Kierkegaard on Faith and Desire: The Limits of Christianity and the Human Heart

Citation

Goldman, Aaron James. 2021. Kierkegaard on Faith and Desire: The Limits of Christianity and the Human Heart. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

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The Limits of Christianity and the Human Heart

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Date: November 9, 2020

Kierkegaard on Faith and Desire:

The Limits of Christianity and the Human Heart

A dissertation presented

by

Aaron James Goldman

to

The Committee on the Study of Religion

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

The Study of Religion

Harvard University,

Cambridge, Massachusetts

November 9, 2020

Dissertation Advisor: David C. Lamberth   Aaron James Goldman

Kierkegaard on Faith and Desire:

The Limits of Christianity and the Human Heart

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes and evaluates several major productions by Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). It focuses on three works Kierkegaard authored under pseudonyms – *Either / Or* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), and *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) – and the non-pseudonymously authored *Works of Love* (1847). The dissertation argues that for Kierkegaard, Christian faith is a distinctive capacity of the individual human being that enables the individual to organize their desires and pursue the good life in a way that is qualitatively superior to what is available outside of Christianity.

Through exegesis of Kierkegaard's works, the dissertation identifies two elements of Kierkegaard's presentation of Christian faith that recur throughout his authorship. The first is an axiom that undergirds Kierkegaard's conception of the good life, namely that for the best possible life to be lived (that is, the Christian life), a person must ultimately be individually responsible for their own happiness or unhappiness. The second is a complex juxtaposition between Christianity and alternative, non-Christian worldviews (collectively called 'Paganism' by Kierkegaard) which Kierkegaard performs to provoke his reader into making the decision to affirm Christianity. If, with the assistance of God, the individual does so (that is, has faith), their desires and motivations are reorganized to enable a higher form of happiness and a new form of moral engagement (love for the neighbor).

The dissertation characterizes this juxtaposition through a stagecraft analogy: the *mechane*, a crane that lifts a theater actor to simulate flight. The analogy highlights the relationship of asymmetrical dependence between Kierkegaard's accounts of Christianity and non-Christian alternatives. For an actor to take flight (happiness) with the *mechane* (Christianity), the hoist (faith) that suspends them must be supported by a tension force from the ground ('Paganism'). Faith requires awareness that the theological and anthropological scaffolding that makes Christian faith possible is transcendent and distinctive. But at the same time, to avoid compromising the transcendence and distinctiveness of faith, the individual cannot completely foreclose the possibility of that which Christianity negates, for example, through rational proofs or research into the historical origins of the Christian tradition.

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pro veritate omnia
nihil veritatis[1]

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[1] Anonymous type-written words found on a scrap of paper in Assistens Kirkegård (Frederiksberg, Denmark), late November 2017.

> But this becoming—how difficult it really is,
> and how like a difficult birth![1]

First things first: This project would not have been possible without the tangible support of several institutions that offered me the time, space, and/or funding to complete it. Some of my initial research was conducted in 2015 as a Summer Fellow at St. Olaf College's Hong Kierkegaard Library. Thanks to the efforts of Gordon Marino and Eileen Shimota, I found at St. Olaf a friendly and fascinating community of scholars. In 2016 I received a generous grant from the Amanda E. Roleson Fund, facilitated by the American Scandinavian Foundation, to spend a year studying at the University of Copenhagen's Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre (SKC). My time there was so valuable that I elected to remain in Denmark for a second year. Bjarne Still Laurberg deserves special thanks for welcoming me to the SKC, and for remaining so helpful throughout my entire stay. In 2018 I was fortunate to find another home as a visiting doctoral student at Lund University's Centre for Theology and Religious Studies (CTR). I am grateful to Alexander Maurits and Magnus Zetterholm for helping to make this happen.

I have often wondered whether one's approach to Kierkegaard depends on which of his writings they first stumble upon. I was lucky to have initially encountered three of Kierkegaard's books at roughly the same time (almost 15 years ago), under the guidance of three generous teachers: Richard B. Miller (who first taught me *Works of Love*), Nancy Levene (who first taught me *Fear and Trembling*), and Becky Elisabeth Revalk (who first taught me *Philosophical Fragments*). These experiences were formative in the best possible ways; it is no accident that these three books form the backbone of my dissertation. To Nancy, I cannot overstate the value

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[1] *PF* 34 / *SKS* 4, 240.

of your mentorship during my youth and the significance of our continuing discussions, which I always look forward to. To Becky— What can I say? Were it not for Kierkegaard's humble and humbling reminders about the ownership of truth, I would be forced to credit almost all of this thesis to you (and be happy to do so). Whatever is of value in it, I'm certain I've heard you say it before in one way or another. So unlike Kierkegaard, I am blessed to know exactly "to whom I'm speaking" about all of this, and that there are indeed people "concerned about such things."[2]

Though my questions about Kierkegaard found a point of departure among those mentioned above, this dissertation only came into existence through the kindness and brilliance of so many teachers in so many places. To my other extraordinary professors at Indiana University – particularly Lisa Sideris and Mary Jo Weaver – thank you for showing me what Religious Studies could be, and for supporting me during my early career. At the University of Virginia, I am grateful to Larry Bouchard, James Childress, and Jamie Ferreira. (I was an obnoxious student, so I thank you for your forbearance. Years later, your seminars continue to bear fruit.) At Harvard, I want to thank Charles Hallisey, whose course on Buddhist ethics shaped my thinking in ways I didn't expect, and Courtney Bickel Lamberth, whose unflinching encouragement of my teaching has ensured I won't ever forget why this career is worth pursuing.

To my dissertation committee – David Lamberth, Amy Hollywood, and Charlie Stang – I owe a special debt of gratitude. Your insight, support, and patience over the years have been remarkable. To David in particular, I want to express my appreciation for the countless hours you spent closely reading my chapter drafts during the months before my defense, as well as for the detailed, incisive comments you left on every page. Without this major effort on your part, this project would not have come together.

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[2] *WL* 362 / *SKS* 9, 356.

For friendships that have persisted for years and spanned oceans, I also want to thank Charlie Carstens, Chris Kuehl, Phil Pitzer, Julia Reed, Dan Snowden, Tina Torrance, and Brian White. You all matter so much to me. I can't say enough.

To my parents Connie and Mitch, my sister Emily, my aunts Nancy and Sally, and my grandmothers Roz (recently passed) and Elaine— You gave me life, cared for me, loved me, housed me, and so much more. Thank you and thank you and thank you. From across the Atlantic, I miss you in ways that, as I age, sometimes surprise me. I wish I could be nearer.

And finally, to Yağmur Yılmaz: You have done the highest thing one person can do for another, aiding me day and night through the pangs of a difficult birth. Or perhaps to reflect our togetherness more fittingly, you have brooded this thing with me until it hatched. At times it felt so large and heavy that it could have been the world egg, and yet – tirelessly, joyfully – you have been here with me to see it through and coax it from its shell. On the long road to becoming Dr. Boyfriend, your confidence in me has quenched my anxiety, and your selflessness has pulled me from my interiority. Your companionship is a treasure I did not foresee, yet you truly see me for who I am. Our small family means everything to me. I love you.

Til Rivkah, som (*Skriv* det!) aldrig blev til.

A. Citations of Kierkegaard and Corresponding Sigla

In this dissertation I frequently cite primary texts by Søren Kierkegaard. Almost every citation refers to both the most recent scholarly Danish and English editions of his works. For the Danish, citations most often come from

SKS   *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* [Writings], vols. 1-28, K1-K28, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–2013).

Citations follow the procedure of listing the volume number of the *SKS*, and then the page number(s) of the volume. For commentary volumes, the volume number is preceded by the letter "K." An online edition (*SKS-E*) designed by Karsten Kynde, which I often consulted, is available at *sks.dk*. With journal or notebook entries, I also include document designations – e.g., BB (for journal BB), NB2 (for '*nota bene*' journal 2), Not13 (for notebook 13) – and entry numbers.

In cases where a citation refers to a piece of writing by Kierkegaard not in the *SKS* (only for some draft manuscripts or marginal comments left on personal copies of books), I cite

Pap.   *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* [Papers], 2nd ed., 16 vols. in 25 tomes; vols. I-XI.3, eds. Peter Andreas Heiberg, Victor Kuhr, Einer Torsting, and Niels Thulstrup; vols. XII-XIII, ed. Thulstrup; vols. XIV-XVI, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968–1978 [1909–1948]).

These citations list the volume number and related designations; entry numbers, line numbers, manuscript numbers; and the page number(s) from the volume.

For the English versions of (and commentaries on) Kierkegaard's works, drafts, and letters, I almost always refer to the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series by Princeton University Press. Most of these translations were completed by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. I note when I have provided my own translation or modified an existing one. For these editions, the citation uses an abbreviated title of the translated work with page number(s):

For most English translations of Kierkegaard's journal or notebook entries and loose papers, I cite the volume and page number(s) of

KJN   *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1-11.2, trans. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, David D. Possen, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007–2020).

<div align="center">B. Bible Citations</div>

In this dissertation I refer to English and Danish Bible translations. Where it is unnecessary to refer to a version Kierkegaard himself would have owned or consulted, I quote and cite

NRSV   *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 5th ed., eds. Michael Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

In cases where it is necessary or helpful to refer to Danish translations of the Christian Bible with which Kierkegaard would have been familiar (such as when I argue that he is alluding to a scriptural passage), I follow the usual practice of the *SKS* by quoting and citing the 1740 Danish translation of the Old (*Gammel*) Testament sponsored by King Christian VI (*GT-1740*) and the 1819 Danish translation of the New Testament sponsored by King Frederik VI and overseen by the Danish Bible Society (*NT-1819*).[1] (While Kierkegaard read Greek and some Hebrew, his scriptural allusions and quotations often deploy terms from these Danish translations.[2]) The physical Bible I consulted is from the same print-run as a Bible Kierkegaard himself owned:

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[1] The 1740 Christian VI Bible is a revision of the 1647 Danish translation of the Bible (from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek); the latter was a collaborative effort between Hans Poulsen Resen and Hans Svane. *NT-1819* includes both new translations from the Greek and revisions from the 1740 version of the New Testament. Other Danish Bibles were still available during Kierkegaard's time, including those directly translated from versions of the (German) Luther Bible.

[2] Kierkegaard also owned and consulted a separate partial translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament into Danish: *Det Gamle Testaments poetiske og prophetiske Skrifter*, *efter Grundtexten paa ny oversatte og med Indholdsfortegnelse samt Anmærkninger forsynede*, 2 vols. in 3 tomes, trans. Jens Møller and Rasmus Møller

GT-1740   *Biblia, det er: den ganske Hellige Skrifts Bøger, med Flid efterseete og rettede*
and   *efter Grundtexten, saa og med mange Parallelsteder og udførlige*
NT-1819   *Indholdsfortegnelser forsynede* [17th Ed.] (Copenhagen: Kongelige Vaisenhuses
             Bogtrykkerie [*Royal Orphanage's Press*], 1824) [*ASKB* 6].

Where I refer to the *GT-1740* or *NT-1819*, I have translated the passages into English from the

Danish myself, and, due to difficulty of access, have also included the Danish text in the notes.

C. Other Citations

Where I refer to other primary texts whose original languages of authorship are not English, I do

my best to cite both the page of an English translation and the location of the cited text in an

original-language edition. If necessary, the first time the source appears, I cite also a full entry

for both the English translation and an original-language version. Thereafter I abbreviate these

citations according to established scholarly practices.

    When possible, I cite – along with an English translation – a version of a text that

Kierkegaard himself owned or could have accessed. When I can provide it, the first full citation

of such a source contains "[*ASKB* {number}]," which represents the catalog number from the

posthumous auction of Kierkegaard's personal collection, as originally collated in

ASKB   *Auktionsprotokol over Søren Kierkegaards bogsamling* [The Auctioneer's Sales
             Record of the Library of Søren Kierkegaard], ed. H. P. Rohde (Copenhagen:
             Kongelige Bibliotek [*Royal Library*], 1967).

The records were recently updated for clarity and to remedy errors. Thus, I primarily consulted

the following volume to determine the likelihood of Kierkegaard's attention to particular

sources, as well as to confirm *ASKB* numbers:

ACKL   *The Auction Catalogue of Kierkegaard's Library*, eds. Katalin Nun, Gerhard
             Schreiber, and Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and
             Resources*, vol. 20 (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016).

(Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin, 1828-30) [*ASKB* 86-88, 89-91]. I have judged it insufficiently different from *GT-1740* (in the relevant passages) to quote or cite from this text instead of *GT-1740*, except at one point in Chapter V.

I cite from two collections of secondary material about Kierkegaard frequently enough to

warrant abbreviating these series' titles in footnotes:

IKC   *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, 24 volumes in 23 tomes, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984–2010).

KRSRR   *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, 21 vols. in 58 tomes, ed. Jon Stewart; vols. 1-19.5, 20 (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007–2015); vols. 19.6-19.7, 21.1-21.3 (London and New York: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2016–2017).

D. Danish Dictionaries

Clarifications of Danish words come from the following four dictionaries. The one most often

consulted is listed second (*ODS*), which corresponds to the Danish of Kierkegaard's era.

DDO   *Den Danske Ordbog* [The Danish Dictionary (1955–)], 6 vols., Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, eds. Ebba Hjorth, Kjeld Kristensen, et al. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2003-2005). Digital version: ordnet.dk/ddo

ODS   *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog* [Dictionary of the Danish Language (1700–1950)], 5th edition, 33 vols., Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1992–2005 [1918–1956]). Digital version: ordnet.dk/ods

KO   Otto Kalkar (with Marie Bjerrum), *Ordbog til det ældre Sprog (1300–1700)* [Dictionary for the Older Language], 2nd edition, 6 vols. (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1976 [1881–1918]). Digital version: kalkarsordbog.dk

GDO   *Gammeldansk Ordbog* [Dictionary of Old Danish (1100–1515)], Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, eds. Marita Akhøj Nielsen, et al., in-progress digital version only: gammeldanskordbog.dk

E. Danish Nouns

In Kierkegaard's era, the first letter of Danish nouns was capitalized; in today's Danish, that is

no longer the case for common nouns. Except only rarely (such as when discussing today's

Danish), I follow Kierkegaard in capitalizing Danish nouns when I mention them.

One feature of Danish (as in other Scandinavian languages) is that there are two main ways to render a noun definite. Which method is used in any given case depends on context and grammatical factors. These include placing a definite article (*den*, *det*, *de*) prior to the noun, and adding an enclitic-like ending to the noun (usually *-en*, *-et*, *-e(r)ne*). When I mention Danish nouns outside of a Danish sentence, I usually follow standard dictionary practices, *excluding* the definite article and ending, even if the noun usually occurs with the article or ending in Kierkegaard's writing.

