

ARNE GRØN

On Human Ambiguity

Edited by

WILLIAM MATHORNE and

BJARKE MØRKØRE STIGEL HANSEN

Religion in

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ARNE GRØN (1952–2025), Mag. art. in Philosophy. Dr. theol.; 1997–2017 Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, University of Copenhagen; 2002 Professor at and Co-founder of Center for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; 2015–2017 Director of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen.

WILLIAM TOKE MATHORNE, born 1992; PhD student at Aarhus University.

BJARKE MØRKØRE STIGEL HANSEN, born 1985; 2018 PhD, London School of Economics and Political Science; Associate Professor, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen.

Center for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen; Konsul George Jorck og Hustru Emma Jorck's Fond; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Religionsphilosophie.

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www.mohrsiebeck.com, info@mohrsiebeck.com

Foreword

Arne Grøn was one of the most thought-provoking philosophers of religion of our time. He observed closely, analyzed clearly, and judged carefully. His focus was not just on the struggles over religion and debates about God, but on the *hen kai pan* of human life. Rather than developing a grand theory, however, he constantly explored new approaches to what characterizes, burdens, hinders, enables, and determines human existence. Hardly anyone else has brought Kierkegaard's thinking from the past into the present as Grøn has. His long illness and early death are a great loss.

Grøn is not primarily interested in Kierkegaard as a source of inspiration for the ontology of existence of Heidegger, the existential theology of Tillich, the phenomenology of the lifeworld of Husserl, or the fundamental ethics of Levinas, although there are certainly interesting connections. Rather, Grøn recalls Kierkegaard as a sensitive explorer of the heights and depths of subjectivity, consistently treating him as a serious existential thinker. Reflecting on existence means reflecting on oneself. This is impossible without asking critical and discerning questions of oneself, others, and everything else, to which there are no easy answers. We are. But we do not owe ourselves to ourselves. This is why we must become who we are, who we can be, and who we should be. Anyone who takes the *gnothi seauton* of philosophical existence seriously must pay attention to this task and process of becoming. Kant called on people to become independent thinkers, and Kierkegaard deepened this into the existential task of evolving from a member of a crowd into a genuinely individual self.

Arne Grøn's interpretation of Kierkegaard is impressive because he doesn't just write about him; he thinks with him. This is apparent not only in his works devoted to Kierkegaard's writings but also in his studies on existential philosophy, the philosophy of subjectivity, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of time and transcendence. Kierkegaard's significance does not primarily lie in what he contributed to the debates of his time or the widely discussed issues of feminism, racism, colonialism, transhumanism, eco-spirituality, or the climate crisis in our time. Rather, it lies in the gaps, breaks, omissions, and desiderata that his thinking reveals in today's discussions.

Grøn identifies the fundamental principles of Kierkegaard's reflections on human existence. Kierkegaard's focus on subjectivity, religion, philosophy, communication, and culture raises questions that cannot be ignored by anyone who

wants to engage seriously with their own existence and the existence of others. However, that is precisely the task of philosophy. Grøn's goal is not to draw attention to a notable yet controversial 19th century Danish thinker but to emphasize the existential insights that render Kierkegaard relevant and significant today. Grøn's interpretation of Kierkegaard is historically informed and consistently contextualizes his thinking within the philosophical and theological debates that followed Kant, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel. However, his interpretation aims to understand human existence in the present rather than merely analyzing the historical connections between Kierkegaard, thinkers of idealism, and contemporary Romantics. It is interesting to compare Hegel's early attempts to understand Socrates, Jesus, religion, humanity, and society with Kierkegaard's. It is also instructive to examine the basic tenets of Kierkegaard's ethics in relation to those of Levinas or Ricœur. Grøn does not view the central philosophical challenge as uncovering Kierkegaard's involvement in the debates of his time or considering how his ideas might inform contemporary debates. Rather, he sees it as understanding Kierkegaard's thinking as a stimulus for existential self-reflection in the present.

