

## Foreword

*Katrine Frøkjær Baunvig*

N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) is a founding father of Danish democracy and a church father within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Furthermore, he is the architect behind the modern-day Danish school system as well as a romantic reviver and scholar of pre-Christian Nordic religion. This at least is the mainstream, self-reaffirming representation of Grundtvig's life, work, and cultural imprint dominating public discourse in Denmark anno 2021. Remarkably, this widely distributed representation leaves out entirely the important strands of philosophical reflection nested within the body of Grundtvig's works. The present volume seeks to take the first steps in making up for this situation. This is the first ever to gather Grundtvig's most important philosophical works in a single volume.

*The Core of Learning* is the fifth in a series of six translations of Grundtvig's work into English. *The School for Life*, containing a group of Grundtvig's texts on educational ideas, was published in 2011; *Living Wellsprings*, offering a sample of Grundtvig's vast number of hymns, songs and poems, was published in 2015; *Human Comes First*, comprising highlights of Grundtvig's theological writing, was published in 2018; and *The Common Good*, containing a group of Grundtvig's political writings and writings on contemporary history, was published in 2019. Forthcoming is volume 6, a biography and translations of 60 or so of Grundtvig's letters.

The Grundtvig Study Centre at Aarhus University is the instigator of these translations. The series is an extension of the centre's ongoing critical edition of Grundtvig's Works (in Danish) as they were published in his lifetime; see [www.grundtvigsvaerker.dk](http://www.grundtvigsvaerker.dk). The Centre undertakes and supports research focusing on all areas of interest in Grundtvig studies, including comparative research initiatives that offer new perspectives on Grundtvig's work and the reception hereof. Furthermore, the centre fosters and supports knowledge exchange, teaching in, and dissemination of this research.

The texts for *The Core of Learning* have been selected by a committee comprising, in

alphabetical order: Edward Broadbridge, Niels Henrik Gregersen, Hans Raun Iversen, Uffe Jonas, Ove Korsgaard, Michael Schelde, and Ole Vind.

Kim Arne Pedersen and Anders Holm are the authors of the comprehensive introduction to Grundtvig as a philosopher covering the stages in his philosophical reflection and the (overlooked) reception of it.

Members of the staff of [www.grundtvigsvaerker.dk](http://www.grundtvigsvaerker.dk) – Steen Tullberg, Jon Tafdrup, Kim Steen Ravn, Vanja Thaulow – as well as Kim Arne Pedersen, Niels W. Bruun and Edward Broadbridge have generously offered their expertise in aiding the individual Grundtvig texts with introductions; Anders Holm has contributed with a rich afterword on the enigmatic relationship between Grundtvig and his contemporary, Søren Kierkegaard.

As with the previous volumes in the series, Edward Broadbridge has been responsible for the translations and editing of the book. The language consultant has been Hanna Broadbridge.

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## Editor's/Translator's Note

*Edward Broadbridge*

Grundtvig is both a philosophical theologian and a theological philosopher, which means that certain articles could have been placed either in vol. 3 on Theology or, as here, in vol. 5 on Philosophy. One such is *On Religion and Liturgy*, which appears here because the first quarter, 'What is religion' is decisively philosophical in tone, and the liturgy takes up only the last part of the article.

### *Grundtvig's Philosophy of Education*

Readers who are interested in this particular aspect of Grundtvig are referred to the illuminating essay by Ove Korsgaard in vol. 1 in the series, *The School for Life* (2011) pp. 13-35. Its very title, 'Grundtvig's Philosophy of Enlightenment and Education' makes the salient point that a single Danish word, *ophlysning* (lit. 'uplighting'), includes both these aspects. Education is not fully education unless it also creates enlightenment, i.e. insight. The last two chapters in this book, an essay and three speeches of Grundtvig's, bring this translation series back to its outset in the School for Life. Outside Denmark, Grundtvig is primarily known for his educational ideas. Inside Denmark these vie for influence with his hymns and songs.

### *Paragraph length*

*On Human Beings in the World* begins with a single paragraph of 1,296 words. In the original edition from 1817 this runs to 6½ pages without a paragraph *break*. But this is small beer compared to Paragraph II, which in the original Gothic script runs to 2,685 words, (pp. 143-56) without a break. The translation makes room for 13 paragraphs for this single unsparing block of words.

### *Use of italics*

During his lifetime all Grundtvig's works were printed in Gothic script. Until 1875 this was the custom in Denmark. But already by 1877 his lectures from 1838 had

been collected and published in Latin script by his son, Svend Grundtvig, under the title *Within Living Memory (Mands Minde)*. In Gothic script italics were indicated by a double-spacing between letters. Thus the first line of *On Human Beings in the World* reads, in Danish Gothic: “At Mennesket er sig selv en G a a d e ...”, where the spacing in ‘G a a d e’ indicates a stressed word. In this particular case, my translation follows Grundtvig’s indication of emphasis: Thus, human beings are “a *riddle* to themselves”.

However, as in the previous four volumes in the series, I have taken the decision occasionally to ignore Grundtvig’s italics, while finding it necessary to italicise a number of *other* words and add exclamation marks to make for easier reading. Grundtvig’s original Danish – even in Latin script – is so complex that Danish university students in the second half of their Theology degrees, aged 25 or thereabouts, still find his works a daunting prospect.