> "…No, hug Scylla's crag—sail on past her—
> top speed! Better by far to lose six men and
> keep your ship than lose your entire crew."[1]

Even in a narrative full of vivid depictions of violence, the killing of Odysseus' warriors by

Scylla is especially grisly.[2] Six men, plucked from the boat as though by fishhooks, call out their

captain's name before being swallowed whole— as the fish of the sea are to human beings, so, it

seems, are human beings to the grander forces that govern the cosmos. Narrating the event to

Alcinous and his court, Odysseus remarks: "Of all the pitiful things I've had to witness,

suffering, searching out the pathways of the sea, this wrenched my heart the most."[3] Among all

his travails, why are these deaths the most heart-wrenching?

Is it because of the guilt he felt over their deaths? Presumably yes, but for Odysseus,

responsibility and guilt are not unique to the dilemma of Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla permits

Odysseus to keep his mission afloat, while Charybdis – devouring the sea three times a day, but

who knows when? – makes no such guarantees. What is it about choosing a certain fate that so

bothers Odysseus? Could Odysseus have even done otherwise than sacrifice his crew? Against

these particular obstacles, he had actually intended to protect them; despite the warning by Circé

that battling against Scylla would be fruitless, Odysseus donned his armor and prepared for a

fight. He wished to avoid losing any of his men, and also to avoid the risk of traversing

Charybdis' maw. Yet then he did not fight: "But now, fearing death, *all eyes fixed on*

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[1] Circé, to Odysseus. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York and London: Penguin, 1996), 274 (book 12, lines 119-121).

[2] Ibid., 278-279 (book 12, lines 253-282).

[3] Ibid., 279 (book 12, lines 280-282).

Charybdis—now Scylla snatched six men from our hollow ship."[4] He became distracted from the threat he had chosen to face by the threat he had chosen not to. It was not in any battle with Scylla, but rather in this moment of distraction, in being fascinated by the particular sort of obstacle Charybdis was, where Odysseus' responsibility resided.

Odysseus was confronted with a choice; he could lose something with certainty (Scylla), or he could risk everything to keep everything (Charybdis). With Scylla there is inevitability, while Charybdis is an 'either / or.' With Charybdis, fortune will decide: either all is lost or nothing is lost. For Odysseus, this 'either / or' is nested within another: either Odysseus chooses to subject himself to the former 'either / or,' or he chooses an inevitable but acceptable loss. The image of Charybdis is powerful. It fascinates Odysseus because is suggests the *possibility* of going unscathed, a wish he had expressed to Circé before, only to be admonished. Like the shred of hope still sealed in Pandora's box,[5] the hope represented in Charybdis, governed by fortune, is a type of possibility itself displaced from those who would wish to grasp it. Hope is always one step removed from being actual, or it would not be hope. But Zeus ensured it would be two steps removed, a possible possibility. That is, not a possibility— for this world. In the same way, Charybdis could never be traversed; Odysseus could only gaze in her direction from a distance.

When every choice is bad, how can one make a good decision? What can someone learn from Odysseus' decision, and from his grief over it?

In this thesis I invoke the thought of Søren Kierkegaard to shed light on these questions. Kierkegaard would situate Odysseus' dilemma within a third 'either / or'— Either the structure of the cosmos (and of the human being) forces a person to choose between certain loss and the

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[4] Ibid., 278 (book 12, lines 263-264; my italics).

[5] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, in *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, trans. Glenn W. Most, *Loeb Classical Library* 57 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 90-95 (lines 59-105).

'either / or' of fortune, or it does not. If it indeed does, then one lives like Odysseus, whose vague wish to wriggle out of his dilemma is met by Circé's rebuke. If it does not, then there is a shred of hope that one need not choose between bad options. Like a fleeting reflection in a pond, this possibility – Christianity's possibility, on Kierkegaard's account – resembles the 'either / or' of Charybdis on the surface, insofar as both offer a chance for escape. But in its depths, it is different. To invoke one of many Kierkegaardian analogies about the relationship between the religious and the less-than-religious, this third 'either / or' is like the first (the abyssal mouth of Charybdis, a symbol of chance) *only* in the way that adding 55 to 45 resembles adding 50 to 40, that is, if you set aside the "number carried."[6]

This third 'either / or' – Christianity – if it is *actual* (which is to say, if it is *possible*, since it is, for Kierkegaard, a *choice*), would transform the first two: either I accept that I must choose between inevitable tragedy or the capricious 'either / or' of fortune, or I refuse to make a decision on these terms. The trauma of Scylla and Charybdis, which bleeds into Odysseus' narration to Alcinous, resides in the unthinkable possibility represented by Charybdis. More precisely, it is to be found in the disparity of that possibility and the world inhabited by Odysseus: *Maybe all could be saved, maybe nothing would be lost. And maybe* I *could make this happen*, rather than depend on the whims of the gods, or on the hunger pangs of a whirlpool. Could Odysseus have chosen *not* to sail between the two? Does this question even make sense to ask of him? Scylla was the mature choice, the 'wise' choice; could Odysseus have instead embraced a new naïveté? As with the sealed box, in Charybdis there is a promise (emphatically, in only *one* meaning of that word) of something otherwise, that *all* could be saved. If only—. For

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[6] See *PV* 46 / *SKS* 16, 28. The term (*Menten* or *en Ment*) is a Danishized form of the Latin phrase *in mente*. It refers to the 'carried' numeral 1 in a long addition or subtraction problem. Kierkegaard uses this concept as an analogy for how a religious perspective can inhabit an aesthetic stance (and possibly an ethical one) while subtly signaling that it is above it.

Odysseus, this phantom notion is seductive, more seductive than the song of the sirens just sailed past. While distracted by it, six were lost.

But as Odysseus learned from the enchantress, Scylla could not have been beaten. So six were to be lost regardless.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

This dissertation is about Kierkegaard, and about a Kierkegaardian question. The question I ask of him, and with him, is: Under what conditions is it possible to live a life worth living? As will be revealed, for Kierkegaard this will turn out to be the same as asking: How can I live a life where I am capable of getting what I desire, without giving up too much along the way, or without leaving it to chance? To return to the image with which we began: How could it be possible to *refuse* to choose between Scylla and Charybdis, to choose not to choose between them? For Kierkegaard, any adequate answer must be in the shape of a *decision*.

To employ a theatrical analogy about a core Kierkegaardian concept, life is lived, not *in* stages (*Stadier*), but *on* them.[7] His well-known triad of the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious – the stages or spheres of existence perhaps most explicitly delineated in *Stages on Life's Way* (1845) but prominent throughout much of his authorship – characterizes the positions that the individual (*Enkelt*) may occupy.[8] As with an actor on a stage, the individual is not anchored to

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[7] The comparison of a theatrical stage to a stage (of existence) – at least linguistically – is mine, not Kierkegaard's. The noun spelled *Stadium* or *Stadie* means a developmental stage, and the noun spelled *Stadium* or *Stadion* means an athletic arena (or 'stadium,' as in English). The term specifically for a theatrical stage was *Scene*, but the connotation of a public display is preserved between the English 'stage' and latter Danish *Stadium* (*ODS*). Moreover, Kierkegaard certainly would have been aware of the common etymology behind either of the Danish nouns spelled *Stadium*, the Danish verb *at staa* (to stand, or be in place) and the Latin *status* (having been positioned, or a position, stage, or rank). In that sense, Kierkegaard's terms for existence-stages (*Stadier*) and for a theatrical stage (*Scene*) both imply, even if indirectly, a platform on which a person stands, or occupies a position.

[8] The term *Enkelt* is a technical term in Kierkegaard's thought, often translated as "single individual" or "singular one." In Danish it is simply the substantializing of the adjective meaning 'single,' 'singular,' or 'individual.' I believe it is best translated into English simply as "individual," and in this thesis I often translate it this way.

any one position. Some actors might be lucky or skilled enough to select the stage on which they play. But if one must choose only between the aesthetic and the ethical, that life – like a choice between Scylla and Charybdis – will be deficient. For Kierkegaard, regardless of how that choice, or that life, is examined, it may not be worth living, at least not in the highest sense. This is because, for Kierkegaard, a life's value is fundamentally wrapped up in the individual's ability to *decide* to live well, and such an ability requires the third 'either / or,' inaccessible to Odysseus.

Accordingly, the dissertation must uncover the hidden stagecraft – with its corresponding levers, pulleys, cranes, and drop cloths – which must have been erected in the foundation of the human being, should the individual actually be free of such a forced choice and thus capable of living the highest life. As I have hinted, the name this assembly of stagecraft takes, for Kierkegaard, is Christianity.

In order to perform this uncovering, the dissertation puts three focused questions to Kierkegaard, each of which I direct to one of his major works: (i) About faith, the central topic of *Philosophical Fragments* (1844)— To what extent is Kierkegaard committed to the historicity of the Incarnation as part of the content of faith? (ii) About hope, a central topic in *Fear and Trembling* (1843)— Precisely what, according to Kierkegaard, is the faithful individual entitled to hope for when they "get Isaac back again by power of the absurd"?[9] And (iii) about love, the central topic of *Works of Love* (1847)— What is the connection between the (divine) command to love the neighbor and the individual's obligation to do so? Before tackling these questions, I will undertake an investigation of *Either / Or* (1843) to elucidate Kierkegaard's conception of desire, a proper understanding of which must undergird any attempt to answer them.

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[9] *FT* 57 / *SKS* 4, 150 (my translation).

These questions are not novel. In the scholarship on Kierkegaard, there is at least a 75-year history of attempts to answer them. It is possible to pose them independently to each respective text, as scholars have often done. Much of this work has been fruitful, but not decisively so, because – as I contend throughout this thesis – it is necessary to have a picture of the overall arrangement and mechanism of Kierkegaard's stagecraft in order to make sense of the parts. In this dissertation, I ask these three questions together in the hope that it will permit a better view into the undergirding logic of Kierkegaard's thought, that is, the stagecraft that enables the individual to pursue a blessed life. In doing so, I will provide an account of Kierkegaard as a "religious author"[10] with a coherent project— a project with the goals of articulating the dynamics of the human being's desire for the best possible life and of communicating the theological and anthropological scaffolding required to satisfy that desire.

Across the texts I assess, I identify two tightly interwoven elements at the base of Kierkegaard's thinking that shape his authorial strategy. A primary aim of my dissertation is to identify and characterize these two elements, while, along the way, addressing topics specific to *Philosophical Fragments*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Works of Love*.

The *first* is an axiom that grounds Kierkegaard's conception of the good life: for life to be worth living, one must ultimately be individually responsible for one's own happiness or unhappiness.[11] The *second* is a complex argumentative move, related to the axiom, that

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[10] See, e.g., *PV* 30-31, 55 / *SKS* 16, 16-17, 37.

[11] In this axiom – usually implicit in Kierkegaard's thought – lies the fundamental motivation for his critique of philosophies and theologies that treat *reason* (in general, but particularly in its usage by Hegel) as the crucial hitch between the human and the divine. If discursive reasoning is a process that carries the force of necessity, then reason would, at best, *compel* the individual toward freedom, love, and happiness. It is this compulsion Kierkegaard finds detestable; it is both to shirk responsibility and desperately to resign one's life to fate. Mark C. Taylor has also argued for the significance of this aspect of Kierkegaard's theology, writing "It is of central importance for Kierkegaard's argument that man himself be responsible for faith." See Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 314.

Kierkegaard repeats throughout his major works. Later in this introduction, I invoke a further stagecraft analogy (the *mechane*) to illustrate it in greater detail. For now, a provisional description: Kierkegaard juxtaposes two possible subjective orientations to the structure of the human being and the organization of the world. In one of them, the individual engages and apprehends the world (and the self's relation to the world) as providing the conditions for the individual to have a life worth living. This view is associated with Christianity. In the other, such conditions – for various reasons, depending on the text in question – are not offered. Kierkegaard associates this latter orientation with non-Christian, non-Jewish philosophical and religious traditions, referring to it as 'Paganism' (*Hedenskab*). The purpose of Kierkegaard's literary, philosophical, and theological project is to communicate to the individual that they must confront these alternative positions as an ultimate 'either / or,' a confrontation which attests to, is only ever enabled by, and can only be successfully fulfilled in, the capacity for faith. Faith, like the winch of a crane, thus serves as a pivot point between two exclusive possibilities: a life of happiness and salvation, and one of tragedy, despair, and unrealized desire. Christianity, for Kierkegaard, proves to be a scheme for organizing an individual's desires that permits a life of faith, which – on his rendering – is qualitatively superior to lives made possible by 'pagan' alternatives. Christianity's success in accomplishing this is entirely dependent on its philosophical or theological distinctiveness and on its historical novelty, which are implications of Christianity's *non-necessity*: If Christianity is necessarily true, then faith ceases to do the work Kierkegaard needs it to do.[12] Thus, the Christian cannot rely on allegedly necessary truths of reason to ensure that they live the best life. Their task is unceasingly, by means of faith, hope,

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[12] This characteristic of Christianity animates Kierkegaard's polemic against reason in speculative philosophy and theology; attempts to *prove* elements of Christianity true mistake what is crucial to Christianity for what is not, and simultaneously efface the role of the individual's subjectivity in affirming Christianity.

and love, to reinforce the conceptual boundaries of Christianity against its other, and to distinguish the powers of the heart transformed by God from those of the limited human heart.

The remainder of this introduction will set up the task to be carried out in the rest of the thesis. First, I offer a brief overview of the terms 'Christianity,' 'Christendom,' and 'Paganism' in Kierkegaard's thought. Second, I interrogate Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication as expressed in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (1848/1859), one of the major explanations Kierkegaard provided about his authorial method. The purpose of this section is to clarify and defend the dissertation's approach to interpreting Kierkegaard as a thinker whose diverse works can and should be read together, with an eye toward how they cohere (individually and with one another). Third, I introduce the dissertation's central analogy (the *mechane*), which I believe to be illustrative of the operation of Kierkegaard's concept of faith as the pivot point between a life worth living and a life that falls short. Finally, I preview the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

A. Christianity, Christendom, and 'Paganism'

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms 'Christianity,' 'Christendom,' and 'Paganism' – and their variations – to convey my account of Kierkegaard's project. While a full account of these concepts will be constructed over the course of the entire thesis, a broad-strokes overview at the outset will help orient my reader.

First, Christianity (*Christendom*) and Christendom (*Christenhed*)[13]— Kierkegaard uses the term 'Christianity' to refer to the religious tradition or set of traditions that commonly bear this name. Often, it has the specific connotation of being the content of the revelation associated

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[13] Note the false cognate. Kierkegaard's word for "Christianity" is *Christendom*, while the word often translated into English as "Christendom" is *Christenhed* (the problematic social and cultural perversion of Christianity).

with this tradition. An adherent of this tradition is referred to as 'Christian' or 'a Christian,' but Kierkegaard also often distinguishes between someone who is nominally Christian versus someone who, as an individual, successfully adopts the truth of Christianity through faith. 'Success' with Christianity is often referred to as "becoming Christian." A short remark by Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* is instructive: "And for the person who lives in our day, eighteen centuries later, is it less significant that he became a Christian [*blev Christen*] because it is eighteen centuries since Christianity [*Christendommen*] entered the world?"[14] Here, "Christianity" refers to the religious tradition, but at the same time to the elements of this tradition that were, according to Kierkegaard, revealed by God at a particular point in history. In general, Kierkegaard privileges core elements of what is revealed by God over the various practices and traditions that have coalesced to form the traditions commonly labeled 'Christianity.' To this extent, it is more common for Kierkegaard to mean something like, 'the revealed, salvific truth, which must be appropriated subjectively by the individual,' when he uses the term, than for him to be referring to concrete aspects of religious practice.