Taking this seriously leads to a new way of seeing, understanding, thinking, and behaving because one learns to distinguish between what is theoretically and practically significant in understanding one's relationship to oneself, to the world, and to other people. One can no longer simply take a stance for or against subjectivity; one must distinguish between references to a selfish and a selfless self. Furthermore, the existence of others and one's own existence are not just different instances of the same thing. They must be understood as irrevocably unique individual challenges to becoming oneself. The individual then becomes distinct from the particular, and the universal becomes distinct from the general. Truth and falsehood are not trans-subjective standards of judgment or validity, but rather, they are realized in the subjectivity of the individual human being. They help or hinder one's ability to become who one is and can be within one's own space of possibility. Thus, existence reveals itself as a gift, life as a task, and thinking not only as an activity but also as co-suffering and co-creating. The relationship between the gift and passivity of existence and the passions and activities of life must be readjusted. There is no life without existence, nor is there any existence that does not owe itself to something else and desire to become what it is, what it can be, and what it should be – in relation to itself, to others, and to God.

The way we understand philosophy, religion, and theology must then also be different. Religion is not a childhood illness of humankind that has been or needs to be overcome; rather, it is the lived insight into the existential imprint of the finiteness of life through its embedding in the infinity of God. Thus, the philosophy of religion is not merely a subtopic of philosophy or a minor subject of theology. Rather, it is a holistic perspective that critically reflects on religion

without glossing over or eliminating the differences between religion and life or between philosophy and theology. Religion provides a holistic perspective on life that transcends what life itself can reveal. The philosophy of religion situates this holistic religious horizon within the broader horizon of existential thought. This perspective critically clarifies that life's existential fragility and ever-referential meaning, as revealed by religion, necessitate our perpetual state of becoming. Only that which becomes is; there is nothing that has not become and does not urge to continue becoming.

The existential thinking that Grøn develops in the wake of Kierkegaard is a school of becoming and seeing that makes life transparent to what usually remains obscured in the hustle and bustle of everyday life as well as in the scientific quest for knowledge and the attention-seeking rituals of public debate. It draws attention to the tense relationship between the visible and the invisible, the finite and the infinite, passivity and passion, freedom and responsibility, boundaries and transgressions, humanity and humaneness, religion and life. "Religion is a deeply human concern that not only testifies to human beings, but also deals with what it means to be human, namely the human beings that we already are." If we knew what we were, it would be easier. But we do not know this. We must first discover it and explore the possibilities available to us. And we must decide how we want to live and what we want to be as human beings. Nothing here is self-evident. Quick answers almost always fall short, and what happens to us passively often reveals more than what we actively do ourselves. That is why it is important to illuminate and understand our own existence, our shared life, the meaning of religion, the challenges of a philosophy of existence that is sensitive to transcendence, and the achievements of a philosophy of religion centered on existence. We can do this through careful observation, attentive listening, patient questioning, and collaborative thinking. Arne Grøn has shown what that means. He has paved the way. Hopefully, many will follow in his footsteps.

Ingolf U. Dalferth

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Ambiguous Subjectivity: On the Limits of Human Understanding

1. Situating Arne Grøn: Introduction and Contextualization

Arne Grøn's *On Human Ambiguity: Writings on Religion and Subjectivity* offers a comprehensive study of philosophy of religion written over a period of more than two decades, from the early 2000s to well into the 21st century. These essays showcase the nuance with which Arne Grøn addresses phenomena of human ambiguity in theological, philosophical, and existential terms. We have collected them to celebrate Grøn's thinking and pay homage to his academic work – both in its breadth and in the depth of its insights into the human condition. This volume is the third in a series of republications of Grøn's writings that began with the book titled *Philosophical essays*, originally published in Danish in 2019, and continued with the publication of *Thinking with Kierkegaard* in 2023.¹