#### *Use of capital letters*

To help readers through this, the most intellectually difficult, book in the series I have regularly used capital letters for major abstract concepts, such as Truth, Experience, the Finite and the Eternal – as well as subjects such as History, Theology, and Philosophy. However, when a *particular* ‘truth’ is in question the lower case is preferred: “The history of Denmark constitutes a minor part of World History.”

#### *Translation of Mennesket*

The Danish word *Mennesket* is gender-neutral. Until the late 20th century, it would have been translated into English as ‘Man’ or ‘Mankind’. In Old English a woman was known as a *wif* or a *wifmann*! 1,000 years later, in Pope’s poem from 1734, *An Essay on Man* (i.e. humankind), we find the immortal words: “Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/The proper study of mankind is man.”

Within the last 50 years or so, the use of ‘Man’ to include all females has understandably come under increasing pressure. I used ‘Man’ throughout in *The School for Life* (2011), but I now realise that ‘Man’ can no longer be defended to cover anything other than the male of the species. In this and the last two volumes I have therefore switched to the gender neutral ‘human beings’, ‘humankind’, or simply the first person plural – except in the case of ‘Natural Man’. Unfortunately, there is still no alternative to *humankind* or the *human* species.

#### *Translation of Vidskab/Viden/Videnskab/Videnskabelighed*

Another concept that confronts the translator is Grundtvig’s use of the above four words, all of which derive from the root-word *vid*, meaning ‘know’. The word is Germanic in origin and originally denoted the mind, as the seat of consciousness. With the Saxon invasion of Britain following the end of Roman rule in 410 CE, the word

comes into the Old English language as *wit*. It survived the Viking and Norman invasions and is used to this day, e.g. a “quick-witted person”, “to lose one’s wits”, i.e. one’s sanity. Grundtvig himself explains his usage thus:

As we know, Philosophy is an expression of the human endeavour for wisdom, for absolute knowledge, for immediate intuition, and, in the highest Christian phrase, for contemplation ‘face to face’.<sup>1</sup> The Danish word that we can best employ to describe this endeavour in all its vitality is without doubt ‘Learning’ (*vidskab*) (p. 271).

To this can be added Jon Tafdrup’s comment below:

Learning, for Grundtvig, is thus an *ongoing endeavour* in this world, with its foundation in the Christian belief that full knowledge will only come when we meet our Maker ‘face to face’. (p. 280)

I have reserved the word ‘Learning’, deliberately capitalised, as a translation of *vidskab* (used 38 times here by Grundtvig), alternating occasionally with ‘scholarship’. The word *videnskab* (used 15 times), which once did service as an alternative, now means ‘science’, and is a cause of confusion when translating texts that are 200 years old. The word *viden* means knowledge pure and simple – as it does to this day; but Grundtvig uses this form only once in the entire Danish text of the book. On the other hand he uses *videnskabelighed* (70 times) regularly, and often in the sense of *vidskab*; for want of an alternative I have again used ‘Learning’ to translate the Danish word. Grundtvig himself is aware of the possibility of misunderstanding:

‘Learning’... on the other hand is an endless endeavour towards an unattainable goal on earth. Any claim that it is actual ‘knowledge’ is empty boasting. Against this we have ‘scholarship’, which is closely connected to ‘Learning’. In general usage, ‘scholarship’ allows for this, since it has chiefly functioned as a secondary usage. As the goal of Learning is indubitably full scholarship, there is no need to create new words such as ‘learningable’ and ‘scholarshipable’.<sup>2</sup> They may have a similarity with ‘companionable’ and ‘amicable’, but they seem to jar the ear and would at the very least mislead rather than guide our readers (p. 272).

The title of this book, *The Core of Learning*, does not originate with Grundtvig, but is my attempt to render his belief that Learning is progressing towards a final goal in

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 13:12.

<sup>2</sup> Here Grundtvig invents two new words *vidskabelig* and *vidskabelighed*.

History. He seeks to encourage this movement in ch. 6, *The Advancement of Learning*, which deals with how to promote this movement actively. Grundtvig believed that Learning was indeed advancing, and that he himself was actively advancing it.

*Volume 6 (forthcoming)*

From the preliminary work on volume 1 to the final publication of volume 5 (i.e. 2008-21) the idea of a possible sixth volume comprising a biography and selected letters has made its presence increasingly felt. At the time of writing, this will become reality in the coming year or so. The biography will make constant reference to the five published volumes, and the letters will illustrate many of the aspects of Grundtvig the man.

## Notes on Contributors

### Translator and Editor

**Edward Broadbridge** (b.1944) BA London, MA Aarhus, taught English and Religious Studies at high schools in Denmark 1967-2008. Among his many theological translations are books on Ruth, Luke, Paul, and Titus of Bostra, as well as translations of 50 Danish hymns, *Hymns in English* (2009). He is also a librettist for Danish composers, and a writer/director of children's musicals. His translations of Grundtvig began with *A Grundtvig Anthology* (1984) and include the first major appraisal of Grundtvig in English, *Tradition and Renewal* (1983), as well as *Grundtvig as a Political Thinker* by Ove Korsgaard (2014) and most of the essays in *Building the Nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity* (2015). He is the translator of Anders Holm's *The Essential N.F.S. Grundtvig* (2019), and editor of the quarterly *Grundtvig Newsletter*. He is the translator and editor of the 6-volume series 'N.F.S. Grundtvig: Works in English' (2008-22).