Christendom, on the contrary, is a form of false Christianity, which results from attempts to instantiate Christianity in culture. An individual is said to be a member of Christendom if they are nominally Christian but do not live according to the actual demands of Christianity. Sometimes Kierkegaard uses 'Christendom' to label those who are nominally Christian but live according to *aesthetic* or *ethical* categories (rather than religious ones),[15] and sometimes he implies that Christendom involves living according to 'pagan' categories rather than Christian

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[14] *WL* 26 / *SKS* 9, 33.

[15] *PV* 43 / *SKS* 16, 25.

ones.[16] (Though I invoke Kierkegaard's terms *aesthetic*, *ethical*, and *religious* periodically in this introduction, a focused interrogation of these categories must wait until Chapter I; for now, it only needs to be said that the *aesthetic* and *ethical* are two broad schemes for an individual to organize their desires and pursuit of happiness, schemes which – unlike the Christian version of the religious – fall short of what would permit them to live the highest life.) Thus, Christendom can refer both to a type of perversion of Christianity, or the place, group, church, or populace who (problematically) consider themselves Christian. Calling someone or something 'Christendom' does not mean that Christianity is altogether absent, for if were, Christendom would not be possible.

The term 'Paganism' (*Hedenskab*) also refers to a complex of concepts, beliefs, cultures, and worldviews that fall outside of proper Christianity, but which are also often conceptually distinct from Christendom. Its variations include the adjective 'pagan' (*hedensk*) and occasionally the noun 'pagan' or 'gentile' (*Hedning*). On several occasions, Kierkegaard deploys the term 'ethnical' (*ethnisk*), which seems to refer primarily to Greek 'pagan' philosophy and religion.[17] The concept of 'Paganism' is complex, and it is one of the major tasks of this thesis to

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[16] *WL* 24 / *SKS* 9, 32.

[17] I have identified only four such locations in Kierkegaard's corpus. In *Repetition* (1843), Kierkegaard distinguishes the ethnical from the modern: "Recollection is the ethnical view of life, repetition the modern…" (*R* 149 / *SKS* 4, 25). In *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), Kierkegaard again associates recollection with the ethnical, as well as immanence and Greek philosophy: "If we now abstract from this ambiguity, we could retain the designation and by πρώτη φιλοσοφία [first philosophy] understand that totality of science which we might call 'ethnical,' whose essence is immanence and is expressed in Greek thought by 'recollection,' and by *secunda philosophia* understand that totality of science whose essence is transcendence or repetition" (*CA* 21 / *SKS* 4, 329). The term appears nearby in a lengthy footnote in which pseudonymous author Vigilius Haufniensis examines Kierkegaard's other pseudonymous works (*CA* 17n / *SKS* 4, 324n). In an 1843 notebook entry, Kierkegaard distinguishes "pagan [*ethnisk*] doctrine, i.e., pure philosophy" from "philosophy that has deceitfully alloyed itself with Xty" (*KJN* 3, 417 / *SKS* 19, 419; Not13:54). Finally, in a series of notes about H. L. Martensen's 1838 lectures on speculative dogmatics, Kierkegaard mentions "The ethnic religions or folk religions" (*KJN* 2, 346 / *SKS* 18, 379; KK:11).

According to George B. Connell, the term *ethnisk* likely comes from the Greek ἔθνος, which is likely a cognate with the Danish words *Hedning* ('gentile') and *hedensk* ('pagan'). See Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 31.

unpack the various ways Kierkegaard invokes 'Paganism' as a technical term (and corresponding concept) to develop his soteriology and ethics.[18] (I return to the topic near the end of this introduction but begin this task in earnest in Chapter II.) Sometimes Kierkegaard does not use the term itself, but alludes to the concept through a juxtaposition of characters from Jewish or (usually) Christian scripture and those of Greek and Roman myth and history.[19] On the one hand, 'Paganism' sometimes refers to any and all ways of thinking and living that are external to Christianity; to this extent, 'pagans' are pre-Christian peoples but also societies and traditions of religious practice that exist contemporaneously with Christianity but have not been introduced to the Gospel. But the term 'pagan' sometimes refers to individuals who live within a region of the world controlled by Christendom but who have not genuinely (yet) received the Gospel, including "you and I": "Therefore world-historical expositions of paganism [*Hedenskabet*] are not needed, as if it were eighteen centuries since the fall of paganism, for it is indeed not so very long since both you and I, my listener, were pagans [*Hedninger*]—that is, if we have become Christians."[20]

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[18] For one of few pieces dedicated to taking this concept seriously in Kierkegaard's thought, see Avron Kulak, "Paganism," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts: Tome V (Objectivity to Sacrifice)*, eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, Jon Stewart, and William McDonald, *KRSRR* 15 (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2015]), 29-34. Other scholars have examined the term and concept, but largely with reference to how it reflects Kierkegaard's perception of other religious traditions. See Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, especially 26-66.

[19] Kierkegaard's relationship to Judaism is difficult to pin down. It is clear that Kierkegaard was a supercessionist regarding Christianity's relationship to Judaism, but he still seems ambivalent about precisely what status Judaism has (historically, soteriologically). Indeed, sometimes Kierkegaard situates characters from the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament alongside figures from Greek and Roman myth and history – for example, Jephthah as an exemplar of the 'ethical' in *Fear and Trembling* (*FT* 58 / *SKS* 4, 151-152) – suggesting that elements of the Jewish tradition might also count as 'pagan,' at least in this broad sense. For more on this topic, see Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, 48-66.

      Regarding Islam and other so-called Abrahamic traditions, there is little evidence that Kierkegaard thought much about them. "Islam" (by that name) is mentioned infrequently in his journals and notebooks, though almost certainly Kierkegaard would have had some knowledge of it through textbooks and other thinkers' accounts of philosophy and religion. See, e.g., *KJN* 2, 321 / *SKS* 18, 350; KK:4 (1838); and *KJN* 3, 260 / *SKS* 19, 264; Not9:1 (1841–1842). Connell suggests that Kierkegaard likely accepted Friedrich Schleiermacher's teaching that Islam was residually polytheistic (Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, 33-34).

[20] *WL* 26 / *SKS* 9, 33.

Often Kierkegaard alludes to the concept of 'Paganism' without mentioning the term or labeling something specifically 'pagan,' such as when he obliquely refers to "the poet" or to Ancient Greek epic poetry.[21] Often a selection of characters or mythological allusions function as synecdoche, revealing Kierkegaard to be imagining himself as a 'pagan' for the purposes of illustration or persuasion.[22] Because Kierkegaard so readily associates the highest or most developed shape of 'Paganism' with Socrates, his frequent discussions of "the Socratic," especially in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), exemplify this practice. Certainly with regard to the Socratic, Kierkegaard frames 'Paganism' as a possible way for the human being and the cosmos to be organized that is refuted by Christian revelation. It is, in short, a 'pagan' *worldview* that Kierkegaard is depicting. Kierkegaard spends a great deal of effort developing an account of what such a 'pagan' world would look like, in order to provide a point of contrast with (and for) Christianity. 'Paganism' is thus, in a sense, a 'possible world,' with the only alternative being, on Kierkegaard's account, the Christian world, in which God entered time as Christ.[23] Though Kierkegaard often invokes Socrates when discussing the 'pagan' worldview or organizational scheme (for the human being, for the world), Kierkegaard assembles the 'pagan' position with references to other Ancient Greek and Roman figures (dramatists, mythic figures, politicians) in order to represent its various shapes. Over the course of his authorship, he clarifies and refines what is implied by the Socratic, and by 'Paganism.'

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[21] See, e.g., *FT* 15 / *SKS* 4, 112.

[22] There are many such examples. See, e.g., the narration of Alcibiades and Plato at *PF* 23-24 / *SKS* 4, 231.

[23] In this thesis, I sometimes use the terms 'Christian world' and '"pagan" world' to refer to these different possible worlds, and 'Christian subject' and '"pagan" subject' to refer to individuals who would be inhabitants of either possible world. In the case of the 'Christian subject,' it does not mean that the individual has successfully *become Christian*; indeed, such a subject – in a 'Christian world' – is likely also a part of Christendom. The term 'Christian world' implies a world in which Christianity is an available option, but the term remains neutral about whether Christianity receives a proper or a false manifestation.

Though it is true that Kierkegaard's limited, parochial vision of religious and cultural diversity profoundly limits his conception of non-Christian traditions, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard did not *strictly* mean for 'Paganism' to refer to Greek and Roman myth, religion, philosophy, and culture. At least twice he alludes to Indian (*indiske*) myths about dynasties that claimed to rule for 70,000 years, in order to illuminate the atemporal aspects of the *mythical* in general (including that of Greek myth), in contrast to Christianity.[24] More importantly, he opposed the efforts of his contemporary, author and Danish Lutheran pastor N. F. S. Grundtvig, who combined elements of traditional Nordic polytheistic religions and folktales with Christianity in his endeavor to produce a brand of Danish or Scandinavian nationalism.[25] Kierkegaard's complex, but largely antagonistic relationship with Grundtvig is well-documented[26]; it demonstrates that Kierkegaard's opposition to conflating or blending Christian and 'pagan' traditions, ideas, and ways of life goes beyond a refusal to Classicize Christianity, even if Socrates and Jesus are the characters he most prominently calls on when discussing such

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[24] See *CI* 106n / *SKS* 1, 159n; and *CA* 86 / *SKS* 4, 389. It is likely these references were drawn from a version of G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1881), 171 / Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Hegel's Werke*, 2nd ed., eds. Eduard Gans and Karl Hegel, vol. 9 (Berlin: Duncker and Humboldt, 1840), 200. See also *KJN* 1, 215 / *SKS* 17, 224; DD:15 (1837). Here Kierkegaard mentions Krishna alongside Hercules and Baldur as "heroes" with vulnerability "in the heel."

[25] In 1846, Kierkegaard writes, "Grundtvig in particular must be viewed as dangerous; because of the various sorts of qualities he unites in his life, he will be able to kill me in at least four different ways… as Hero and Bard, in old Nordic style, he will kill me with Thor's hammer" (*KJN* 11.2, 83 / *SKS* 27, 380; papir 349:4). Grundtvig was a towering figure of 19th-century Denmark. In today's Denmark he is likely more well-known than Kierkegaard.

[26] See Troy Wellington Smith, "From Enthusiasm to Irony: Kierkegaard's Reception of Norse Mythology and Literature," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 23 (2018): 223-246; Anders Holm, "Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant," in *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries: Tome II (Theology)*, ed. Jon Stewart, *KRSRR* 7 (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2009]), 95-151; and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Gudbilledlighed og Syndefald: Aspekter af Grundtvigs og Kierkegaards menneskesyn på baggrund af Irenæus [*Imago Dei* and the Fall: Aspects of Grundtvig's and Kierkegaard's Anthropology in Light of Irenaeus]," *Grundtvig-Studier* 55 (2004): 134-178.

topics. It also reveals Kierkegaard's commitment to the existence of salient commonalities undergirding all 'Paganisms,' from which Christianity alone is distinguishable.[27]

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Before moving on, the following deserves to be made explicit: The term 'pagan' as both a noun and adjective (as well as the term 'Paganism') has a long and problematic history. Beyond its use in justifying colonial enterprises in the name of Christian evangelism, it has been, in anthropological contexts, carelessly applied to diverse peoples with equally diverse traditions and practices, often with violent political consequences. The Danish equivalents of the term (*hedensk*, *Hedning*, *Hedenskab* – cognates of the English 'heathen') have a similar history, and Kierkegaard, in using the term throughout his corpus, is no less implicated in the associated history of oppression than anyone who deployed the term carelessly or violently in English theological and political writing from the same historical period. I have no interest to defend Kierkegaard's choice to use *this* term. However, as I will argue, the term refers to a specific and crucial concept in Kierkegaard's thought and is sufficiently distinct from similar terms, such as 'non-Christian,' that a simple substitution would be misleading. (The term 'non-Christian' in particular would be an inadequate substitute also because, though all 'pagan' individuals would be non-Christians, not all non-Christians would necessarily be 'pagan,' at least not simplistically so. This is further complicated when considering how the concept of Christendom generates an additional rationale for identifying a person as nominally Christian while they are neither completely non-Christian nor have yet *become Christian*.) In order to reflect the richness of Kierkegaard's project – which prominently includes the concept 'Paganism' – and draw my

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[27] This commitment (correctly) renders Kierkegaard's use of the term 'Paganism' a target by scholars interested to defend a present-day conception of religious pluralism. See, e.g., Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, 30-31.

reader's attention to the term's technical usage in Kierkegaard's work, for the remainder of the dissertation I will put the English words 'Paganism' and 'pagan' within single quotation marks.[28]

B. Is it possible to read Kierkegaard— and write about him?

> Oh, I don't know whom I'm talking to about all this, whether there is anyone concerned about such things; but this I know, that the very people who have praised love effectually have been experienced sailors and able seamen in these waters that nowadays are in part almost unknown. And for them I can write, comforting myself with those beautiful words: "Write!" "For whom?" "For the dead, for those whom you have loved in some past"—and in loving them I shall indeed also meet the dearest among the contemporaries.[29]

Where can we begin with Kierkegaard? He is, it is said, a master of irony and a great critic of rationality.[30] It seems there is little that scholars can say safely about him. There are many

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[28] In addition to other (serious) problems pertaining to Kierkegaard's ascription of 'pagan' to religious and philosophical traditions, Kierkegaard often interprets Classical Greek and Roman sources carelessly, only reaffirming the sharp distinction he draws between 'Paganism' and Christianity, and cutting too sharp a fault line between archetypes, as it were, in the field of intellectual and religious history. Put bluntly: Kierkegaard often reads Greek and Roman (and other) sources as instantiations of 'pagan,' never Christian, ways of thinking, when the realities are not always so clear. This habit manifests – especially in *Works of Love* – in lines of reasoning that contrast 'pagan' sources with Christian ones without any offer of explicit interpretation, only the presumption that because they are from, for example, Classical Greece, they are different from Christianity in an important way.

[29] *WL* 362 / *SKS* 9, 356. I have slightly adjusted Hong and Hong's translation. The text Kierkegaard quotes is his own translation into Danish of sections of a letter by Johann Gottfried von Herder, "Vom Unterschiede der alten und neuen Völker in der Poesie, als Werkzug der Kultur und Humanität betrachtet" (reply to no. 45 in "Ideen zur Geschichte und Kritik der Poesie und der bildenden Künste. In Briefen. 1794–1796"), in *Johann Gottfried von Herder's sämmtliche Werke. Zur schönen Literatur und Kunst*, eds. Johann Georg Müller and Christian Gottlob Heyne (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'sche, 1827-30), vol. XVI of XX (1829) [*ASKB* 1692], 114.