The Danish philosopher and theologian Arne Grøn (1952–2025) is renowned for his profound contributions to the philosophy of religion, ethics, theories of subjectivity, and Kierkegaard studies. Grøn studied philosophy at the University of Copenhagen. In the early 1980s, he studied in Berlin under Michael Theunissen, an experience that shaped his lifelong interest in the themes of subjectivity and negativity. In 1997, Grøn was appointed full professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Copenhagen's Faculty of Theology. Guided by his reading of Kierkegaard's notion of selfhood, Grøn co-founded the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen in 2002. He collaborated with colleagues Dan Zahavi (Professor of Philosophy) and Josef Parnas (Professor of Psychiatry) to promote dialogue between different methodologies for researching subjectivity. From 2015 until his premature retirement in 2017 due to serious illness, Grøn served as director of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre at the University of Copenhagen.

Grøn's academic production spans a range of philosophical interests, encompassing German idealism, existential philosophy, Kierkegaard studies, and mod-

¹ Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen, Mads Peter Karlsen, and René Rosfort, eds., *Filosofiske essays af Arne Grøn. Eksistenciel hermeneutik*, Vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Eksistensen akademisk, 2019); Arne Grøn, *Thinking with Kierkegaard. Existential Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Ethics*, ed. Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen and René Rosfort (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023).

ern French thought, while specifically drawing connections between theories of subjectivity, phenomenology, hermeneutics, religion, ethics, and narrativity. While subjectivity has long been a key theme of Western philosophy, Grøn seeks to reformulate its metaphysical problematic by recasting inquiry into subjectivity as an open question. This approach allows us to take an initial step toward outlining the historical, cultural, and theoretical terrain of subjectivity as it emerges through the embeddedness of human freedom.

The guiding principles for what to include in this collection of essays are twofold. First, to compile Grøn's most important essays on the philosophy of religion, subjectivity, and existential hermeneutics in a single, accessible volume and, in doing so, to provide a comprehensive overview of his thinking both to readers familiar with Grøn and to a broader academic audience. Second, to place them in relation to one another to allow Grøn's thought to appear in a new context, one that may shift our perspective. We contend that precisely in this shift of perspective lies a chance to explore further the ambiguity of human subjectivity. What this collection of essays shows, spanning almost two decades, is both the continuity of Grøn's phenomenological-hermeneutic approach and his evolving reflections, interests, and ability to use philosophical insight to shed light on significant events and conflicts – notably the Danish Cartoon Crisis in 2005/06 and the ensuing debates on blasphemy, free speech, and the public sphere.

The essays of this volume reflect Grøn's interest in religious questions over the last two decades. This period has seen a so-called "return to" or revival of religion(s).² Yet it is characteristic of Grøn's philosophical approach to exercise a certain reticence toward prevailing contemporary trends in intellectual and academic discourses, including those that assert religion's supposed return to the geopolitical stage. Even if recent debates have been marked by the purported "resurgence of religion," the question remains: Why does religion (re-)appear as a contemporary mode of human self-understanding?

If religion returns, Grøn suggests, it returns on the condition that we can no longer take for granted what it means for religion to return. Indeed, even to acknowledge religion's return implicitly assumes that religion has somehow been put out of play. The problem is in what form religion returns: "How does the

² Grøn, "Religion as a Philosophical Challenge," 147. Early examples include José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics & Policy Center; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Martin Riesebrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der "Kampf der Kulturen"* (München: Beck, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

return of religion affect religion itself?”³ Framing the problem this way allows Grøn to explore how the conditions for thinking religion have changed and thus challenge our ways of thinking about religion today. This challenge is not only a challenge to religion but equally to the *philosophy* of religion.