### Language Consultant

**Hanna Broadbridge** (b.1945) MA Aarhus English & Japanese, married Edward in 1967 and has been a teacher of English in Denmark 1971-2009 and lecturer in English at the Royal Academy of Education 1978-2003. She has been an external examiner in English at all the Danish universities 1998-2015, and is an official interpreter for the Danish legal system. She is chair of the Diocesan Council of Aarhus, and chair of the LWF Committee of the Council of International Relations in Denmark.

### Introductions

**Anders Holm** (b.1973) MTheol Copenhagen (2002), PhD Aarhus (2007) on Grundtvig and Kierkegaard. Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology, Copenhagen University. Editor since 2011 of the annual scholarly journal *Grundtvig-Studier*. Visiting Fulbright Professor at Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama in 2016. Publications include *To Samtidige. Kierkegaards og Grundtvigs kritik af hinanden, (Two Contemporaries. Kierkegaard's and Grundtvig's Critique of One Another)* Copenhagen: Anis 2009, and *The Essential N.F.S. Grundtvig*, Aarhus Filo, 2019. Translated by E. Broadbridge.

**Kim Arne Pedersen** (b.1957) MTheol Aarhus (1987), PhD Aarhus in Grundtvig's philosophy (1995), Associate Professor, Aarhus, Centre for Grundtvig-Studies (1996-2003),

Leader of the Grundtvig Academy, Vartov (1998-2000). Pastor of Odder Independent Church (2004-15). Has published articles on all facets of Grundtvig's work.

**Kim Steen Ravn** (b.1963) MA Aarhus Comparative Literature (1985). Former head of Philological Department at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, which produced the complete works of Kierkegaard in Danish (1993-2009). Member of the digitalization and annotation staff of 'Grundtvig's Works' at the Grundtvig Centre since 2010. Has primarily written articles on the Danish author, Poul Martin Møller. Published the Danish poet Johannes Ewald's *Selected Poems* (Borgen Copenhagen 1996) and the Norwegian scientist and diplomat Fridtjof Nansen's diary from 1905 (unipax Oslo 2005).

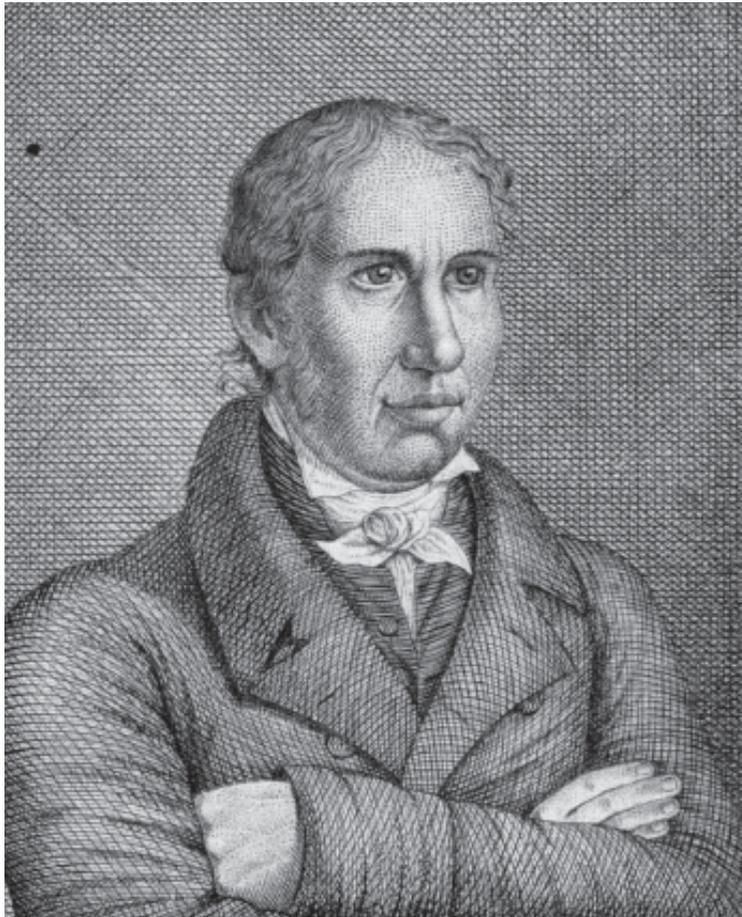
**Niels W. Bruun** (b.1944) MA Copenhagen (1970). Philologist for *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* in Munich (1986-89), and for the digitalization and annotation of the works of Søren Kierkegaard at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre (1998-2009). Member of the digitalization and annotation staff of 'Grundtvig's Works' at the Grundtvig Centre (2011-12). Author of books and articles especially in the fields of classical philology and the history of medicine.

**Jon Tafdrup** (b.1975) MA Copenhagen (2009). Philologist for the digitalization and annotation of the works of Søren Kierkegaard at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre (2010-13). Member of the digitalization and annotation staff of 'Grundtvig's Works' at the Grundtvig Centre since 2013.