[30] See, e.g., Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), vii-viii. Westphal situates Kierkegaard alongside Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as critics of "Reason" (with a capital 'R') and claims that Kierkegaard (independently of Marx) made serious critical headway into the "concepts of ideology and the sociology of knowledge" (vii). However, this does not, for Westphal, mean that Kierkegaard's critique should be classified as "existentialist" or "irrationalist" (vii-viii). One example of a classic "irrationalist" reading of Kierkegaard is that of Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 [1981]), 39-43.

reasons for this.[31] Here I concentrate on two of them. First a weaker claim: It seems that attempts to analyze Kierkegaard's work that generalize, organize, or otherwise reason through his writing (including this thesis) may be thwarted by his style and some of his crucial concepts (for example, paradox) that themselves resist intellectual assessment. Second, a stronger claim: Kierkegaard's style is inseparable from the content he conveys, making it impossible for scholarship (including this thesis) ultimately to attribute to him a particular position, whether across his corpus or even within individual works, without doing his thought an injustice.

Though I do not believe there is a truly satisfying preemptive response to these concerns beyond forwarding my own interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought (and in so doing, permitting an assessment of its plausibility), this section of the chapter examines Kierkegaard's own discussion of his method. Based on passages in Kierkegaard's posthumously published *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (1848/1859), I contend that Kierkegaard's self-consciousness about his method does not preclude interpreting him as an author interested in communicating ideas (and *communicable* ideas at that). Indeed, the words he interjects into the final deliberation of *Works of Love* (quoted above) make it clear that he is an author quite desperate to be understood. This does not mean he is unwilling to play games, nor does it mean that playing games implies not wishing to be understood. But I do mean to suggest that there is a fundamental decipherability and interpretability to Kierkegaard, which render him quite readable, even though he may appear to pose special challenges beyond those which are normal to reading a difficult philosopher, theologian, or literary innovator. Kierkegaard is complex, but he is closer to being a self-conscious writer of sacred scripture (craving to communicate, thirsting to be appropriated)

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[31] One aspect of the difficulty in studying Kierkegaard that I will not address is the connection between Kierkegaard's biography and his writing. I do not have room to explore this issue in the dissertation, though I believe that the interpretation I forward is commensurate with much of the insight Kierkegaard himself grants us (in in his published and unpublished writing) about how he understood the connection between his life and writing.

than the author of the Voynich Manuscript.[32] And though he presents us with pseudonyms within

pseudonyms (within pseudonyms), he does not require a reader who can navigate the paths of

folded space[33]; his purposes for doing so are usually apparent. In this section, I show how.

<center>* * *</center>

Before offering my interpretation of Kierkegaard's concepts of deception, pseudonymity,

and indirect communication, I owe my reader a short explanation for why I privilege *The Point*

of View for My Work as an Author as a text with insight into Kierkegaard's methodological

reflections. This is not the only work in which Kierkegaard addresses these issues. In addition to

journal entries, Kierkegaard tackles such questions in published works, perhaps most famously in

the final pages of the *Postscript*, but also in the short work *On My Work as an Author* (1851).

Furthermore, it is my observation that Kierkegaard's explanations for the organization of his

authorship[34] (including the pseudonyms) are quite different, even mutually irreconcilable, across

each of these works. This is all to acknowledge that there is no obvious place to turn for a

definitive explanation, especially since Kierkegaard seems to suggest several times that an

account is *the definitive one* before appearing to change his mind later.[35]

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[32] The Voynich Manuscript is an anonymously authored, illustrated codex dated to the early 1400's, about which there is little scholarly consensus. Its script is in an unknown language, code, or perhaps pseudo-language. See *The Voynich Manuscript*, ed. Raymond Clemens (London and New Haven: Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University Press, 2016).

[33] See Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Penguin, 2010 [1965]), 29, 364.

[34] The term "authorship" (*Forfatter-Virksomhed* or *Forfatterskab*) is occasionally used as a technical term (by Kierkegaard, and by scholars of Kierkegaard) to refer specifically to a segment of his written works, usually the pseudonymous works authored from *Either / Or* (1843) until the *Postscript* (1846). I use the term to refer to Kierkegaard's corpus, as Kierkegaard seems to do through much of *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*.

[35] For example, the *Postscript*'s 'postscript,' which contains an account of the pseudonyms and Kierkegaard's purposes behind them, is titled "A First and Last Explanation" (*CUP1* [625] / *SKS* 7, 569). Then, in the introduction to *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard writes, "A point has been reached in my authorship where it is feasible, where I feel a need and therefore regard it now as my duty: *once and for all* to explain as directly and openly and specifically as possible what is what, what I say I am as an author" (*PV* 23 / *SKS* 16, 11; my emphasis). Later, Kierkegaard writes – after composing a different explanation for *On My Work as an Author* –

One reason scholars might be suspicious about the generalizability of *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* is that it went unpublished during Kierkegaard's lifetime. However, this was not for any reason having to do with the book's quality or with Kierkegaard's changing commitments to what had been said therein. On the contrary, Kierkegaard's several (and shifting) concerns about publishing it imply that he held the book's contents in high regard, and considered the book genuinely reflective of his methodology.[36] In one 1849 journal entry, he describes it as "true" and "masterly" but the "sort of thing [that] can only be published after my death."[37] Part of the reason for his interest in posthumous publication presumably involves having recently been the target of the *Corsair*: such "abuse at the hands of vulgarity has disturbed my incognito a bit," poisoning the well for publishing non-pseudonymous commentary about his own authorship.[38] In another entry the same year, he writes, "…now, for the first time, I understand and can see the whole of it—but then of course I cannot say 'I.' […] I am a pseudonym."[39] Here his major concern seems to be that publishing, during his lifetime, an accurate and full account of his authorship – something he considered *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* to be – would compromise the authorship's goals; he even thought to publish this work under a pseudonym.[40] This anxiety indeed reflects a commitment he maintained

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"This is how I *now* understand the whole. From the beginning I could not quite see what has indeed also been my own development" (*OMWA* 12 / *SKS* 13, 18; Kierkegaard's emphasis).

[36] See *PV*, "Historical Introduction," xiv. Hong and Hong provide a thorough review of Kierkegaard's reasoning. The most concrete reason was that Kierkegaard did not want it to see print prior to other works he had completed, but which were not yet published (*KJN* 5, 261 / *SKS* 21, 251; NB9:79 (1849)).

[37] *KJN* 5, 260 / *SKS* 21, 249; NB9:78 (1849). On the same page, he muses that, should he publish presuming that he would soon die but in fact turned out to live much longer, the quality of the work could be compromised.

[38] *KJN* 5, 259 / *SKS* 21, 249; NB9:78 (1849).

[39] *KJN* 6, 287 / *SKS* 22, 285; NB13:21 (1849).

[40] He toyed with several pseudonyms, including Johannes de Silentio (*KJN* 5, 261 / *SKS* 21, 250; NB9:78 (1849)).

consistently throughout his career to avoid the pretension to authority of communicating directly. If anything, Kierkegaard avoided publishing this book because it reflected his goals and method too accurately; he feared it might look like an easy key to understanding his other works and thus a false shortcut to becoming Christian.

The serious alternatives – the *Postscript* and *On My Work as an Author* – are both, I suspect, partial or skewed views into Kierkegaard's method. The *Postscript*'s "First and Last Explanation" is the preferred text for scholars such as Louis Mackey and Roger Poole, whose interpretations emphasize the distance between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, and the inextricability of the form and content of his writing in general. (I will return to both scholars shortly.) Here, Kierkegaard goes to great lengths to separate himself from the pseudonymous voices he has created, but – I believe – he does so too starkly:

> My pseudonymity or polyonymity has not had an *accidental* basis in my *person*… but an *essential* basis in the *production* itself… What has been written, then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the creat*ing*, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who *poetizes* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person a *souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the *authors*, whose *prefaces* in turn are their productions, as their *names* are also. Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me.[41]

By likening his role to a *souffleur*, Kierkegaard suggests he has not composed the script that his pseudonyms speak, but only ensured that they speak what was authored by another source (perhaps by each pseudonym itself, though here the analogy would break down, for a stage actor usually performs a script written by a playwright). However – though much of the *Postscript*'s account does overlap with that of *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* – Kierkegaard does not here attend to a crucial element of his authorship to which he does in the later, posthumously published work, namely that he had always endeavored to include "signs" that

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[41] *CUP1* [625]-[626] / *SKS* 7, 569-570.

"telegraphed" the Christian purposes of pseudonymous texts.[42] In short, Kierkegaard *wants* the undergirding Christianity to be noticed by his reader. Thus, to the extent we take Kierkegaard seriously in the *Postscript* when he says that "in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me," we must keep in mind that the particular way he generates his pseudonyms (or, places "the life-view of the creat*ing*, poetically actual individuality in [each] mouth") is by selecting *every word* that they themselves write— and that this is intentionally to "telegraph" his readers "in the direction of the religious,"[43] that is, Christianity. It should be underscored that what makes Kierkegaard's pseudonymity interesting (and useful) is that it involves a single author with (presumably) coherent purposes behind myriad voices. In the absence of an author's governance – for instance, if no one knew Kierkegaard's pseudonyms were pseudonyms *of Kierkegaard* – would scholars spend time reading all of the pseudonymous works?

On My Work as an Author is a short text that can be dealt with quickly. It offers several provocative formulations, including the idea that – to push readers toward Christianity – Kierkegaard's authorship needed to move from the maieutic or aesthetic production, toward direct communication.[44] What is Kierkegaard's reasoning? First, he claims that Christianity is simple (*eenfoldig*); thus to become Christian means to become "more and more simple."[45] Down the page, he continues: "'Direct communication' is: to communicate the truth directly… But since the [Christian] movement is to arrive at the simple, the communication in turn must sooner or later end in direct communication."[46] In other words, the proper method of helping (to the

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[42] *PV* 53 / *SKS* 16, 35.

[43] Ibid.

[44] *OMWA* 7 / *SKS* 13, 13.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

extent possible) an audience to become Christian begins with aesthetic seduction but concludes with explicitly describing to an audience what is demanded by Christianity.

The reason this seems odd is that much of Kierkegaard's work (pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous) suggests that it is simply not possible for "direct communication" (*ligefremme Meddelelse*) to goad another human being to adopt a belief or opinion, and certainly not to force them into Christianity. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* argues explicitly that this is impossible (an argument I will discuss this in the coming pages). In another roughly concurrent work, *Practice in Christianity* (1850), the pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus is explicit that direct communication of Christian faith is not really possible for a human being.[47] Moreover, Anti-Climacus states clearly that even "Christ cannot give a direct communication…"[48] To attempt direct communication is to sin; it is a pretension that marks Christendom rather than genuine Christianity. So why would Kierkegaard describe it as a component of his authorship?

My position on this issue is that, in *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard is less interested to describe the mechanism or metaphysics of communication than he is to discuss the pragmatics of employing different genres of writing, all of which – at their best – could be forms of indirect communication. (Accordingly, after this remark, he provides an account of most of his written works and how each fits into his scheme.[49]) On this narrower conception of aesthetic writing versus direct communication, the aesthetic involves stylized, seductive forms of poetry, prose, or drama, while direct communication involves something more closely resembling

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[47] See, e.g., *PC* 133ff / *SKS* 12, 137ff.

[48] *PC* 136 / *SKS* 12, 139.

[49] *OMWA* 8-11 / *SKS* 13, 14-17.

sermons, treatises, or theology. Both are different technologies to achieve indirect

communication, which is better described in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*.

1. "Force him to become aware"

> A certain devotee who was on the way to illumination saw a piece of paper with lines written on it. "Why," said the devotee, "hast thou blackened thy bright face?" "It is not fair to take me to task," replied the paper, "I have done nothing. Ask the ink why she has sallied forth from the inkstand where she was quite at ease, and forcibly blackened my face."[50]

If there is something safe to say about Kierkegaard, it begins with this: The goal of the

authorship, as Kierkegaard conceived it, is, to the extent possible, to aid his audience (and

possibly himself) to become Christian. This is stated explicitly and simply in *The Point of View

for My Work as an Author*: "this is an authorship of which the total thought is the task of

becoming a Christian."[51] (Explaining what this means is one task of my thesis.)

Things immediately become more complicated when we turn to Kierkegaard's

biography, style, twisting of genre, pseudonymous method, and self-conscious deployment of

deception (*Bedrag*) or indirect communication (*indirekte Meddelelse*).[52] These factors,

collectively or individually, raise questions for scholars attempting to interpret Kierkegaard.

When is he to be taken seriously? When is he playing a game with his readers? When does this

or that journal entry hold the key, or was it only written with the purpose of needling a future

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[50] Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī, "The Allegory of the Pen" excerpted from *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, in *Some Moral and Religious Teachings of Al-Ghazzali*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Syed Nawab Ali (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Kashmiri Bazaar, 1944), 46-47. I have slightly modified punctuation for ease of reading.

[51] *PV* 55 / *SKS* 16, 37.

[52] See, e.g., *PV* 53-56 / *SKS* 16, 35-38.

audience? Or when was he simply trying out thoughts to which he never became committed? Is this or that passage only comprehensible when we consider Kierkegaard's relationship to his father, Regine Olsen, or Jacob Peter Mynster? Is this or that seemingly lucid argument written as a pitfall for an overconfident reader? If these concerns are coupled with an attentiveness to Kierkegaard's frequent polemics against philosophy as a rational, systematic enterprise, it becomes difficult to know what to say. Making any claim about Kierkegaard's thought as a whole, or attempting to reconstruct what Kierkegaard believed or meant or thought or (God forbid!) argued, is a task laden with risk. We could be wrong. We could fall prey to the deceit. We might offer what Poole has labeled a "blunt reading."[53] How embarrassing it would be for experts of Kierkegaard's corpus to become the very "assistant professors" he anticipated with such annoyance![54]

So where to begin? In the interest of being charitable to Kierkegaard's resistance to systematicity, his emphasis on subjectivity, and his literary style (including the pseudonymous method), some scholars attempt interpretive or constructive projects with less ambitious scopes, characterizing only his *points* of view[55] or conducting a "'musical-experiment' in the key of

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[53] Roger Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-Century Receptions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 58-75. By "blunt reading," Poole means "that kind of reading that refuses, as a matter of principle, to accord a literary status to the text; that refuses the implications of the pseudonymous technique; that misses the irony; that is ignorant of the reigning Romantic ironic conditions obtaining when Kierkegaard wrote; and that will not acknowledge, on religious grounds, that an 'indirect communication' is at least partly bound in with the *pathos* of the lived life" (ibid., 60). Poole attributes these reading practices partially to early English translators of Kierkegaard, who often were philosophers or theologians. Such readings – following non-literary translations – tended, on Poole's account, to obscure significant literary elements of the text essential to Kierkegaard's project.