If we must return *to* religion, then we must reflect on the return *of* religion, that is, reflect on religion as a space of human understanding. Grøn’s thinking is an earnest response to this demand and takes its departure from the challenges religion represents for philosophical rationality. His originality consists in an insistent return to the ambiguity of human subjectivity to probe the significance of philosophical problems. The lack of a stable center – the split at the heart of personal identity and existence – plays out in the different forms of ambiguity that mark attempts at self-creation, self-understanding, and self-communication. Acknowledging human ambiguities, Grøn seeks to address the problem of what it means to be human *by being human*, that is, by conducting respectful, if at times critical, discussions of his academic peers and sources of inspiration, complicating their accounts by drawing his readers’ attention to the limits of ethics, language, and selfhood.

In the introduction that follows, we provide a brief overview of the themes of the collection of essays, which will serve as a guide for readers to navigate. First, we highlight the critical role of Grøn’s notion of subjectivity, showing how it challenges philosophical approaches that do not consider the ambiguous nature of human self-understanding. Grøn’s inquiry into the problem of subjectivity is a welcome reminder of the crucial place that subjectivity occupies within contemporary debates about human ambiguity. Second, we show how Grøn’s understanding of philosophy of religion opens a productive and critical avenue for approaching self-understanding. In Grøn’s work, religion bears witness to human ambiguity, precisely because religion furnishes a historical and metaphorical language for speaking about the human condition in its openness – thereby confronting the subject with the question of how to orient itself in the world. Third, we consider Grøn’s critical contributions to hermeneutics, which involve not only the delineation of textual interpretation but also the exploration of understanding as a singularly human trait. This opens hermeneutics to questions of existential orientation and gives rise to Grøn’s unique form of existential hermeneutics, which resonates with the issues raised in the first two sections. The fourth part of the introduction provides a brief outline of Grøn’s hermeneutic-phenomenological attempt to reorient a religious emphasis on the entanglement of passivity and activity inherent to human subjectivity. It does so by examining selected limit conditions of subjectivity – such as time, transcendence, and the holy.

³ Grøn, “Religion as a Philosophical Challenge,” 147.

These four thematic incisions into Grøn's writings correspond to the four sections into which we have divided this collection of essays. A final part of the introduction provides a concise overview of the sections of the book and offers detailed summaries of its 25 individual essays' main arguments linking them to the collection's overall themes. Our hope is that this introduction will engage both new and experienced readers with Grøn's innovative and stimulating perspectives on human ambiguity and the complexity of his philosophical project.

2. The Relevance of Subjectivity for Contemporary Philosophy

Grøn's authorship covers a plethora of different but related topics. However, from his early writings to his last, we recognize a guiding thread, which can be framed as a problem: In orienting ourselves toward others and the world, we are already relating to ourselves *in* these relations. This formulation of the problem speaks the language of subjectivity. Subjectivity is the process of orientation, because when we orient ourselves, we relate to ourselves as someone who relates to "themselves."

The question of orientation that emerges for Grøn gives a special place to the issue of subjectivity. Discourse on subjectivity – a central theme in the history of philosophy, at least since Descartes – offers neither a solid foundation to rely on nor a definitive basis for declaring "the death of the subject." Rather it prompts us to confront the limitations of the traditional discourse when rekindling the question of subjectivity. Grøn's writings can be viewed as an attempt to disentangle subjectivity from specific modes of thinking, and so from the metaphysical tradition to which these conceptions of subjectivity belong without, however, renouncing that tradition. This means finding a way to reformulate the question of subjectivity *within* the tradition. The unthought resources from the history of the philosophy of the subject merit further consideration, Grøn argues, since the history of subjectivity is not so much about the history of a new starting point for philosophy as it is about the still *unthought* of subjectivity that makes thinking subjectivity itself a problem.

