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# THE CORE OF LEARNING

*The Philosophical  
Writings of*

## N.F.S. Grundtvig

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Edward Broadbridge  
(translator and editor)

Aarhus University Press

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Introduction: Kim Arne Pedersen & Anders Holm  
Afterword: Anders Holm

Introductions by Niels W. Bruun,  
Kim Arne Pedersen, Kim Steen Ravn,  
Jon Tafdrup, Vanja Thaulow, Steen Tullberg

*“Philosophy is an expression  
of the human endeavour for wisdom” (1816)*

*“Philosophising without Faith  
is the same as looking without eyes” (1817)*

*The Core of Learning. The Philosophical Writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig*  
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# Contents

Illustrations · 7

Foreword · 9

Katrine Frøkjær Baunvig

Editor's/Translator's Note · II

Edward Broadbridge

Notes on Contributors · 15

“Time will Tell the Truth”: Grundtvig as a Philosopher · 19

Kim Arne Pedersen & Anders Holm

## I ANTHROPOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

1. On Human Beings in the World (1817) · 67

Introduction by Steen Tullberg

2. On Truth, Greatness, and Beauty (1817) · 109

Introduction by Kim Arne Pedersen

## II RELIGION AND AESTHETICS

3. On Religion and Liturgy (1807) · 135

Introduction by Vanja Thaulow

4. On Revelation, Art, and Learning (1817) · 172

Introduction by Jon Tafdrup

5. On the Church, the State, and the School, part 2 (1819) · 209

Introduction by Kim Arne Pedersen

## III HISTORY AND SIGNS

6. On the Advancement of Learning (1807) · 239

Introduction by Niels W. Bruun

7. On the Philosophical Century (1816) · 269

Introduction by Steen Tullberg

8. On Historical Learning, or the Concept of History (1816) · 280

Introduction by Jon Tafdrup

9. On the Relation between Learning, Experience, and  
Sound Common Sense (1817) · 295  
Introduction by Steen Tullberg
10. History and Naturalism, or the Illumination of Time and Space (1865) · 310  
Introduction by Kim Arne Pedersen

#### IV LANGUAGE

- II. On Proverbs (1817) · 323  
Introduction by Kim Steen Ravn
12. On the Word and the Mother-Tongue (1819) · 337  
Introduction by Kim Arne Pedersen

#### V YOUTH

13. Youth in Our Time (1850) · 355  
Introduction by Kim Arne Pedersen
14. Three Speeches at Marielyst People's High School (1866, 1868, 1871) · 373  
Introduction by Edward Broadbridge

#### AFTERWORD

##### GRUNDTVIG AND KIERKEGAARD

The Yodeler and the Hairsplitter.

On the Enigmatic Relationship between Grundtvig and Kierkegaard · 383

Anders Holm

Sources · 397

English Bibliography · 398

Indexes · 401

N. F. S. Grundtvig: Works in English · 409

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## Illustrations

Cover: P.C. Skovgaard's drawing of Grundtvig. The handwriting is Grundtvig's own, taken from Illustration 3.

1. Grundtvig 1822 • Copper engraving by Johann Walther. Royal Library, Copenhagen • 18
2. The lightning-man, Henrik Steffens 1813 • Painting 1891 by Arthur Kampf • 66
3. Draft manuscript for *On Human Beings in the World* 1814-15 • Royal Library, Copenhagen • 108
4. Front cover of first edition of *Danne-Virke* 1816 • Photo: Edward Broadbridge • 132
5. Contents of last edition of *Danne-Virke* 1819 • Photo: Edward Broadbridge • 208
6. Grundtvig 1842 • Drawing 1842 by Peter (P.C.) Skovgaard • 236
7. Grundtvig's study at Store Tuborg • *Illustreret Tidende* 1883, Royal Library, Copenhagen • 268
8. Grundtvig's memorial rooms at Udby • Photo: Leif Tuxen • 294
9. First page of *Youth in Our Time* 1850 • Photo: Edward Broadbridge • 354
10. Grundtvig in his velvet gown 1872 • Photo: Adolph Lønberg, Royal Library, Copenhagen • 372
11. Ernst Trier speaking at Vallekilde People's High School 1888 • Drawing by Joakim Skovgaard, Det Nationalhistoriske Museum på Frederiksborg Slot. Photo: Kit Weiss • 379
12. Flyer for course on Kierkegaard and Grundtvig • Photo: Edward Broadbridge • 396





## 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.

This publication has received financial support from the following foundations, whom the Grundtvig Study Centre cordially thanks:

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*Katrine Frøkjær Baunvig*

Director of the Grundtvig Study Centre, Aarhus University

## 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.

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**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>

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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).