[54] The term in Kierkegaard's Danish is *Docenter*, sometimes *Privatdocenter*, probably in reference to lecturers and researchers in the German academic system, with which Kierkegaard had personal familiarity. See, e.g., *EO1* 207 / *SKS* 2, 202; *FT* 62 / *SKS* 4, 155; and *SLW* 462 / *SKS* 6, 426.

[55] See Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida / Florida State University Press, 1986).

Kierkegaard," a "melody-narrative focused" on this or that character, motif, or trend,[56] ever

conscious that Kierkegaard is so slippery that it might not be possible to pin him down. These

limited efforts may cite Kierkegaard's own critiques of reason, or simply the difficulty of

interpreting across the pseudonyms.

Merold Westphal attempts something like this in *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*. He

offers two analogies for his method of locating and characterizing Kierkegaard's conception of

faith. The better of the two, which Westphal deploys throughout the book, compares faith to a

twelve-faceted gem. "Each facet is a perspective" (much like each pseudonym), but none is

equivalent to the "the whole gem."[57] While I do not think this analogy fails – in fact, I find it to

articulate reasonably well how Kierkegaard's pseudonyms might best be understood – I take

issue with how Westphal deploys the image of a gem seemingly to restrict the ambitions of his

own interpretation. For once we accept that there is single gem before us, we could indeed

determine an adequate description of the gem as a single object based on descriptions of all its

individual facets and what is observed about its interior through each facet. It is of course the

case that individual texts and pseudonyms offer limited insight into Kierkegaard the author (and

into Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole), but any text by any author offers only limited insight.

In everyday experience, we always have only a single vantage point when observing phenomena

but still (I think justifiably) can determine the persistent features of objects; a seemingly round

tower in the distance might indeed turn out to be rectangular, but under most epistemologies we

are still justified in determining it to be a tower and not a two-dimensional perspectival slice of

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[56] Sheridan Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector: Faith, Finitude, and Silence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xii.

[57] Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014), 8

an object whose identity as a tower is indeterminate.[58] Similarly, we always only see a *slice* or perspective of an author's thought when we read a work, period of their work, or even a page of their writing; this does not mean the author's thought is inaccessible, or that we should be afraid to attempt to characterize it. I believe Westphal, like many scholars of Kierkegaard, engages in an unnecessary performance of interpretive modesty before going on to advance a thorough account of Kierkegaardian faith. Kierkegaard is indeed slippery, but that does not mean we should pretend we are not trying to grasp him, especially when we actually are.

To offer my own analogy (similar to Westphal's) for interpreting Kierkegaard— I suggest considering a house with windows on each of its sides, perhaps even several doors. An observer could look through each portal to get a sense of the interior, what pieces of furniture are there, and how the rooms are arranged and connected. Some windows might be easier to look through than others; some windows might provide a misleading view; other windows might offer a clear view of several rooms. Perhaps one or two windows even provide views of almost the entire interior. The observer might be able to see the very same furniture from the front and back doorways or from different windows, even if the furniture is observed from different angles. But the observer is in fact looking at the same house and the same contents of that house. They could provide a reasonable reconstruction of it by piecing together what they see through several windows and doorways. From the vantage points of several windows, I am attempting such a (tomographic) reconstruction in this dissertation. As with all such attempts, it may end up being only partial, due to my limitations as an author and that I only have the time to peer through several of the windows before the authorities are called.

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[58] See, e.g., René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Writings of Descartes* [CSM], vol. II of III, trans. and eds. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 53 (76); and *PF* 82 / *SKS* 4, 282.

Other scholars, including Poole and Mackey, advance a stronger claim that Kierkegaard's writing subverts attempts to make sense of it rationally, or even to ascribe any coherent meaning to it. In *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, Poole offers a "new reading of Kierkegaard" that likens Kierkegaard's authorial method both to that of New Criticism and to that of deconstruction.[59] Referring to the pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard's first authorship, he writes, "The (old) New Critics used to say that a poem should not mean but be. A new reading of Kierkegaard should discover that the aesthetic texts do not mean but are."[60] Poole is referring to the final lines of Archibald MacLeish's "Ars Poetica," seminal in the tradition of New Criticism: "A poem should not mean / But be."[61] Several pages later, Poole writes, "But, after the events of the last decade, in which philosophy has been taking rueful account of the extent to which it is itself a rhetorical art, an art of persuasion…, it could be that there will be some openness to reading Kierkegaard as a philosopher who uses all the major tools of deconstructive theory long before they were given a local habitation and a name by Derrida."[62] In a similar fashion, but in another piece, Poole (bluntly) puts it, "[S]ufficiently understood, the Kierkegaardian text does not tell us something, it asks us something."[63]

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[59] The traditions of deconstruction and New Criticism are non-identical (even if they overlap), and each contains multitudes. I will not here attempt to characterize Poole's conception of either tradition.

[60] Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 5.

[61] Archibald MacLeish, "Ars Poetica," in *Collected Poems 1917-1982* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 106-107.

[62] Poole, *Indirect Communication*, 7. Poole attributes deconstructivist practices to Kierkegaard elsewhere in the book, including his non-pseudonymous works: "Kierkegaard [in *CI*] was using a deconstructive ploy well before Derrida" (50).

[63] Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard," 61. The context of this remark is a complaint by Poole about Princeton University's English translations of Kierkegaard's writings (led by Hong and Hong), particularly that for these translations, it was decided that technical terms which Kierkegaard used in different contexts "have always to be translated in the same way" (ibid.). Despite their improvements over previous versions, he goes so far as to claim that "what the Princeton translations do, is constantly to imply that Kierkegaard is laying down the law or proposing

It is not only that, due to difficulties presented by his method, we cannot responsibly

reconstruct Kierkegaard's thought; beyond this, Poole argues, there is no *thing* there that we

could reconstruct in the first place. Attempting to do so would be to attribute to Kierkegaard a

pretension to authority, which he always refused. Instead of *meaning*, the text *provokes*. For

Poole, "blunt readings" mistake provocation for communicable content by failing adequately to

address Kierkegaard's literary style, thus making a critical mistake Kierkegaard spent an entire

authorship working against.

Similarly, Mackey – Poole's predecessor in this tradition of interpreting Kierkegaard[64]

– has made a great deal of Kierkegaard's self-styling in the preface to his *Two Discourses at the*

Communion on Fridays (1851) as "a singular kind of poet and thinker."[65] In *Kierkegaard: A*

Kind of Poet, Mackey argues that the "conjunction of 'poet and thinker' is essential. His

philosophy *is* poetry…"[66] But throughout the book – even in its title – Mackey places

significantly more weight on the term 'poet' than the term 'thinker.'[67] Mackey's conception of

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truth or telling us something" (ibid.). I would suggest that, first, not *enough* terms are translated into English consistently in the Princeton editions, second, that the humor and irony often do translate into English (despite that terms "have always to be translated in the same way"), and third, that there is a gulf between an inadequate translation with regard to literary style (however important style is to the content) and the problematic result (for Poole) that Kierkegaard's texts read both as discursive and authoritative rather than only provocative.

[64] Poole, *Indirect Communication*, 7.

[65] *WA* 165 / *SKS* 12, 281.

[66] Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 295.

[67] For instance, in the preface he writes, "Quite simply, [this book] argues that Søren Kierkegaard is not, in the usual acceptation of these words, a philosopher or a theologian, but a poet" (ibid., ix). John Caputo and Taylor have made similar claims. Caputo refers to Kierkegaard as "a kind of kind of poet, an ironist and a humorist," while eliding the rest of the passage (including the term "thinker") from *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*. See John D. Caputo, *How to Read Kierkegaard* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 5-6. Taylor remarks, simply, that "Kierkegaard regards himself as essentially a poet." See Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel & Kierkegaard* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000 [1980]), 93. Taylor is likely referring to other instances in which Kierkegaard self-describes as "essentially a poet," e.g., *KJN* 5, 259 / *SKS* 21, 249; NB9:78 (1849): "The fact that I cannot present myself fully means that I am, after all, essentially a poet [*Digter*]." Yet the context of such passages seems always to qualify what is meant by 'poet.'

poetry distances the writer's goals from the product so extensively that, about Kierkegaard's authorship, he cautions: "A poem in this sense does not *mean*—it does not urge the feelings and opinions of the poet on the reader. It *is*…"[68] But surely (contra Mackey) there must be *something* that can be uncovered about Kierkegaard's conception of *becoming Christian* from an examination of his authorship.[69]

The stance I take presumes, indeed will demonstrate, that it is possible to go beyond providing *a* reading of this or that pseudonym, this or that production. Indeed, the focal texts of my analysis are both pseudonymous (different pseudonyms, at that) and non-pseudonymous, the former from Kierkegaard's so-called first authorship, and the latter from his second. The boundaries I set on this project are due to my own limitations, not limits set by my subject. My refutation of scholars who make the weaker point with which I began this section – namely, that Kierkegaard's concepts must be only cautiously articulated using reason and so call for a less structured mode of analysis – will merely reside in the failure or success of the interpretation I develop. But first I will provide a response to readings of Kierkegaard such as Mackey's and Poole's, based on Kierkegaard's own description of his method. Perhaps, given what Kierkegaard means by *deception*, it is not so bad to be the victim of it. Perhaps we should let ourselves be deceived.

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[68] Ibid., 284-285. Will Williams has suggested, I believe correctly, that Mackey is also alluding to the final lines of Archibald MacLeish's poem "Ars Poetica." See Will Williams, *Kierkegaard and the Legitimacy of the Comic: Understanding the Relevance of Irony, Humor, and the Comic for Ethics and Religion* (London: Lexington, 2018), 127. The third chapter of Williams' book "Irony and Deconstructionist Readings of Kierkegaard," offers a thorough critique of Poole's and Mackey's methods of interpreting Kierkegaard (ibid., 121ff).

[69] George Pattison has also responded to interpreters such as Poole and Mackey, defending the prospect of characterizing and summarizing the content of Kierkegaard's overall contribution to philosophy and theology: "[W]hatever is said about indirect communication, there is clearly a distinctive and coherent theological point of view running through Kierkegaard's writings and… this point of view can be discerned both in pseudonymous and in what are sometimes called veronymous works." See George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 214.

The substantive question in these debates is whether Kierkegaard's authorship resists an interpretation that aims to analyze, to unify (across works), to locate and unfurl arguments, and to attribute an underlying coherence. These may be the tasks of an interpreter of a philosopher; are such tasks appropriate for interpreting Kierkegaard? In this section I approach the heart of Kierkegaard's method – his account of deception (*Bedrag*) – to suggest that it enables more expansive, less cautious modes of interpretation than scholars sometimes attempt.

In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard introduces his method of indirect communication – which includes deception, aesthetic writing, and pseudonymous authorship – as a way to combat the problem of Christendom. In Christendom, people "are Christians only in imagination… They live in esthetic or, at most, esthetic-ethical categories" rather than according to genuine Christianity.[70] Though Kierkegaard clearly associates Christendom with 19th-century parishioners and clergy of the Danish Lutheran Church, the concept is applicable to any person who hypocritically, and largely unreflectively, believes themselves to be Christian while co-opting Christianity for selfish ends (even unconsciously so). He refers to Christendom repeatedly as an "illusion" (*Sandsebedrag*) or "delusion" (*Indbildning*) that operates both collectively and on the level of the individual.[71] Because of human beings' all-too-frequent inability to meet Christianity's strong demands, presumably most – if not all or nearly all – self-identified Christians belong, according to Kierkegaard, to this category.

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[70] *PV* 43 / *SKS* 16, 25.

[71] The terms are used almost in succession on *PV* 48 / *SKS* 16, 30.

Before going further, let us ask what, ideally, the religious author can hope to accomplish. Recall Kierkegaard's explanation that his "is an authorship of which the total thought is the task of becoming a Christian." But Kierkegaard qualifies his task:

> A person may have the good fortune of doing a great deal for another, …may have the good fortune of helping that person to become a Christian. But this is not in my power [*Magt*]; it depends upon very many things and above all upon whether he himself is willing. Force [*tvinge*] a person to an opinion, a conviction, a belief [*Tro*]—in all eternity, that I cannot do. But one thing I can do, in one sense the first thing (since it is the condition for the next thing: to accept this view, conviction, belief), in another sense the last thing if he refuses the next: I can force him to become aware [*opmærksom*].[72]

It is not possible to become Christian *for* another; no one can "force" another to "an opinion, a conviction, a belief," certainly not Christianity. This is simply due to the nature of human individuality. Importantly, adopting Christianity is reserved for the individual in question, who must be "willing" to do so. (What "willing" involves will be touched on again in Chapters II and III.) But, assuming that someone does adopt it and become Christian, doing so is conditioned upon that person first having an awareness of what it means to become Christian. There is no third step; the "first thing" is to become aware – something that the religious author, or any person, is capable of doing *to* or *for* them – and then, in the second step, the person becomes a Christian. Or does not.

Force awareness of *what*? This will require some explanation. The Danish word *opmærksom* can also mean 'attentive,' but attentive to what? Presumably "to become aware" does not mean to have some systematic, cognitive conception of Christian doctrine and what it claims. However, it does seem to imply some degree of understanding of how becoming Christian is different than (sinfully) remaining in Christendom or being a non-Christian individual not yet even introduced to the Gospel (that is, a 'pagan'). If a choice is involved, and

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[72] *PV* 50 / *SKS* 16, 32. I have adjusted the Hongs' translation slightly; they render *tvinge* as "compel."

it is, then one must have some awareness of their options before choosing. When an individual is "aware," these options present themselves according to a particular structure, which I unpack (later in the introduction) in terms of an analogy to the mechane. (For now, let this be said: According to Kierkegaard, in order to force a choice for an individual, the individual must be conscious of the difference between two possible worlds, a 'pagan' world – in which Christianity is absurd – and a Christian one – in which Christianity is an option.) Kierkegaard continues: "By forcing him to become aware, I succeed in forcing him to judge [*dømme*]. Now he judges. But what he judges is not in my power."[73] Though a reasonable translation, the language of 'judging' is ambiguous; one can *judge* something merely passively without it becoming the basis for action. Here, though, the verb (*at dømme*) captures the idea of rendering a judicial verdict, or of reaching a *decision*— to cut between truth and falsity, to *choose what is true* (with all ambiguity intended). By describing the decision to become Christian (or not) in terms of judgment, Kierkegaard seems (though not decisively so) to imply that choice is involved, at least in some capacity (even if choice is not a completely indifferent, deliberative posture). Such a decision (a judgment) must be made, *will* be made, *is being* made by the individual right now, but never by another. To deploy language from *Philosophical Fragments*, I can only ever *occasion* another person's becoming Christian by giving rise to a context where awareness, and hence judgment could occur.[74] I can never sufficiently *cause* another to become Christian.