The reason, then, for holding on to this tradition is that, in all its complexity, subjectivity points to the very situation in which we find ourselves. Despite warranted reservations, subjectivity is still the guiding principle of modern philosophy. Hegel states this explicitly in his journey through the history of philosophy, where he remarks that Descartes allows us for the first time to see "what is properly the philosophy of the modern world." Here, Hegel writes, "we are at home and, like the sailor after a long voyage, we can at last shout 'Land ho.'" Descartes made a fresh start in every respect. The thinking or philosophizing, the thought and the formation of reason in modern times, begins with him. The

principle in this new era is thinking, the thinking that proceeds from itself.⁴ Yet even if it is true that subjectivity is the *sine qua non* of modern philosophy, Grøn painstakingly works out his notion of subjectivity as a *problem*.

As an example of the tradition of modern philosophy of subjectivity, Grøn cites K. E. Løgstrup's metaphysics as a framework in which the explanation of things is no longer traced back to God but to consciousness: "Consciousness becomes a self-referential court of judgment [*en i sig selv hvilende instans*], Descartes' *res cogitans*. This absolute position into which the human subject comes in this way competes with God."⁵ Thus, while the maritime metaphor has given rise to a particular way in which the subject is described, which can be considered the essence of the subject arriving at – or returning to – the firm ground of consciousness, Grøn notes an ambiguity in the way the image of newly discovered lands translates the subjectivity which we already are. If we return home after a long voyage, we return to that which we believe we know only in order to re-discover it. Subjectivity is what is most proper to the human being, Grøn argues, and yet precisely as such, it is at the same time that which is most foreign and difficult to bring into view.

This reframing of subjectivity becomes important to Grøn's search for an adequate phenomenological position. Rather than taking his point of departure from what has been established within some particular theory of subjectivity, Grøn considers what we are doing *in* doing phenomenology of subjectivity. In line with the phenomenological tradition and its reflective ability "to continue to force inquiry back to the phenomena and to the seen and to mistrust from the ground up all wild and windy speculations, no matter how close to the heart of common sense,"⁶ we must, Grøn suggests, ask ourselves in the first place: What is the point of going back to that which shows itself?⁷ According to Grøn, it only makes sense to talk about going back to phenomena if something comes *in between*, that is, if we take into account our own ways of approaching phenomena.

As a search for the beginning, Grøn points to a central methodological step of phenomenology: To focus on *how* that which is given is given to us. If we pursue the phenomenological dictum to go back to the things themselves, we notice

⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 131.

⁵ K. E. Løgstrup, *Metaphysics*, Vol. II (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 4 / K. E. Løgstrup, *Ophav og omgivelse. Metafysik III* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1984), 13. Cf. Arne Grøn, "Subjektivitet og livsytring," *Fønix* 4 (1994): 194–212; "Subjektivitet og selvforhold," *Psyke & Logos* 23 (2002): 186–199.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 232.

⁷ Cf. Arne Grøn, "Self-Giveness and Self-Understanding: Kierkegaard and the Question of Phenomenology," in *Thinking with Kierkegaard. Existential Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Ethics*, ed. Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen and René Rosfort (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), 217–235.

that the “things themselves” are not immediately apparent to us. What comes in between, including both the established and unquestioned understandings already at stake in our ways of understanding, is ourselves. Thus, Grøn doubles the question of subjectivity, since it is not subjectivity that has simply become a question to be directly addressed, for in addressing subjectivity, subjectivity itself comes in between as a problem to itself. In this sense, subjectivity is not merely one problem among others in phenomenology; it is the key to “the very project of phenomenology”⁸ insofar as what is given *to us* shows how subjectivity is itself given as the dative of manifestation. This also raises the question of how phenomenology can account for the subjectivity it presupposes: “Subjectivity does not appear in the same way as that which directly appears to subjectivity. We are not given as that which is given to us. Yet, we are given to ourselves.”⁹ Phenomenology must take heed of this double reflection.