**Vanja Thaulow** (b.1977) MTheol Copenhagen (2005). Pastor of Majbølle-Vignæs parish on Lolland 2007-II. Member of the digitalization and annotation staff of 'Grundtvig's Works' at the Grundtvig Centre since 2011. PhD Aarhus (2018): 'Warrior of the Lord. Rhetorical Criticism of N.F.S. Grundtvig's Theological Polemics in the Period 1810-1825'.

**Steen Tullberg** (b.1968) MTheol Copenhagen (1999). Former head of Philological Department at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre which produced the complete works of Kierkegaard in Danish (1997-2013). Member of the digitalization and annotation staff of 'Grundtvig's Works' at the Grundtvig Centre since 2013. Has primarily written articles on the Danish and German reception of Kierkegaard, including 'Denmark: The Permanent Reception – 150 Years of Reading Kierkegaard' in *Kierkegaard's International Reception, vol. 1, Northern and Western Europe* (Ashgate UK 2009).





### 1. Grundtvig 1822

The earliest depiction of Grundtvig is the 1820 painting by the little-known artist, Christian Christensen, reproduced in *The School for Life* (2011) p. 73. In 1822 Johann Walther (1799-1860) made this copper engraving of the painting, reflecting an intense, intelligent man, whose eyes have unusually large pupils. It was advertised for sale on 3rd August 1822 in the newspaper *The Day (Dagen)* at the price of 3 Rigsmarks. Vilhelm Saxtorph wrote in his *Portraits of Grundtvig* (1932) that “it is turned in relation to the painting, and the posture is wrong ... It must have been printed in a very large number, since it is still easily available, and that is probably the reason why it is so well-known ... It should never be reproduced or be accepted at face value as a likeness.”

# “Time will Tell the Truth”: Grundtvig as a Philosopher<sup>3</sup>

*Kim Arne Pedersen & Anders Holm*

## 1. Introduction

From the outset, philosophical considerations play a significant part in Grundtvig’s writings. They are very much contingent on the role of philosophy in contemporary academic and public life, and they form part of his dialogue with the age on spiritual life – particularly in his earliest works.

Even as a child away from home in Thyregod aged 9 to 15,<sup>4</sup> Grundtvig is reading avidly and acquainting himself with the philosophically-based ‘natural theology’. This argues that humankind, by observing itself and the universe through its naturally-given abilities, can acknowledge that the world has come into being through a divine act of creation. Aged 17-20 and studying theology at Copenhagen University (1800-03), Grundtvig comes under the influence of Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, Børge Rüsbrigh (1731-1809), whose teaching inclines to the pre-critical metaphysics of the German, Christian Wolff (1679-1754). Wolff is inspired by Gottfried Leibnitz (1646-1716), but is also influenced by late scholastic philosophy, and, following the tradition and Leibnitz, emphasises that faith and reason, i.e. theology and philosophy, can in fact be united.

Also while studying at university Grundtvig comes into contact with the works of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804),<sup>5</sup> most likely through Professor of Moral Philosophy, Anders Gamborg (1753-1833). Gamborg is his ‘preceptor’, meaning his supervisor and guardian, since like most students of the day Grundtvig has not yet come of age.<sup>6</sup>

3 “Time will tell the Truth” was one of Grundtvig’s favourite proverbs. He listed it in his alphabetical collection of *Danish Proverbs and Sayings* (1845), and wrote a whole essay on that subject, translated below as ch. 11. He used it as the motto on the title page of his *World History* (1817), below the original Greek version in lines 33-34 of the *First Olympian Ode* by Pindar (c. 518-c. 445 BCE): ΜΕΡΑΙ ΕΠΙΛΑΟΙΜΟΙ ΜΑΡΤΥΡΕΣ ΣΟΘΩΤΑΤΟΙ (the days that remain are the wisest witnesses).

4 From September 1792 to summer 1798.

5 Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is best known for his ‘critical philosophy’, which argued that human beings are ‘autonomous’, and his duty-based ethics, which meant, in consequence of this autonomy, that it is one’s duty to follow the formal moral principle common to all people, the so-called ‘categorical imperative’.

6 By Christian V’s Danish Law of 1683, boys under 18 were ‘minors’ (*umyndige*), boys between 18 and 25 were ‘underage’ (*mindreårige*), and not until they were 25, were they ‘of age’ (*fuldmyndige*). The age of majority was reduced to 21 in 1922 and to 18 in 1976.

In addition, Grundtvig probably studies the works of a number of Kantian-inspired Danish thinkers outside the university. In his early teenage years Grundtvig has also read the periodical *Jesus and Reason*,<sup>7</sup> known for its French-inspired, deistic approach to enlightenment.

Lastly, he hears about Romanticism for the first time. The source is his philosopher cousin, the natural scientist Henrik Steffens (1773-1845). Between 1802-04 Steffens gives a number of lectures on the subject at Copenhagen University, with those on Goethe and poetry leaving the deepest impression on Grundtvig. He admits that at the time he did not register much of what his cousin said, but he now has a vague idea that something *new* is in the air. More significant than Steffens, however, is the high standing of philosophy in the academic education of the time, which ensures that Grundtvig is well-trained in philosophical thinking, when he makes his debut as a writer in the first decade of the 19th century.