Kierkegaard frames the decision by an individual to adopt belief or faith *as their own*; it is not within another's power (*Magt*). But it is within the capacity of an individual (such as an author) to force another's awareness. To do so is an evangelical act, one model of which is the

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[73] Ibid. I have adjusted the Hongs' translation slightly, again using "force" instead of "compel."

[74] See, e.g., *PF* 11 / *SKS* 4, 220.

martyr: "To force people to become aware and judge is namely the law for true martyrdom. A true martyr has never used power [*Magt*] but has contended by means of powerlessness [*Afmagten*]. He forced people to become aware."[75] The martyr forces awareness and occasions a judgment for another through a grand act of refusing to resist bodily destruction. Kierkegaard seems to think that this is a particularly effective way of forcing awareness: "Indeed, God knows, they [the executioners] did become aware—they put him to death."[76]

Or at least it *was* effective for those unfamiliar with Christianity (that is, pre-Christian 'pagans'). To provoke awareness within Christendom may require simultaneously much more and much less. As Kierkegaard notes, a "new science of arms [*Vaabenlære*]" is needed.[77] "The entire old science of arms," he writes, "all the apologetics and everything belonging to it, serves instead, to put it bluntly, to betray the cause of Christianity."[78] These methods (that is, "apologetics and everything belonging to it") often bolster the institutional hypocrisies of Christendom by advancing a systematic, non-subjective account of faith. Kierkegaard does not mention martyrdom here; perhaps the old form of martyrdom is obsolete, too, given how Christendom attempts to normalize the strangeness of Christianity's paradoxes. So, for Kierkegaard, a new form of martyrdom is necessary, one that does not involve literal submission to execution, but adopting an analogous type of self-effacement to force awareness, a form of maieutic ego-martyrdom in the composition and publication of a text for an audience. The martyrdom of the religious author is to obscure one's own desires and limit the pretentions of

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[75] *PV* 50 / *SKS* 16, 32. I have adjusted the Hongs' translation slightly, again using "force" instead of "compel."

[76] *PV* 50-51 / *SKS* 16, 32.

[77] *PV* 52 / *SKS* 16, 34.

[78] *PV* 52-53 / *SKS* 16, 34.

one's own agency. It is to let oneself be put to death insofar as one might *wish* to force another to *become Christian*, instead humbly working through other means (deception) to force awareness.

A key differentia between the old martyr's strategy and that of the religious author is the challenge to be confronted. In Christendom, Christianity is an established, culturally adopted set of ideas and practices, so it can seem (though illusorily so) easily digestible. Though traces of Christianity's paradoxes may be present within it, Christendom's 'Christianity' is an aesthetic, a style of living, rather than, as Kierkegaard would want to characterize it, "the idea for which [one is] willing to live and die."[79] To battle against it, it requires not an *additional step* to help someone become Christian, but a different kind of process. Kierkegaard elucidates the difference with an analogy to writing on a piece of paper:

> [T]here is a great difference… between these two situations: one who is ignorant and must be given some knowledge, and therefore he is like the empty vessel that must be filled or like the blank sheet of paper that must be written upon—and one who is under a delusion that must first be taken away. Likewise, there is also a difference between writing on a blank piece of paper and bringing out by means of chemicals some writing that is hidden under other writing.[80]

The contrast here needs to be carefully drawn. With the images of "the empty vessel" and "blank sheet of paper," Kierkegaard is referring to a 'pagan' individual who has not come into contact with Christianity. The analogy presumes that, after being written upon, one is capable of reading the writing on the paper, a paper which corresponds to some core part of oneself. To help a 'pagan' individual outside of Christendom become Christian would be like adding writing to the blank sheet of paper.[81] Note, however, that this would not make them become a Christian; this

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[79] *KJN* 1, 19 / *SKS* 17, 24; AA12 (1835).

[80] *PV* 53-54 / *SKS* 16, 35.

[81] In this passage, Kierkegaard's analogy to a blank sheet of paper oversimplifies the position of the 'pagan' subject for the sake of elucidating the challenge Christendom presents. On this account, blankness is the original and natural state of a sheet of paper; to write on it is alter it from its original state. But the 'pagan' subject, at least to the extent we follow Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*, is in a state of sin from the perspective of Christianity;

would only force awareness and a judgment on the part of the 'pagan' individual. (To channel

the language of *Fragments*, it would be to provide an occasion.) Now, aware of the choice, they

must decide between (properly) becoming a Christen or being a sinful member of Christendom.

For the individual already inhabiting Christendom, writing already present (like an

illusion or delusion) must be removed, not to return the person to a state of blankness, but rather

to reveal obscured writing, the same writing that would be first written onto the 'pagan'

individual. Again, this act would only force awareness (not make someone into a Christian), but

the first step is distinct. In Christendom one must first "remove the delusion," which is an

obstacle to "the recipient's ability to receive" the truth.[82] Indirect communication is the only

option; it is a "corrosive" for polishing a tarnished surface, or in the case of writing, revealing the

paper as a palimpsest.[83] Kierkegaard describes this corrosive as "the negative": "the negative in

connection with communicating is precisely to deceive [*bedrage*]."[84]

Let us review Kierkegaard's logic. Christendom is a type of illusion (*Sandesbedrag*) or

delusion (*Indbildning*) based on a contortion of Christianity (often with corresponding social

reinforcement). It obscures an individual's awareness that they must make a judgement, a

decision about becoming Christian (that is, having faith). To correct for the illusion, a further

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on this line of a reasoning, that a 'pagan' individual is, as it were, empty of writing must be, from the Christian position, their own fault, a corruption rather than the original state. But in this passage of *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard seems to suggest that the 'pagan' subject is in an unadulterated, natural state. (This ambivalence about 'Paganism' and 'pagan' individuals will be central to Chapter IV.) It seems Kierkegaard wants it both ways— the 'pagan' must be sinful (to some extent), but also represents a natural or pre-Christian, blank slate. For a piece that sheds light on this issue with close attention to the Climacus writings, see Jamie Turnbull, "Is Socrates Kierkegaard's 'Natural Man'?" in *Acta Kierkegaardiana, Vol. 6* [of 6]: *Kierkegaard and Human Nature*, eds Roman Králik, et al. (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, Trinity College, University of Toronto and Nitra, Slovakia: Central European Research Institute of Søren Kierkegaard, 2013), 163-180.

[82] *PV* 54 / *SKS* 16, 35.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

form of deception (*Bedrag*) is necessary. Why would deception be necessary to reverse an illusion or delusion?

On one level, we can make more sense of this by considering Kierkegaard's Danish. An illusion – *Sandsebedrag* – is itself a type of deception (a 'sense'-*bedrag*). And the word *Bedrag* (deception) itself is related to the verb *at drage* (to pull, jerk, draw, or drag). A deception might be said to pull one's attention away from what is true or important about a situation; for one caught in a systematic deception of the truth or the senses, an illusion or delusion, one might need to be pulled back, *deceived* into a position where they can decide on truth once more.[85]

This does not, however, capture the whole process of indirect communication as a type of deception; for Kierkegaard, as a religious author, deception does involve jerking someone out of the comforts of Christendom by pulling in the opposite direction as the illusion, but not at first. At first, it seems to require putting oneself within the delusion, or at least pretending to be caught up in it. One reason for this is that "By a direct attack he only strengthens a person in the illusion and also infuriates him."[86] On Kierkegaard's account, those deluded by Christendom require subtle preparation to become receptive to the truth (a truth to which they have already been exposed) that would cause them to make a judgment. (Kierkegaard implies that this is due in part to selfishness, reinforced by social approbation.[87]) For this reason, "one must approach the one

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[85] In a well-known passage of *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard juxtaposes "direct communication" with "communication in reflection"; the purpose of the latter is "to *deceive into the truth*" (*OMWA* 7 / *SKS* 13, 13). Much has been made of this formulation. (For one of numerous examples in the literature, see Mark L. McCreary, "Deceptive Love: Kierkegaard on Mystification and Deceiving into the Truth," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39, no. 1 (March 2011), 25-47.) My position on this formulation is that Kierkegaard is not suggesting it is possible, through deceptive machinations (or any means), to cause someone to *become Christian*; rather, he's simply framing, in a different way, the "corrosive" that can shed light on the Christian spiritual possibility already within a subject in Christendom. In other words, deceiving someone into the truth is preparatory; it does not *compete* their faith.

[86] *PV* 43 / *SKS* 16, 25-26.

[87] *PV* 51 / *SKS* 16, 33.

who is under an illusion from behind."[88] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kierkegaard characterizes this

task with an implicit allusion to Socrates' pedagogy: "To be a teacher is not to say: This is the

way it is, nor is it to assign lessons and the like. No, to be a teacher is truly to be the learner.

Instruction begins with this, that you, the teacher, learn from the learner, place yourself in what

he has understood and how…, or that you, if you have understood it, then let him examine you,

as it were, so that he can be sure that you know your lesson."[89] (Kierkegaard explicitly returns to

Socrates near the end of the chapter.[90]) The deception is a pedagogical stance, one in which the

teacher occupies the space of the learner. This means that to avoid *being condescending* to

Christendom, the author must *condescend* to a position within Christendom. But it is an act; for

Kierkegaard there must be, as I have mentioned earlier, "signs" to "telegraph" that the lesson is

religious, just as there are – as I show in Chapter I – in the "Ultimatum" to *Either / Or*. (In this

sense, the method is ironic in a way that resembles the method of Socrates – who, on

Kierkegaard's reading, persistently deploys ignorance to break down the preconceptions of his

interlocutors – but definitively *not* that of Christ, given that in Christ, God *has become* a human

being. The teacher, here, does not *become* the learner, but only pretends.)

In Kierkegaard's authorship, this pedagogical method takes the form of writing

seductively, aesthetically, and sometimes pseudonymously. Recall that "in Christendom,

individuals are Christians only in imagination… They live in esthetic or, at most, esthetic-ethical

categories." "Consequently," Kierkegaard writes, "in Christendom the religious author, whose

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[88] *PV* 43 / *SKS* 16, 25. I have slightly adjusted this translation by Hong and Hong. Elsewhere, Kierkegaard describes this task as attempting to "wound from behind" or "attack[] from behind" (*CD* 161-162 / *SKS* 10, 171-172). This analogy captures both the hiddenness of the religious author, who does not approach Christendom head-on, but also the subtlety (such as that of a thief or hidden assailant) required to dispel Christendom's illusions.

[89] *PV* 46-47 / *SKS* 16, 28-29.

[90] *PV* 53 / *SKS* 16, 35.

total thought is what it means to become a Christian, properly starts out with being an esthetic author."[91] One could, in principle, author texts that directly attack non-Christian ways of living. "Denounce the bewitchery of the esthetic—" Kierkegaard writes, "well, there have been times when you thereby might have succeeded in coercing people. Yes, to what end?—to love in their secret heart the bewitchery even more fanatically with clandestine passion."[92] If we recall that the purpose is to force a judgment or decision about Christianity, this type of "coerci[on]" will fail. One must condescend to the esthetic by donning the esthetic; "if you are able to do so, portray the esthetic with all its bewitching charm, if possible captivate the other person, portray it with the kind of passionateness whereby it appeals particularly to him."[93] The line between problematic coercion and problematic seduction is clear in principle, even if difficult to notice. One must wear the clothes of the aesthete, while signaling that there is more. In the way one might add multi-digit numbers and forget to 'carry the one' (cf. p. 3), one might fail to see the religious motivation behind an aesthetic production. In such a case, the conclusion will not be correct, for the sum will not produce the intended result. A difference might remain. Residing in that difference is the awareness that Kierkegaard intends to force.

It is in relation to this maneuver that Kierkegaard explains his pseudonyms: "[F]rom the total point of view of my whole work as an author [*Forfatter-Virksomheds totale Synspunkt*], the esthetic writing is a deception [*Bedrag*], and herein is the deeper significance of the *pseudonymity*."[94] The pseudonym is a tool to perform the deception, the purpose of which is for the author to occupy a non-Christian stage of existence while actually, as though from a cable, he

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[91] *PV* 47 / *SKS* 16, 29.

[92] *PV* 46 / *SKS* 16, 28.

[93] Ibid.

[94] *PV* 53 / *SKS* 16, 35.

is suspended above it; the pseudonym can thus stand in a position that the actual author, with his interests, desires, and experiences, cannot. In this sense, "esthetic writing" does imply only the subject-position of an aesthete (such as *Either / Or*'s A), but rather any such position – aesthetic, ethical, religious (or anything in between) – that can perform this deceptive feat. The pseudonymous character may not have become aware (of Christianity), or he (and it almost always is a 'he') may be aware but choose to live according to non-Christian categories. In short, the pseudonym is a tool that permits a reader to impute the undergirding logic of a text to the constellation of desires that shape the life of a human individual (the pseudonymous character or author); keeping the actual author (that is, Kierkegaard, about whom many of his contemporary readers already had some opinion) out of view is essential for this to work. This is *not* a methodology captured by Mackey's or Poole's claims about Kierkegaard's writing. Indeed, it seems to run contrary Mackey's and Poole's interpretations, insofar as Kierkegaard *expects* (with pedagogical purpose) the reader to conclude things about the goals, desires, limitations – the life – of the pseudonymous author.

2. "Do not be deceived by deception"

> In a theater, it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they became still more hilarious.[95]

We should return, then, to the question of how to read Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is a deceiver. He says as much, so can we trust him? "But a deception," he writes, "that is indeed something rather ugly. To that I would answer: Do not be deceived by the word *deception*. One

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[95] A, in the Diapsalmata. *EO1* 30 / *SKS* 2, 39.

can deceive a person out of what is true [*det Sande*], and—to recall old Socrates—one can

deceive a person into what is true. Yes, in only this way can a deluded person actually be brought

into what is true—by deceiving him."[96] As it turns out – and this is the key point for how we

should read Kierkegaard – to be deceived into the truth may be less strange than we expect:

> What, then, does it mean "to deceive"? It means that one does not begin *directly* with
> what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value.
> Thus one does not begin (to hold to what essentially is the theme of this book) in this
> way: I am Christian, you are not a Christian—but this way: You are a Christian, I am not
> Christian. Or one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and
> you are living in purely esthetic categories. No, one begins this way: Let us talk about the
> esthetic. The deception consists in one's speaking this way precisely in order to arrive at
> the religious. But according to the assumption the other person is in fact under the
> delusion that the esthetic is the essentially Christian, since he thinks he is a Christian and
> yet he is living in esthetic categories.[97]

We need to linger here to understand how *broad* Kierkegaard's notion of deception is. One

begins "by taking the other's delusion at face value." One takes the explicit goals, desires, and

arguments of the other seriously. One begins from their premises; one argues in their language;

one plays devil's advocate; one uses the Socratic method. Indeed, one *plays a role*— anything to

disrupt the false comfort of treating Christianity as an aesthetic, cultural signifier, or marker of

identity.[98] But none of these methods or goals are uncommon for the written word. Effectively,

deception involves deploying classical methods of dialectic and drama – including art, artifice,

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[96] *PV* 53 / *SKS* 16, 35. Note that Hong and Hong translate *det Sande* into English as "what is true," rather than "truth." I believe this move is correct. In *NT-1819*, Jn 14:6 reads, "'…jeg er Veien og Sandheden og Livet…'" ("…I am the way, and the truth, and the life…"). Though this deployment of terms is not consistent across Kierkegaard's corpus, the term for *truth* in the soteriological context of Jn 14:6 is usually *Sandheden*, not *det Sande*. Kierkegaard does not intend the truth into which one might be deceived, to be truth *qua* salvation. It is rather an intellectual truth, which can the help force the choice of Christianity.