Subjectivity is not merely given to us as an object of everyday experience, since *in* being given to us, we are relating to that which is given to us: “We are given to ourselves but given *in ourselves relating*.”¹⁰ In other words, a human being *is* such that it relates itself to what it is. In a word, it is a *self*. If we are given to ourselves as self-relating beings, this means that we *are* not simply what we are, because in relating to ourselves, we become a problem *to* ourselves. Building on his in-depth interpretations of Theunissen’s seminal contributions to Kierkegaard’s negativistic method – especially through his analysis of despair – Grøn suggests that negative phenomena play an important part in human subjectivity, insofar as such phenomena, on the one hand, point to that which befalls us (*Widerfahrnis*), but, on the other hand, reflect the ways in which we situate ourselves.¹¹ That is to say, in situating ourselves, we do something with ourselves, primarily in the negative mode of attempting to catch and fixate that which escapes our grasp: the self.

⁸ Grøn, “Self-Givenness and Self-Understanding,” in *Thinking with Kierkegaard*, 222.

⁹ Grøn, “Self-Givenness and Self-Understanding,” in *Thinking with Kierkegaard*, 222–223.

¹⁰ Grøn, “Self-Givenness and Self-Understanding,” in *Thinking with Kierkegaard*, 225. Here Grøn mirrors Kierkegaard’s famous formulation of the self: “But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself” (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death. A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, vol. 19 of *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, ed. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], 13 / Søren Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, vol. 11 of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. [Copenhagen: Gads forlag, 2006], 129).

¹¹ Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Der Begriff Verzweiflung. Korrekturen an Kierkegaard* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993); “Kierkegaard’s Negativistic Method,” in *Kierkegaard’s Truth: The Disclosure of the Self*, ed. Joseph H. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 381–432; “Für einen rationaleren Kierkegaard,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (1996): 61–90. Cf. Arne Grøn, “Der Begriff Verzweiflung,” in *Thinking with Kierkegaard. Existential Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Ethics*, ed. Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen and René Rosfort (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), 304–329; “Kierkegaards Phänomenologie,” in *Thinking with Kierkegaard. Existential Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Ethics*, ed. Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen and René Rosfort (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), 330–354.

Acknowledging this double sense of subjectivity is for Grøn the only adequate way to understand that in situating ourselves we are actively involved in what we are doing; and yet being-situated gestures toward a movement of passivity in which we ourselves are affected such that we come to find ourselves already situated. Indeed, to think of negative phenomena as modes of relating implies, for Grøn, an entanglement within subjectivity of passivity and activity. Accordingly, “the subject *is* a self-relation insofar as it experiences itself in and through that which it does – with itself.”¹²

3. Philosophy of Religion: Thematizing the Ambiguous Perspective

Grøn’s interrogation of subjectivity tightly connects to his ventures into philosophy of religion. What does Grøn understand by philosophy of religion?¹³ Although it seems plausible to conceive of the philosophy of religion as philosophy *about* religion, such that it serves an instrumental purpose in facilitating the examination of religion or the study of religion with philosophical means, Grøn suggests that philosophy of religion complicates the very relation between philosophy *and* religion. The problems that philosophy takes as its primary subject matter appear to be intrinsic to philosophy of religion. Accordingly, philosophy of religion becomes a reflection on the starting point of philosophy, which, for Grøn, entails an explication of the very relation *between* philosophy and religion.

Grøn’s notion of *philosophy of religion* suggests that religion is not merely its object of philosophical analysis. To enter more deeply into the history of philosophy and its problems, we must recognize, Grøn argues, how the dominant form of philosophy of religion is rooted in Athens and Jerusalem. While acknowledging the distinctive source of his philosophical heritage, Grøn’s primary interest in philosophy of religion is not limited to this specific tradition, but a way to explore fundamental questions relating to philosophy of religion today – questions that go to the core of how we understand ourselves.¹⁴ While acknowledging the possible exclusion of other religious traditions such as Islam or Buddhism, the primary meaning of philosophy of religion is for Grøn to reveal a dialectical tension between philosophy and religion. This tension manifests in philosophy of religion’s uniqueness insofar as Grøn finds within the Greek, Jewish, and Christian heritage something that resists attempts to conform that heritage to

¹² Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1997), 49; 47–50.