### Philosophy as a Social Issue

From 1805-08 Grundtvig works as house tutor at Egeløkke Manor on Langeland to Carl Steensen de Leth (1798-1889), the 7-year-old son of the lord and lady of the manor. To sublimate his secret passion for the lady of the house, Grundtvig turns to a study of Nordic mythology, but more importantly he also turns to the work of Kantian philosophers such as Friedrich Schiller (1767-1805) and idealist thinkers such as Johann Fichte (1762-1814) and Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854). Grundtvig returns to Copenhagen in 1808, and until late 1810 he teaches History and Geography to 14 to 18-year-old boys at the Schouboe Institute, the most modern private high school in the country. In a farewell poem to his pupils he exhorts them to “Turn away from this world’s vale of tears/to the Holy One upon the cross!/There alone the soul’s true health is found”.<sup>8</sup> The poem reflects Grundtvig’s return to traditional Lutheran orthodoxy after his religious crisis in 1810, with his philosophical writings now marked by a defence of Christianity. In Grundtvig’s approach to Christianity, to human life, and to all scholarly work, philosophy is an *elemental* concern. In the present book, examples of this first phase of his work (1805-10) are presented in the second and third sections: *On Religion and Liturgy* (1807) and *On the Advancement of Learning* (1807).

During this period Grundtvig takes spiritual life as a single entity, an *interaction* between theology, community life, and academic life. His philosophy is to be found in the conclusions he draws from this interaction, which is conditioned by our human

7 The periodical, *Jesus and Reason* (Dan: *Jesus og Fornuftten*), was founded in 1795. From 1797-1801 it was edited by Otto Horrebow (1769-1823).

8 Cf. ‘Farewell to my Pupils’, no. 134 in *Living Wellsprings* (2015).

citizenship in the eternal world of the Spirit, characterised, like Plato, as our “original home”.<sup>9</sup> He emphasises that “only a truly religious mind, an unshakable faith in heaven, and a glimpse of its glory,”<sup>10</sup> can promote the flowering of philosophy and science. A successful spiritual life depends on religion giving *direction* to society.

Throughout his life Grundtvig holds firm to two fundamental ideas that derive from this tenet: that philosophy is a social issue, and that human beings consist of both spirit and body. As regards philosophy as a *social* question, *On Historical Learning, or the Concept of History* (1816) reveals how the broad cultural philosophy of his earlier writings finds a powerful and significant form in the idea of “mutual dependence”<sup>11</sup> between social classes in their collaboration on learning. *On Human Beings in the World* (1817)<sup>12</sup> opens with a powerful poetic image of this division between spirit and body in a quotation from Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, where the human being is seen as both ‘dishonour’d’ yet ‘divine’.<sup>13</sup> There is a perpetual tension between our physical temporality and our longing for eternity. Grundtvig notes disparagingly how “every other writer in the previous century took... a trip into the maze that makes up the human grove,”<sup>14</sup> i.e. the labyrinthine paths that constitute our human relations as “anthropologists, psychologists, and educationists”.<sup>15</sup> From 1805 onwards Grundtvig is critical of Enlightenment thinking; yet, as is often the case with spiritual life, he has been shaped and governed by what he now repudiates. The three branches of learning mentioned above are broadly identical with the three areas he centres on throughout his philosophical work. In the same year, 1817, he also publishes *On Revelation, Art, and Learning*, which bears the hallmark of his Platonic-inspired ‘spirit and body’ philosophy and “the clash of two worlds, of contending powers loosely linked within us in a mighty ferment”.<sup>16</sup> Any philosophy that fails to take into account this transcendent relation “does not deserve to be called a philosophy.”<sup>17</sup>

There are thus clear threads from Grundtvig’s thinking in the period 1805-10 to his more thoroughly worked-out philosophy in the years 1815-23. In between, 1811-15, the years he calls his “theological” period, he works first as curate to his father in Udby parish and then as a writer in Copenhagen, primarily in his advocacy of the Gospel and

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9 *On Religion and Liturgy* p. 139.

10 *On the Advancement of Learning* p. 249.

11 *On Historical Learning, or the Concept of History* p. 292.

12 *On Human Beings in the World* p. 68.

13 Edward Young (1683-1765), *The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality*, London, 1742. A pioneer book of the Romantic movement, *Night-Thoughts* was immensely successful, influencing the young Goethe and the whole *Sturm und Drang* (*Storm and Drive*) movement in late 18th century Germany and characterised by extremes of emotion and a rejection of Enlightenment classical norms.

14 *On Human Beings in the World* p. 78.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *On Revelation, Art, and Learning* p. 192.