[97] *PV* 54 / *SKS* 16, 36.

[98] It seems, even when Kierkegaard discusses Christendom, that for one person (say, a religious author) to break down another's self-conceptions (to reveal, as it were, the Christian writing underneath), it requires their consent and willingness. When Kierkegaard writes, "Force a person to an opinion, a conviction, a belief—in all eternity, that I cannot do," he does not only mean bringing someone to Christianity, but *any* opinion, conviction, or belief.

and argument to absurd conclusions – to achieve the persuasive goals of rhetoric.[99] (As I will show in Chapter I, *Either / Or* takes on the shape of a dialectic and goads its readers to try on each position. Both A's and Wilhelm's first practical principles result in an absurd conclusion: an absurd life.)

Moreover, this form of deception is not estranged from making rational arguments; it is not estranged from seriousness.[100] It is an attempt to convince by meeting a listener where they are, a form of intellectual empathy. To take deception seriously, as Kierkegaard's method does, does not mean that we should attempt to outwit Kierkegaard, to outwit his deception, or refuse to dive in. The method asks us to dive in, and though we may, as readers, find our own assumptions to be wrong (assuming we live according to aesthetic or ethical categories[101]) or even find that we have already been made aware, we have not thus done him an injustice. If we have attempted to reason through Kierkegaard, we have indeed reasoned – at least in some sense – as Kierkegaard hoped we would— even if we do not arrive at the destination he hoped.

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[99] For excellent accounts on Kierkegaard's literary methods and their purposes, see Howard Pickett, *Rethinking Sincerity and Authenticity: The Ethics of Theatricality in Kant, Kierkegaard, and Levinas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017); and Joel D. S. Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard's Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

[100] Williams puts it well: "Of the main problems with Deconstructionist readings of Kierkegaard, their conception of what constitutes 'irony' for Kierkegaard is among the most central. This is because they believe irony to be at the heart of Kierkegaard's project, often managing to find it in just about any place in his corpus that they care to look for it. *If Kierkegaard is a thoroughly ironic writer, they reason, then he cannot be a writer in earnest*" (Williams, *Kierkegaard and the Legitimacy of the Comic*, 150; my emphasis).

[101] Often, such as in the passage quoted above, Kierkegaard omits mentioning the possibility that Christianity is reduced to *ethical*, rather than *aesthetic* – or on the Hongs' rendering, "esthetic" – categories. This is not because *ethical* Christendom is impossible. Elsewhere in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard writes, "…most people in Christendom are Christians only in imagination, in what categories do they live? They live in esthetic or, at most, esthetic-ethical categories" (*PV* 43 / *SKS* 16, 25). Because it is, on Kierkegaard's estimation, rare for anyone even to move beyond the aesthetic stage, Kierkegaard often refers to Christendom as an aesthetic perversion of Christianity without referring to the ethical. When he does so, I do not think he intends to exclude the possibility that an individual in Christendom could be in the ethical stage, or at least transitioning between the aesthetic and the ethical. Rather, he uses "aesthetic" as a catch-all for the categories of life in Christendom.

To Poole or Mackey, we might respond by drawing attention to the space between style and content. Indeed, for Kierkegaard we can never simply ignore style to focus on the content. The content must be understood by reading, and reading must attend to all aspects of the text, including genre, dramatics, and other features. Kierkegaard's brand of deception does not, however, demand *a priori* that a religious author adopt particular stylistic tendencies and eschew others. The method is designed based on Kierkegaard's diagnosis of Christendom; furthermore, it employs elements of many styles, including that of structured, logical argumentation. As readers, we are not directed to ignore these argumentative elements in favor of others or *vice versa*; instead, we must understand their content while we simultaneously take seriously Kierkegaard's critique of structured argumentation's often bombastic pretension to authority.

To summarize, Kierkegaard's style neither exhausts nor by itself fulfills his method. If Kierkegaard were to have adopted irreducible, *sui generis* literary devices in an attempt to hypnotize us to accept Christianity, he would – by his own account – have failed. Deception helps to achieve the provocation of awareness but stops at this point; indeed, one may deceive someone out of falsity and into what is true, but it is not possible to deceive someone into Christianity. (For Christianity always demands the subjective engagement – consent, choice, judgment – of the individual.) The omnipresence of ideology and selfishness in Christendom makes for a tricky enemy, but it is nonetheless clear that Kierkegaard's authorship is – to the extent its goal is to force awareness – a *human* task, and one that requires no superhuman method of engagement by his readers. His writing is not a magic spell that charms us without us noticing it, but an often-complex – yet occasionally-deceptively-simple – set of claims, presumptions, motifs, characters, and arguments that actually attempts to communicate. It is not an interpretive failure to read Kierkegaard as though he were attempting to advocate a coherent worldview;

being willing to do so, and being wrong, is actually to take the sort of risk that is required to play his game. Nothing about the method, or about the pseudonyms, forbids us from asking the same questions of Kierkegaard we would ask of other philosophers of his era. His method, characters, even arguments, are all there to force awareness; so we should interpret them and see what sort of awareness is forced! Yes, reading Kierkegaard is difficult. But reading is always difficult.

When we fear domesticating Kierkegaard by rendering his thought unified, univocal, consistent, coherent, rational – a fear Mackey and Poole believe scholars ought to have – we make our own error, conflating two moments in Kierkegaard's account of communication: the moment in which deception brings about awareness, and the moment in which an individual who is aware *judges*, that is, becomes Christian or does not. We believe that Kierkegaard would never produce such systematic or structurally consistent argumentation since he means to deceive us (into truth). But his arguments, characters, elements of style *are* the deception. We do not outthink him by ignoring features of his corpus (such as attempts at coherent reasoning), delimiting them until they disappear. They do not conceal the game. They *are* the game, and like a game, they have a structure (logic, rules). The clever move Kierkegaard makes is not to give up argumentation or consistent thinking in favor of other genres, but rather to use these methods thoughtfully as a way of pulling a reader into a situation where they must make a choice. In this way, Kierkegaard's authorship was always a task of provoking awareness, rather than pushing someone into Christianity. Kierkegaard consistently attempts the former but knows he cannot possibly attempt the latter. Thus, the scholarly anxiety that locating and assembling consistent threads in Kierkegaard's corpus will constitute a betrayal is often unfounded, as long as the interpreter keeps in mind that no amount of argumentation (also no amount of comedy, irony, dramatics), could ever complete the reader's own religious task.

There is an irony here. The assistant professor Kierkegaard lambasted was an uncareful reader so committed to Hegelian systematic philosophy that whatever they read was slurped up into it – a bloviating blob, so Kierkegaard thought – without being permitted to stand on its own. But in light of trends in scholarship about Kierkegaard, this diagnosis should be rethought. Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*, claims (and believably so) that he does not "lack the courage to think a complete thought."[102] *Mutatis mutandis*, scholars should embrace this courage when it comes to thinking through Kierkegaard; they should be willing to try to think Kierkegaard the whole way through. De Silentio knows, surely – as does Kierkegaard – that the courage to think a thought is not the courage of faith. So attempting to assemble Kierkegaard's authorship like a puzzle – a task not dissimilar from how other authors are read, including Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel – should not be warned off. (Nor should it be conflated with producing what Kierkegaard wanted of his readers, *to become Christian*.) Critical readings, reconstruction, analysis, and assembly are responsible ways of becoming aware. These scholarly tasks do not aim to actualize Kierkegaard's hope that many might decide to become Christian, but – as discussed in this section of the thesis – Kierkegaard thinks that only the individual can actualize this for themselves. To this extent, such scholarship – including my project here – is not inimical to Kierkegaard's production.

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[102] *FT* 30 / *SKS* 4, 126.

C. Faith and the Mechane

> Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
> Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
> In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can;
> Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.[103]

The opening of this thesis invoked *The Odyssey* to suggest that Kierkegaard's authorship presents Christianity as an answer to a specifically human problem. This problem was about how to live a good life when the shape of the human being and the organization of the cosmos seem always to preclude making choices that could enable achieving one's ultimate desires. On the face of it, this seems like a problem of *human finitude*. Yet such an interpretation risks reaffirming the very problem, namely that the human being does not have the agency, or any similar power, to conquer or circumvent the traumas of a finite, fatal, tragic world; in other words, that human happiness is limited, even precluded, by the shape of the human being and the world.

But does it have to be finitude? It could be sin. On such an interpretation, the failures of an individual to achieve happiness are their own, *their responsibility*. Can sin, perhaps paradoxically, provide an avenue of escape? If so, what is involved in such an interpretation of the human being? What shape might it take?

Finitude or sinfulness? Are they different? How do we know which is our primary ailment? Can we ever *know*? Would it be better for us if one, rather than the other, was our deepest affliction? Undergirding the distinction between these concepts is a pattern of thinking that Kierkegaard reperforms throughout his authorship, in texts both pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous. This pattern of thinking is organized, indeed even structured. The key concepts –

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[103] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "[Carrion Comfort]," in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4th ed., eds. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 99.

Christianity and 'Paganism' – occupy crucial positions, and depend on one another. This structure cannot be ignored if we are to make sense of the Kierkegaardian individual's confrontation with aspects of the world that frustrate their attempts to live the best possible life.

To characterize Kierkegaard's repeated move, I deploy a stagecraft analogy: the *mechane* (μηχανή). At this point in the thesis, the description I offer of this mechanism is preliminary. Its role in Kierkegaard's thought will not be robustly defended until Chapter IV. I will, throughout the remainder of the thesis, more thoroughly determine the device that I sketch here. Hence, what I write below should be understood more as foreshadowing than analysis.

But first: Why stagecraft? It is in acknowledgement of Kierkegaard's resistance to the closure and completion of intellectual systems that I have chosen stagecraft rather than, say, an analogy of building a solid house.[104] But despite being flexible, impermanent, and uncemented, stagecraft still requires a structure: a scaffolding, rigging, even machinery, all of which serve a purpose. Kierkegaard's thought is like this, affording different views of the action to his reader, each position with different acoustics and different vistas. It all has an audience in mind, and (almost always in the case of Kierkegaard, often in the theater) pedagogical intent. Moreover, it has a definite shape; the parts each have a purpose and exert forces on one another.

* * *

The mechane was a device used in ancient theatrics. It is, simply, a rudimentary type of crane, one constructed for elevating an actor in order to perform the illusion of flight above a stage. Instead of a suspended counterweight, a rope was connected at one end to the ground or a stationary weighted object, and at the other end to the hoist. A parallel rope was drawn through a pulley at the crane's pivot point, and then attached to the actor. (See Figure 1, p. 46.) In

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[104] See, e.g., Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, in *CSM* I, 122 (22).

Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, a device like this would have permitted the flight of the actor playing

Socrates, when he enters the scene in a basket suspended in the air.[105] Variants of the mechane

may have also been used in passion plays to portray the ascension of the resurrected Jesus.

Interestingly, in an early example of Christology, Ignatius of Antioch refers to the mechane and

its components to explain the role of faith, love, and the cross in accomplishing salvation, with

the "hoist" (the pivot point by the pulley) representing faith.[106]
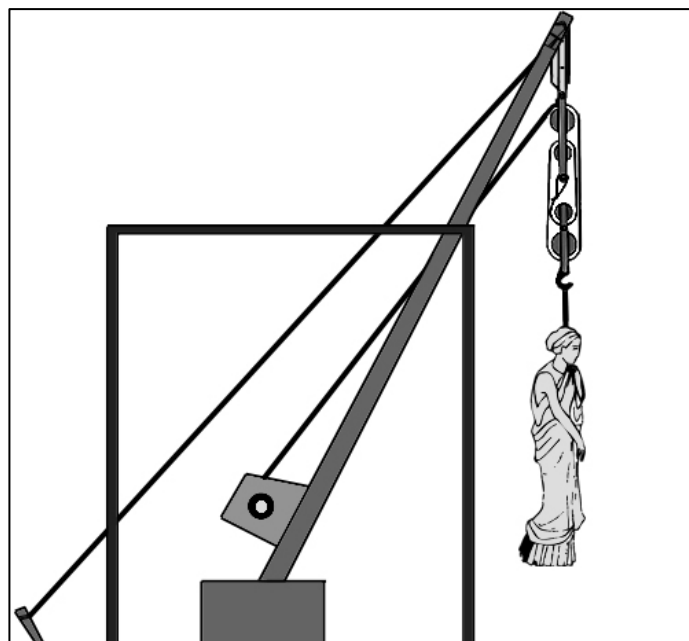
Figure 1. An illustration of a mechane suspending an actor.[107]

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[105] Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, in *Aristophanes: Clouds, Wasps, Peace*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson, *Loeb Classical Library* 488 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 36-39 (lines 218-234).

[106] See Ignatius, *Eph.* 9:1: "You are stones of the Father's temple, prepared for the building of God the Father. For you are being carried up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ [μηχανῆς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ], which is the cross, using as a cable the Holy Spirit; and your faith is your hoist, and love is the path that carries you up to God" (Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I*, trans. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 24 (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 228-229). I am grateful to J. Gregory Given for his assistance in locating the above source. For more on the grammar and meaning of Ignatius' analogy, see Jonathon Lookadoo, *The High Priest and the Temple: Metaphorical Depictions of Jesus in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 163-166.

[107] Arne Eickenberg, "Mechane, Greek Theater" (illustration), *Citizendium: The Citizen's Compendium* (uploaded 20 July 2007; last accessed 5 July 2020), <https://en.citizendium.org/wiki/File:Mechane_GreekTheater.jpg> (License: Public Domain, released by artist).