¹³ For an extended discussion, see Bjarke Mørkøre Stigel Hansen, Mads Peter Karlsen, and René Rosfort, “Arne Grøn’s Existential Hermeneutics: Existence, Ethics and Religion,” *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 53 (2020): 108–132.

¹⁴ Cf. Arne Grøn, “Religionsfilosofi,” *Teol-information* 16 (1997): 33–34.

any fixed interpretation, as is the case in, for instance, conservative memory politics.¹⁵ Rather than the bedrock upon which philosophy of religion is built, this heritage in Grøn's writings should, we argue, be construed as a "fragile designation"¹⁶ in that it appears to designate more than a cultural and historical interweaving at the base of philosophy of religion. The question is how to understand the hyphen of the Greek-Jewish-Christian, to think what lies between them and unites "the most impenetrable abyss that Western thought conceals,"¹⁷ and to articulate its relationality in light of an open dialogue on interreligious and intercultural understanding.

What has been bequeathed to us is tied to a reflection on the double heritage – Greek and Jewish-Christian – of philosophy of religion. It is here that it becomes clear that an understanding of what philosophy of religion is has implicitly guided Grøn's exploration of the point of contact between that which unites (and disunites) philosophy *with* religion. The hyphen drawn between the Greek-Jewish-Christian mélange reflects an oscillation between "religion" and "philosophy," precisely where religion is defined in opposition to philosophy and where philosophy is defined as non-religious. While the opposition that underlies "philosophy of religion" is an opposition that is itself philosophical, as if philosophy asserts what it is in itself against its other – religion or religions – Grøn instead makes explicit the interface between philosophy and religion that hermeneutics presupposes in its attempt to understand that which, as Paul Ricœur puts it, "has already been understood prior to reflection".¹⁸

In good Ricœurian fashion, Grøn argues that philosophy has its sources outside itself, meaning that "philosophy always has a relation to *non-philosophy*".¹⁹ If philosophy is concerned with its own origins, the problem of philosophy of religion is the problem of that which is outside philosophy and its translation into philosophy. As Grøn sees it, philosophy of religion is a problem of *trans-*

¹⁵ See the contributions in Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski, eds., *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition?: A European Perspective* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016); and Anya Topolski, "The Dangerous Discourse of the 'Judeo-Christian' Myth: Masking the Race-Religion Constellation in Europe," *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 1–2 (2020): 71–90.

¹⁶ We borrow this expression from Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 42. The basic problem of investigating as a universal phenomenon the Latin construct "religion" is also addressed by Derrida in his notion of "Globalatinization," the universalization of a specific Judeo-Christian formation underlying the resurgent interest in philosophy of religion (cf. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion, Cultural Memory in the Present* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998]).

¹⁷ Jean-François Lyotard: *The Hyphen. Between Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 13.

¹⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 4.

¹⁹ Paul Ricœur, "Philosophy after Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 9–25, 22. See also Grøn, "Religions-filosofi," 34.

lation. The issue stems not only from the difficulty of translating religion into philosophy – as though religion and philosophy were two separate, monolithic blocks that map onto one another – but also from the challenge of understanding how religion has already been translated. Grøn raises the existential-hermeneutical problem of translation and its stakes. The issue is how to understand the questions and problems through which we understand ourselves as humans. In this regard, the translation between philosophy and religion opens the space of the dialogue between philosophy and religion, and, conversely, by drawing upon the depths of what remains foreign to translation, further amplifies the existential-hermeneutical task of philosophy of religion. As Grøn puts it: “it is a matter of bringing back the question of the religious as a question of translation. Rather than simply moving from the religious to a translation of it, we must bring back the movement to what is to be translated and take another look at it.”²⁰ In looking at translation, Grøn speaks to an important aspect of the so-called “post-secular” turn within philosophy, where Jürgen Habermas has argued for the usefulness of translating normative religious ideas into secular philosophical positions independent of faith-based creeds.²¹ The unfinished process of secularization is thereby turned into an ongoing learning process, through which religious traditions are rediscovered as sources of meaning in a modernity struggling to find a sense of what is important. Yet Grøn emphasizes that the question of translating religion cannot pass over its status as a *question* of translation, so much so that religion is as much a resource for modernity as it is a necessary challenge to modern philosophy. Philosophical translation is then a question to the translator about how to orient oneself when taking something to be a source of normative significance.