17 *Ibid.*

his polemical deployment against contemporary rationalists. In 1813 he comes to an understanding of the human being as three-dimensional: Spirit, Body, and Mind. He links imagination to the Spirit, feeling to the Body, and intellect/reason to the Mind, as can be seen in the later essays included here. It is also in this ‘theological’ period that he attacks German idealism in general and leading intellectuals in Denmark in particular, most notably H.C. Ørsted (1777-1851), the discoverer of electro-magnetism.<sup>18</sup> Ørsted, who is influenced by the German idealists, especially Schelling, had attacked Grundtvig’s publication of an eschatologically-oriented writing from his late father’s papers and his attempt to turn the clock back to pre-Enlightenment times. Grundtvig responds with the claim that the biblical prophecies are in the process of being fulfilled! In *Against the Little Accuser* (1815)<sup>19</sup> Grundtvig calls Schelling “unChristian, ungodly, and untruthful” and contends that he can deliver a logically watertight proof that this is the case: God is transcendental, Christianity and the Bible are the only means of salvation, and the end of the world is approaching, beliefs in which he is far from alone in holding. Ørsted’s stinging response claims that God is *immanent* in creation and identical with nature and matter. The controversy eventually dies down, though neither antagonist changes his viewpoint. Ørsted regards Grundtvig’s apocalyptic Christianity as obscurantism, while Grundtvig holds firm to his apocalyptic expectation of the coming of Christ. By the end of 1815, however, Grundtvig is setting aside his preaching mode and moving on to what he calls his “historical period” – 1815-23.

### *Danne-Virke*, a One-man Journal

Between July 1816 and January 1819 Grundtvig publishes his own one-man journal, *Danne-Virke*<sup>20</sup> – 16 editions in all, containing essays, obituaries, and poems, and including articles on *Beowulf*<sup>21</sup> and his own magnificent poem ‘The Easter Lily’.<sup>22</sup> Grundtvig divides his content of *Danne-Virke* into ‘flowers’ (poems), ‘leaves’ (source criticism) and ‘fruits’ (philosophical essays on history, literature and myth). The last-mentioned genre, philosophy, is repeatedly drawn on in Grundtvig’s contemporary work, *An Account of*

18 H.C. Ørsted is often spelt ‘Oersted’ in English. Oersted’s Law and the oersted (Oe) are named after him. His Christian names, Hans Christian, are not used in Denmark – as indeed is the case with H.C. Andersen, the writer of fairy-tales.

19 Danish title: *Imod den lille Anklager*.

20 English title: lit. *The Dane-Work*, named after the rampart along the southern Danish border with Germany.

21 Being a largely self-taught scholar of Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Grundtvig took great interest in the epic poem, *Beowulf* (8th-9th cent). In 1820 he published the first modern translation (into Danish, revised in 1865), and in 1861 he published a new edition of the poem. For further comment see the English summary by Andreas Haarder in *Grundtvig Studies* 1965 (also online).

22 Grundtvig’s 30-page drama-poem (Danish title: *Paaske-Lilien*) depicts Christ’s resurrection as experienced by imagined bystanders at the grave on Easter morning. It was first published in *Danne-Virke* (1817) and was included as a hymn version in Grundtvig’s *Song-Work for the Danish Church* (1837). In 1910 Carl Nielsen wrote a new tune, and the 6-verse hymn is now among the most popular in the Danish hymnbook.

*World History, Primarily in the Lutheran Era* (1817).<sup>23</sup> His readers include the Copenhagen literati and university students, as well as provincial church leaders, and a handful of Norwegians, among them Professor of Philosophy, Niels Treschow and Professor of Greek, Georg Sverdrup. No fewer than 9 of the 14 chapters in the present book date from the *Danne-Virke* period. Grundtvig is now less combative and more reflective than before – yet none the less impassioned.

The distinguished literary historian, Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, calls this historical period one of “*Danne-Virke* patience”,<sup>24</sup> meaning that Grundtvig is willing to wait for History to show future generations that his Christian world-view was right in the end: “We only become wise by experience, and therefore we all need to know our history, which alone embraces, connects, and illuminates all human experience.” This thought leaves its marks on his philosophical thinking after 1815: He calls this period

... my *historical* one, as most will agree. Everything I have written since then is concerned with my claim that also at the *universal* level we only become wise by experience. We should all learn from History as best we can, for History alone embraces all human experience and can connect and clarify it.<sup>25</sup>

Grundtvig will no longer preach the Gospel directly, but will see “whether the eye is as blind to human beings... as it is to our Saviour”.<sup>26</sup> Fundamental to his thought is that historical experience is the best teacher to help us understand ourselves. This conviction is expounded in a much calmer tone than in the hectic discharges of the preceding theological period. With an allusion to his prophecies during the controversy with Ørsted, Grundtvig will let time be the judge of who was right and who was wrong: “All such clarification I therefore leave to posterity.”<sup>27</sup> His task is not so much to prophesy as to present his History-based observations on humankind and our relationship to the world and to God, whom he regards as the core of all learning. Hence the phrase “human condition” is constantly in use.<sup>28</sup>

In turning his attention to our shared human condition and to “the great concerns of the human race: the enlightenment of past generations and thus of humankind itself”<sup>29</sup> Grundtvig is putting words to the universalist aims that are consolidating in

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23 Danish title: *Udsigt over Verdens-Kroniken fornemmelig i det Lutherske Tidsrum*.

24 Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen (1980) *Det handlende ord. N.F.S. Grundtvigs digtning, litteraturkritik og poetik 1798-1819 (The Word as Agent, N.F.S. Grundtvig's Writing, Literary Criticism and Poetics 1798-1819)*. Copenhagen, p. 681.

