

## Part II

# Time, History and the Fall: St Augustine and Kant

‘Misconceptions like this are unavoidable’, he said, ‘now that we’ve eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. But Paradise is locked and bolted, and the cherubim stands behind us. We have to go on and make the journey round the world to see if it is perhaps open somewhere at the back’ ... ‘Does that mean ... we must eat again of the Tree of Knowledge in order to return to our state of innocence?’ ‘Of course,’ he said, ‘but that’s the last chapter in the history of the world.’

(Kleist, *On the Marionette Theatre*)

The tree of knowledge, the alleged state of innocence, a postulated journey towards freedom, the knowledge of good and evil, etc., are the common representations present in most narrations of the theme of the Fall. A hypothetical state of natural human being is presupposed and is the shared underlying feature of all these narratives. What follows is an understandable urge to escape from such a ‘confining’ state where the human being is seen as deprived of freedom and a longing for freedom and knowledge, with all the consequences this entails. What is more, in the majority of these stories the inescapability<sup>1</sup> of the Fall is treated as being almost obvious, despite the vast amount of conceptual problems that this postulation brings to the fore and among which one could undoubtedly include the emergence of evil, the beginning of suffering, etc. In the course of the ages many explanations of the Fall have been given, and many attempts to ‘situate’ and adequately explain the origins of evil have emerged, all of them related not only to the

philosophical and/or theological background of each thinker, but also to the historical period in which s/he was born. The questions that arise are innumerable, and from this same story many completely different accounts have arisen; there are some that find the possibility of salvation in the progressive unfolding of history, others see it as a return to the state of a lost Paradise.

Kleist suggests, perhaps ironically, a return to the state of innocence, but with one condition, namely to eat again of the 'tree of knowledge'. How should one interpret this enigmatic vision? Is this an indication that the thinker accepts the inescapability of the unfolding of history, or is he suggesting the possibility of a return to a pre-fallen state for humanity in manner reminiscent of Kierkegaard's discussion of recollection? Moreover, if the latter is the case, then why do human beings have to eat again of the tree of knowledge? Is the repetition of the same act tantamount to a restoration of the former state? If Kleist wishes to refer here to a higher state, why does he call it 'state of innocence'?

The cherubim, let us recall, stand outside the gate of Paradise in order to prevent us eating of the tree of life, to prevent time from prematurely becoming eternity. Kleist's story proposes a journey round the world to 'see if [the gate of paradise] is perhaps open somewhere at the back'. In this part I follow Kleist's suggestion and attempt an exploration of 'meeting points' between time and eternity. This exploration entails a temporary suspension of the direct analysis of Kierkegaard's works and a discussion of divergent accounts of the creation and the Fall. The aim is to 'take notice' of the perspectives Kierkegaard has opened up to gain further insights.

The concept of repetition was briefly introduced in the previous chapter. Repetition has a significant role in this exploration, which nevertheless remains latent until the final chapter where an explicit and detailed analysis takes place. The exemplary form of repetition is often described by Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous authors as a 'religious leap'. Thus, the religious leap for the individual is the always deferred *telos* and in this respect it might seem at first glance that the pseudonymous authors develop a linear conception of time and consequently a conception of both the history of human race and of the human individual as tending towards an end. But if this were the case, how could one explain the importance that Kierkegaard attributes to radically new beginnings? His choice and employment of the concept of repetition imply a conception of cyclical time where the interplay between eternity and time<sup>2</sup> is always present. However, it would be more accurate to suggest that in Kierkegaard's thought there is an acknowledgement of

both linear and cyclical dimensions of time since a progressive element is also implied in the conception of a new beginning. Constantius defines repetition as a 'transcendent, religious movement by virtue of the absurd – when the borderline of the wondrous is reached', eternity being true repetition' (Repetition, p. 305).

Constantius then focuses his attention on the repetition as exemplified in the life of a human individual (Repetition, p. 287), his main interest being its relation with freedom (Repetition, p. 297), since for him repetition is 'a task for freedom'. In its individual manifestations, repetition is shown by the author to presuppose the consciousness of sin and in its higher form to signify atonement (Repetition, p. 313).

The following – crucial – passage was cited above:

If God himself had not willed repetition, the world would not have come into existence. Either he would have followed the superficial plans of hope or he would have retracted everything and preserved it in recollection. This he did not do. Therefore, the world continues, and it continues because it is repetition. (Repetition, p. 133)

This passage allows the reader to 'take notice' of the almost inexhaustible variety of possible interpretations to which it may be subjected and which may furthermore lead to the development of radically different viewpoints. In addition to a whole sequence of questions that arise concerning the nature of God, of God's will,<sup>3</sup> of God's power to will repetition, of existence, of continuation and conservation of the world, there is also a pivotal question that arguably provides the ground for all the others to emerge. This question is certainly the one concerning the proper meaning of Kierkegaard's phrase 'if God had not willed repetition'. How is this to be interpreted? Does Kierkegaard refer to the primordial act of the creation of the world, or does he simply point to the human act of repetition that can save a human being after the Fall? Is repetition an act of God, a human act, or a combination of the two?

If, as already mentioned, the introduction of the 'concept' of anxiety signifies a different understanding of the Fall according to which not only is there neither a rigid distinction between the 'before' and 'after' of the Fall, nor an abysmal difference between Adam and the postulated subsequent human beings, it would be of interest in this Part to attempt a presentation of two accounts which, in one way or another, implicitly or explicitly, favour the opposite interpretation of the Fall. The first account to be discussed in this context is that St Augustine's, the second is Kant's. St Augustine offers the conception of a radical split between

the time before and after the Fall. Kant explores the issue of the Fall, applying the 'as if' rule, that is according to the imaginary dimension that the 'as if' conveys to such postulations as an allegedly pre-fallen state of humanity, etc. Thus, in Kant's narrative repetition functions exclusively on the level of the individual's being-in-the-world, whilst in the case of St Augustine it operates – mainly but not exclusively – on the level of *cosmological* time. Both thinkers, explicitly or implicitly, follow the strategy of attributing to history a merely hypothetical or 'fantastic beginning', which made Kierkegaard wonder whether a condition such as that of pre-fallen Adam had any actual currency for them.