Reflecting upon the philosophy that is open to its outside prompts Grøn to reaffirm the Socratic conception of philosophy as a methodological attempt to reflect on, and to give an account of (*logon didonai*), what we ourselves think and do.²² Grøn refers to this methodological attempt as a kind of afterthought (*Nachdenken*), meaning that philosophy, which comes after the fact, is not to be conceived in terms of “pure thinking,”²³ as Grøn has learned from Kierkegaard. Rather, it is premised upon, even affected by, previous forms of thought, to such

²⁰ Arne Grøn, “Religionsfilosofi efter metafysik,” *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 72 (2009): 122–139, 136 (our translation).

²¹ Cf. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen*, 15; Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion: Philosophische Aufsätze*, 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 110–113, 130–143; see also Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. C. Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

²² Cf. Grøn, “Die Aufgabe der Religionsphilosophie”.

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Vol. 1–2. ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 12 of *Kierkegaard’s Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Negative Theologie der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), 24.

an extent that a distance comes in between, which allows philosophical reflection to think-after the conditions of human existence, as well as to be surprised by that which is other to philosophy and brings it to a halt. For Grøn, the activity of *thinking-after* contains an essential element of passivity, insofar as we *are brought to think* by an external occasion.²⁴

This raises the question of to what extent we can give an account of that which concerns us. Does it only concern us if we are able to give an account of it? Asking this question allows us to inquire into the presupposition that philosophy has liberated itself from religion and established itself as the autonomous legislation of human reason. To focus our commitment to rationality, Grøn sees philosophy of religion not as transferring rationality onto religion, but rather as a way of sharpening our thought which challenges our understanding of reason.²⁵ Indeed, whilst versions of philosophy of religion focus on the boundary between the religious and the secular, Grøn calls into question that very distinction by arguing that religion serves as a challenge to philosophy and its claim to give an account of what we think and do inasmuch as religion constitutes a limit to our understanding of human reality.

The philosophy of religion revolves around the conditions in terms of which we understand, describe, and analyze religion as a human enterprise. Religion contains within it and addresses ways in which humans are in the world. In other words, religion is a perspective through which we see and understand ourselves in the world. If religion is the object of philosophy of religion, it is because religion is itself already an *interpretation* of human reality. This is, Grøn argues, a simple yet overlooked point, implying that philosophy of religion is mediated through religion so that it reflects the entirety of human reality, which is itself a manifestation within the horizon of religion's interpretation and thus is already interpreted by religion.²⁶

Another key insight implicit in Grøn's philosophy of religion is the idea of *perspectivism*, modeled on Nietzsche. Perspectivism is a result of the disorienting "Death of God," an experience in Grøn's retelling borne of Christianity itself – not quite in Marcel Gauchet's words "a religion for departing from religion,"²⁷ but an exit from the hegemony of religious images for politics, morality, and knowledge. This in turn releases religion to point to the ambiguity between religious and secular perspectives. Subjectivity is in this sense freed from and at the same time redoubled on itself; it looks at its own way of looking. This is not to say that religion is only subjective, as though it were a matter of individual perspective.

²⁴ Cf. Grøn, "Subjectivity, Passion, Passivity".

²⁵ Grøn, "Subjectivity and Transcendence: Problems and Perspectives"; "Religion as a Philosophical Challenge".

²⁶ Cf. Grøn, "Religionsfilosofi," 34.

²⁷ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4, 101.

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