25 *An Exchange of Letters between North Jutland and Christianshavn*, 1824, quoted in *Grundtvig's Memoirs and Memoirs of Grundtvig (Grundtvigs Erindringer og Erindringer om Grundtvig)*, eds. H. Høirup & S. Johansen, Copenhagen 1948 p. 64.

26 *On Human Beings in the World* (1816) p. 70.

27 *On the Philosophical Century* (1816) p. 271.

28 See pp. 73, 79, 90 etc.

29 *On Proverbs* p. 331.

him through his studies in the history of philosophy, as formulated by the German polyhistorian, Johann Herder (1744-1803). Thus he writes:

The chronicles of the world, which depict the interaction of the various peoples and the links between the ages, are by their very nature a ‘common’ that none can justly arrogate to themselves.<sup>30</sup>

The ‘common’ in question is the *village* common in Danish peasant society, a stretch of uncultivated land on which everyone can graze their livestock. Similarly, history is the shared experience of humankind, to which all should have free access.

The title of Grundtvig’s journal, *Danne-Virke*, signals his intent to protect the Danish reading public from the encroachment of German idealism and culture south of the border, but not from the whole wide world in general. On the contrary, he considers it a specifically *Danish* task to philosophise over *world* history, and over the relationship between the individual and the universal. We see how the individual is placed in the same relation to his or her people as to humankind in general:

Individuals occupy the same relationship to their people as to the entire human race; whatever they are able to comprehend therefore depends first on how much their people can *comprehend* of the present moment, and second, on how much they are aware of the *ideas* of their people.<sup>31</sup>

In the same article Grundtvig argues that “wherever the body is divided among warring members, nothing can thrive,” and “the more limited a people’s idea of, and feeling for, the human race, the more limited their idea of the human being.”<sup>32</sup> The aim therefore is for the individual nations to work together, with world history as their point of origin, to *explain* the human being – including the circumstances of our origin and our destiny.

In this philosophising over history, Grundtvig sees a major role for Christianity, but treats it primarily as a cultural force – especially in the first two volumes of *Danne-Virke*. Already in 1816 he anticipates his later dictum, “Human comes first, and Christian next,”<sup>33</sup> when, with reference to the European nations, he argues that “how they are as a people, so do they become as Christians.”<sup>34</sup> Down the ages, Christianity has always interacted with each people’s distinctive stamp in the illumination of

30 *On Historical Learning, or the Concept of ‘History’* (1816) p. 290.

31 *Ibid.* p. 283.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Cf. The poem appears as no. 91 in *Living Wellsprings* (2015).

34 *On Historical Learning, or the Concept of ‘History’* p. 287.

its history and understanding of both itself and humankind in general. Grundtvig's gradual transition from Christian polemicist to historically-based anthropologist does not affect his fundamental beliefs. He continues to hold his Christian world-view, but his approach now is to expound this in a successive unfolding of philosophical arguments in *Danne-Virke* to persuade his readers of the truth of Christianity. This move from knowledge towards faith corresponds on a smaller scale to what history offers us: the future will prove that the Christian claims regarding our human circumstances and our destiny are credible and reliable. Indeed, in the detailed position he takes towards contemporary philosophy in *A Brief Account of World History* (1812),<sup>35</sup> he uses the very motto from the Greek historiography, Pindar: "What Truth is Time will tell."

As Grundtvig turns away from a direct proclamation of the Gospel in the years after 1815, it is in this 'historical period' of his authorship that his philosophical observations weigh most. We find here the foundation for his thinking much later, called by one theologian "prefaces to all Grundtvig's later ideas on history and doctrine".<sup>36</sup> He continues to write philosophical texts and to work with philosophical elements right up until his death in 1872. Although they are no longer a main concern, this does not weaken their importance. The 'prefaces' that are the fruition of this period operate with a series of concepts that are fundamental to his maturing view of anthropology, history, society, education, and theology, positions which for the rest of his life he justifies with *philosophical* arguments. Like his contemporaries, he does not define 'philosophy' in its narrower sense but includes both "cultural education and upbringing".<sup>37</sup> However, we must note that although he continues to diverge from the path that philosophy takes in the 18th and 19th centuries, he remains, as in his youth, under its *influence*, including that of German idealism. Inspired by Fichte's concept of *Wissenschaftslehre* (epistemology) but with reference to an older biblical usage, he speaks now of 'learning' (*Vidskab*). In alignment with Fichte's belief that human reflection is an unfinished process, Grundtvig characterises learning as "an expression of the human endeavour for wisdom, for absolute knowledge."<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the specialised sciences, 'learning' is thinking *in progress*, an "endless endeavour towards an unattainable goal on earth".<sup>39</sup>

Fichte and Grundtvig also agree that this awareness of an unattainable goal in this life is the foundation of consciousness. However, where Fichte posits a unify-

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35 Danish title: *Kort Begreb af Verdens Kronike betraget i Sammenhæng*, otherwise untranslated.

36 Bishop Henning Høirup (1909-95) *Grundtvig's View of Faith and Knowledge* (*Grundtvigs Syn paa Tro og Erkendelse*, 1949).

37 *On Revelation, Art, and Learning* p. 203. Grundtvig's words here are *dannelse* and *opdragelse*. *dannelse* is a central word in the Danish language, and denotes *cultural* education, now including life-skills, while *uddannelse* denotes formal education and training.

38 *Ibid.* p. 271.

39 *Ibid.* p. 272.

ing consciousness between God and humankind, Grundtvig honours the traditional distinction between creator and creature. Thus, for us as *created* beings in Time, “all true learning must in every sense be *historical*”.<sup>40</sup> The apostle Paul is right to say: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”<sup>41</sup> Only in eternity will we understand the riddles of life: where we come from, where we are heading, and what is the meaning of it all. Grundtvig underlines that “all knowledge about an eternal independent existence is impossible for us.”<sup>42</sup> At the same time, in *On the Philosophical Century* (1816) he agrees with Wolff that ontologically, “like all the essential basic concepts of existence (p. 273)”, God is beyond our understanding. Yet although direct knowledge of God is not possible in this life, his existence can be *proved*, and as Paul says, in eternity “we shall see face to face”, and “shall know fully.”<sup>43</sup>

These observations are summarised into two major declarations in the following year in *On Revelation, Art, and Learning* (1817). First, “we cannot understand a jot more about humankind than what has been developed and illuminated in us over time.”<sup>44</sup> And second, everything in the world, including all phenomena in space and time “is simply an effect of the almighty power of eternal Truth, mirroring His thought as created by His Word.”<sup>45</sup> Human beings “reflect God Himself, as the work of His hand with a gleam of His light and a spark of His Spirit.”<sup>46</sup> Philosophy therefore reaches its fulfilment and achieves its goal in a knowledge of God. Human beings, created in God’s image, “are at the head of it all,”<sup>47</sup> meaning the totality of Time and Space, the world as Nature and History. This idea that human beings are the crown of creation – and a microcosm of it – is the pillar of Grundtvig’s philosophy of nature and his philosophy of history. He adds, wittily, “their lives are set on a historical course, at the end of which, like Professors of History, they are created Doctors of Theology.”<sup>48</sup> The ‘historical course’ leads eventually to an indirect knowledge of God on earth, and a direct knowledge, face to face, in eternity.

For Grundtvig, philosophy thus occupies the role of a servant; it provides services on the overriding level for specific purposes. Philosophy is an instrument for the two disciplines within the area of ‘the School’, i.e. education and the human acquisition of knowledge. In 1819 he calls education a sphere “which our whole life constitutes,

40 Ibid. p. 275.

41 I Cor 13:9-10.

42 *On the Philosophical Century* p. 273.

43 I Cor 13:12.

44 *On Revelation, Art, and Learning* p. 176.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid. p. 199.

48 Ibid.

corresponding to revelation and experience.”<sup>49</sup> To this can be added Grundtvig’s belief that “knowledge is only of help to put doubt to shame and to strengthen Faith,”<sup>50</sup> a relation to which he gives pointed expression in the same article: “Philosophising without Faith is the same as looking without eyes.”<sup>51</sup> According to Grundtvig, our view of humankind and our concept of God illuminate each other. His claim that history is a goal-oriented process directed by Providence – a belief that under the influence of German idealism is central in 1811-15 and still much in evidence in the ‘*Danne-Virke* period’ (1816-19) – is no longer so convincing from our present-day perspective. What speaks to us rather is his view of humankind, which is central to our understanding of creative education and creation theology.

## 2. Reception and Research

On the basis of the controversy with his contemporaries in the years 1811-15, Grundtvig is widely regarded as a Christian opponent of philosophical thinking. Judgement against him, though sporadic, is harsh. In the monthly journal *Athene* (1813-17), which was influenced by German idealism, the literary critic Peder Hjort (1793-1871) calls Grundtvig’s philosophy “suffocating smoke” (1817), a metaphor that Grundtvig borrows and, with an image from hunting, turns to positive effect for his riposte: “What else should I do with my philosophising other than smoke out the foxes that theology has failed to do, or otherwise smoke them into their foxhole-graves?”<sup>52</sup> He hereby demonstrates that his philosophy, also after 1815, remains *in the service of* his theology, a position which confirmed for his critics, like the later champion of democracy, Dr J.J. Dampe (1790-1867), that Grundtvig should simply be written off as an obscurantist and his philosophy as an opaque attempt to undermine free thought. The criticism gradually fades after he moves into his ‘historical period’ in 1815 and reins in his aggression towards other thinkers. Not least his defeat in a libel trial in 1825<sup>53</sup> makes him a wiser, less combative philosopher in the 1830s. But his ideas remain out of step with his contemporaries, with the sole enthusiast in his lifetime being the philologist and educationist Christian Flor (1792-1875) – the first principal of the first people’s high school in Rødning from 1844. In the 1870s Professor of Philosophy Rasmus Nielsen (1808-84) also acknowledges Grundtvig’s contribution to theology and education, but he leaves Grundtvig’s philosophical ideas to themselves.

Not until 1909 is Grundtvig seriously acknowledged as a philosopher of value.

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49 *On the Church, the State, and the School* p. 231.

50 *On Human Beings in the World* p. 75.

51 *Ibid.* p. 76.

52 *On Revelation, Art, and Learning* p. 174.

53 The ‘Clausen Libel Case’ is dealt with in vol. 3 *Human Comes First* (2018).