In the theater, whether the mechane succeeds in lifting the actor depends, fundamentally, on the tension force established between the actor and the fixed point on the ground vis-à-vis the pulley. Let us say that the actor is the individual (*Enkelt*), the fixed point on the ground represents the 'Pagan' worldview, the pulley or hoist is faith (as Ignatius also suggests), and the device as a whole is Kierkegaard's broader conception of the content of Christianity. Salvation or happiness (lifting the actor) requires connecting the individual to what is immanent through a capacity (faith) that itself has a transcendent origin. Moreover, the possibility of elevation engenders *two points of view* from which one can view the relationship of the human being to the world.[108]

Either a person is lifted, or they are not. And if so, this depends on the tether to the ground remaining taut. Similarly, for Kierkegaard, faith stands at a pivot point such that it enables the worthwhile life only with reference to a possible world in which living such a life is *not* possible. 'Paganism' must remain in view but be kept forever distant (as that possibility, a world that *could have been*). If one were to reside in such a possible world (that is, on the *ground*), one is but a poor player on the stage, a walking shadow that must always choose between aesthetics and ethics, or Charybdis and Scylla. If suspended in the air, one might be free of such a dilemma, yet in the movement, the viewpoint changes; the actor can occupy – have they the eyes to see (and the courage to open them) – a wider, aerial perspective, and indeed may even notice how the acts of God that enable their happiness are attached to the stage below. In this sense, Christianity can view and assess 'Paganism,' but 'Paganism' cannot see Christianity.

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[108] This notion of shifting perspectives, in which – for Kierkegaard – things snap into place in a new way upon taking a new position, resonates with the approach in M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Unlike Ferreira, however, I do not make imagination a key category of my analysis.

Faith enables a perspective from which one can choose which world they inhabit, but at the same time, for faith to be possible, it means that the world that exists is *not* that of 'Paganism.'

Which type of subject am I, and which world am I in? Am I in a world in which tragedy is ultimate (the 'pagan' world), or one in which the good life is commensurate with the conditions of finitude (the Christian world)? As I have suggested, there is a decisive asymmetry between the two alternatives: For Kierkegaard, Christianity offers a vantage point from which the subject can compare 'Paganism' to Christianity (and in fact must do so), while 'Paganism' can at its best only ask the question to which Christianity is the answer. After all, in a 'pagan' world, hope remains in the box, and at best, to be a responsible captain is to let six die. Nested within this asymmetry are further alternatives— within 'Paganism' one may live a life ethically, among friends, by means of self-examination. Or not. If Christianity is true, one can live a life of offense, despair, resignation, and self-love; or one of faith, hope, and love of the neighbor. To the extent one lives the proper Christian life, one must perpetually confront the possibility of 'Paganism's' ultimacy, reckon with it, and then *deny it*. For Kierkegaard, this move both enables, and makes it possible to fulfill, the ultimate desires of the human being.

'Paganism' and Christianity exist in a form of interdependency. Each finds a hidden origin in the other. Christianity is the beginning that irrupts within, alongside, and as the denial of the alternative ('Paganism'); it makes its beginning at the limits of questions that 'Paganism' can and indeed does ask, but for which 'Paganism' can offer no answers (or rather, it often preemptively answers *no*).[109] Whether 'Paganism' actually corresponds to a concrete point or period in human history, or prehistory, even evolutionary prehistory— this is beside the point

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[109] 'Can the truth be learned?' 'Does virtue cause happiness?' 'Can I love an *other*?' Not all of these questions have a direct parallel in Classical philosophy, but each finds its home, for Kierkegaard, in a Socratic, Platonic, Aristotelian, or (ancient Greek) tragic conception of knowledge, happiness, and the limitations of the human being. (It is rare for Socrates to find a satisfactory answer to the question from which he departs.)

and likely undecidable. (It is my suspicion that Kierkegaard himself believed the spatiotemporal borders of 'Paganism' to abut the life Jesus of Nazareth and the spread of his teachings, but he would not have thought this interpretation to be probative.) Whatever 'Paganism' is, from within it, an alternative can only be dreamt or gazed at from the distance, but never lived— like the 'what-if' of Charybdis, or the hope still secreted away inside Pandora's Box.

 If Christianity is true, then there always were two possible worlds: the 'pagan' world and the actual world in which God condescended out of love. And if Christianity is true, then the actual world cannot be the 'pagan' world (even though it could have been— for there can be nothing necessary about God's self-sacrificial act of love). This is framed as a thought-experiment in *Philosophical Fragments*, which I discuss in depth in Chapters II, III, and IV. It generates two possible perspectives (Christian and 'pagan'), one of which (Christianity) engenders two possible worlds (the Christian world and the 'pagan' one), and the other which engenders nothing outside itself (only 'Paganism').[110]

 Within 'Paganism,' one might, like the drunken Alcibiades, fail by subordinating the general welfare to natural desire; one might, like Agamemnon, succeed at preserving the nation but surrender one's beloved in order to launch the ships; or one might, like Socrates, succeed (though not in the way a Christian can) by mounting an honest defense and accepting the city's verdict. As I explore in Chapter I, within Christianity, one might live by seeking to realize one's desires at the expense of commitment (the pseudonym / character A), or one might subordinate one's desire to a conception of self-determination and universality (the pseudonym / character Wilhelm). But unlike in 'Paganism,' both such acts constitute a certain kind of failure, for if

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[110] Here, I have framed the issue in a way similar to Nancy Levene's articulation of the origin of modernity in Levene, *Powers of Distinction: On Religion and Modernity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), especially 15-24.

Christianity is true, the individual is capable of faith. They do not have to live like Alcibiades, Agamemnon, or Socrates; to choose to *try* to live like them – as A and Wilhelm do – is to reject the offer of faith in favor of despair (*Fortvivelse*). Such is the nature of Christendom, an acculturated form of Christianity in which citizens live according to aesthetics or ethics, that is, values that pervert Kierkegaardian Christianity by imitating 'Paganism.'

In 'Paganism' the distinctions are familiar, but – according to Kierkegaard – incomplete. Here, for Kierkegaard, the idea of a perfect being surrendering eternity is self-contradictory (Chapter II), a full picture of how virtue can cause happiness is impossible to envision (Chapter V), and altruism is unthinkable (Chapter VI). Faith, hope, and love of neighbor are not capacities available to the human being in a 'pagan' world. This is not to say there is no transcendence, no infinity, no God in 'Paganism'; it is to say that the qualitative difference between the immanent and transcendent, finitude and infinity, and God and human is an uncrossable gulf, forever separating human nature from the happiness desired. (Faith, on Kierkegaard's account, is the organ gifted to the human being that can bridge this gulf.)

In a world where the Christian story is true, such distinctions should be (according to Kierkegaard) shocking to the individual who first becomes conscious of them, but to his reader, they are likely not so. This is because Christendom has taken hold, rendering familiar and even vulgar what is essentially, for Kierkegaard, divine. For if Christianity is true, altruism is possible (and all other forms of love insufficient), God became finite, and the individual – through faith – "can, can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be." Thus, Kierkegaard's pedagogy demands that he convince his reader to reckon with the *possibility* that they indeed live in Christendom, and not within (pre-Christian) 'Paganism.'

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The structure I have proposed (the *mechane*) is reperformed throughout Kierkegaard's corpus. I characterize and defend the model explicitly in Chapter IV with respect to Kierkegaard's articulation of faith in *Philosophical Fragments*.

D. Dissertation Overview

The task at hand, which I execute in the six chapters that follow, is to show how in several of his major works, Kierkegaard argues for, and elaborates, the structure of thinking I have characterized as the mechane, always with an eye toward the individual's ultimate responsibility for living well. This will grant us further insight into how Kierkegaard understands what it means to live the best possible life, and, what is the same, to become a Christian. It will also offer the opportunity to resolve a set of tensions specific to several of Kierkegaard's texts.

In Chapter I, I approach Kierkegaard's earliest major published work, *Either / Or* (1843), in order to elucidate his concept of desire, as well as to provide interpretations of the well-known trifecta: the *aesthetic*, *ethical*, and *religious*. Each of these refers to a meta-scheme for ways the human being can organize desire in pursuit of the good life, but only the last of the three – which draws a clear connection between happiness and responsibility for one's own unhappiness (in sin) – proves to be promising.

In Chapters II, III, and IV, I dig into the key source for the structure I have characterized as the mechane: *Philosophical Fragments*. In Chapter II I show that Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus and through the performance of a thought-experiment, argues for a conception of faith as a novel capacity made available to the human being by the incarnate God. If faith indeed proves possible for the human being, it can provide the basis for a distinctive answer to the question: (how) can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal

consciousness? In Chapter III, I argue that *Fragments* characterizes faith in such a way as to circumvent criticisms launched by other scholars, including the criticism that Climacus' conception of faith makes too few demands regarding what historical details faith should refer to, as well as the charge that his conception of faith eliminates the need for God to enter time altogether. In Chapter IV, I examine a reoccurring structure in *Fragments* that resembles a proof that the incarnation has happened, one based on the nature of an idea (*Indfald*) that Climacus believes his reader already has. (M. J. Ferreira has hesitantly referred to this structure as an *a priori* proof,[111] while G. P. Marcar has labeled it – following Climacus' own vocabulary – the *wonder* (Vidunder).[112]) Then, I investigate the purposes of this reoccurring structure in the context of my broader interpretation of *Fragments*, concluding that it forms the basis of mechane. Finally I more thoroughly determine the structure of the mechane.

In Chapter V, I shift to *Fear and Trembling*. My exegesis attends to the opening of the "Preliminary Expectoration," which suggests that faith is a possible response by the individual to the apparent disconnect between one's efforts to live well and the results one is capable of achieving: in the external world, work, remarks pseudonymous author Johannes de Silentio, does not necessarily beget bread.[113] Here I affirm the general approach of interpreters who defend interpretations of faith (as it is advanced in *Fear and Trembling*) as "eschatological trust" and "radical hope," while simultaneously contesting how they frame future-directed hope. By considering the characters of Abraham and Agamemnon from the perspective of the mechane, I argue that *Fear and Trembling* does not posit a conception of faith that offers any reason to

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[111] M. J. Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem, and Kierkegaard's *A Priori* 'Proof,'" *Religious Studies* 23, no. 3 (Sep. 1987): 337-345.

[112] G. P. Marcar, "Climacus' Miracle: Another Look at 'the Wonder' in *Philosophical Fragments* through a Spinozist Lens," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 24 (2019): 59-84.

[113] See *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123.

expect particular desires to be satisfied in the future (miraculously, eschatologically); instead, faith only satisfies an undergirding meta-desire for reconciling virtue and happiness.

In a brief Chapter VI, I tackle Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. Here I ask whether *Works of Love*'s conception of love for the neighbor constitutes a theory of moral obligation by divine command. I argue that *Works of Love* does not advance such a position. Instead, Kierkegaard conceives the love command to enable a form of obligation that meets his criteria for morality *as such*, criteria met when the love command frees the individual from a solipsism of self-interested desire. In the dissertation's conclusion, I recapitulate the project's central claims before suggesting two possible avenues for future research.

CHAPTER I.
WHERE TO BEGIN?: THE 'EITHER'S AND 'OR'S OF DESIRE

> To be sure, I felt that it was a strange desire,
> since I had no use for this piece of furniture,
> and it would be a prodigality for me to
> purchase it. *But desire, as is known, is very
> sophistical…* This is the last time you are
> going to be so prodigal, I thought. In fact, it
> really is lucky that you did buy it, for every
> time you look at it you will be reminded of
> how prodigal you were; with this desk
> commences a new period in your life. *Ah,
> desire is very eloquent, and good intentions
> are always on hand.*[1]

In this chapter I approach *Either / Or* as a window into Kierkegaard's stages of existence

(particularly the aesthetic and ethical).[2] Here I demonstrate that, for Kierkegaard, the stages are

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[1] Victor Eremita, about the writing desk (*Secretair*) containing A's and Wilhelm's letters. *EO1* 4-5 / *SKS* 2, 12-13 (my italics). I have slightly adjusted the translation by Hong and Hong.

[2] Kierkegaard appears to use the term "stage of existence" (*Existents-Stadium*) only once in his authorship. It appears in plural in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (*CUP1* 520 / *SKS* 7, 472). The term "sphere of existence" (*Existents-Sphære*) appears several times in the same work (*CUP1* 152, 268, 432, 501, 521 / *SKS* 7, 141, 244, 393, 455, 473). At one point, the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus says explicitly: "There are three spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious" (*CUP1* 501 / *SKS* 7, 455; translation slightly modified.). Throughout Kierkegaard's corpus, the words *Sphærer* and *Stadier* are used without the word *Existents* to refer to these concepts.
       Kierkegaard does not settle on a single, consistent scheme for the stages or spheres of existence over the course of his authorship. Oftentimes, such as in *Either / Or* and the *Postscript*, the stages are subdivided. In the *Postscript*, it becomes a further question whether the Christian is an additional stage beyond the religious, or a subdivision within the religious. Taylor, for instance, has drawn attention to the significance of the complicated subdivisions within the three major stages. See, e.g., Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, 74-77. I agree with Taylor's extended argument that the stages are best interpreted as *both* "stages of the development of the individual self" and as "ideal representations of various life views," but I remain ambivalent about the overall significance of Kierkegaard's subdivisions of the stages (74). Despite variance in presentation, the triad of aesthetic, ethical, and religious seems consistently to be the series of master categories Kierkegaard invokes for the stages or spheres throughout his authorship, while the subdivisions take shape according to Kierkegaard's particular purposes in a given work. For more on how Kierkegaard's presentation of the stages shifts throughout his authorship, see Lydia Amir, "Stages," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome VI (Salvation to Writing)*, eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart, *KRSRR* 15 (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 89-96. Also helpful is Lee C. Barrett, "Johannes Climacus: Humorist, Dialectician, and Gadfly," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*, eds. Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart, *KRSRR* 17 (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 117-142.
       It is worth noting that, in general, the prominence of the so-called 'theory of the stages' or 'spheres,' has been questioned by scholars of Kierkegaard, especially in recent Danish scholarship. (Kierkegaard does not himself ever use the term 'theory of the stages of existence.') When scholars dispute the prominence of the theory of the stages, they either seem to dispute the notion that Kierkegaard conceives the stages as requiring a chronological progression upward (from aesthetic, to ethical, to religious), or that Kierkegaard believes living according to

broad schemes for how to orient oneself vis-à-vis the concept of desire (as well as particular

desires) in order to live the best life possible. Kierkegaard interrogates the relationship between

desire and the good life by asking, through the mouths of the text's several characters: On what

basis should I begin? In asking this question, *Either / Or* displays a complicated relationship to

the history of philosophy. On the one hand, through the writings of the character "A" the text

performs a clear critique of historical attempts to launch a systematic philosophical project, one

which borders on parody.[3] On the other hand, *Either / Or* vindicates the spirit of such projects as

attempts (though problematic ones) to approach the difficult task of self-consciously determining

how to live, given the limitations of the human being and the world they inhabit.[4]

A word about desire: Kierkegaard uses many terms throughout his corpus that are

translatable as 'desire.' These include *Attraa* (aspiration), *Begjær*(*-ing*) (desire, broadly), *Elskede*

(beloved, object of love or affection), *Elskov* (passionate or erotic love), *Kjerlighed* (love)[5] and

its variation *Forkjerlighed* (preferential love), *Længsel* (longing, yearning), *Lidenskab* (broadly,

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religious principles (on the religious stage) precludes living with desires and interests associated more closely with the aesthetic stage. See, e.g., Joakim Garff, *Den Søvnløse: Kierkegaard læst æstetisk/biografisk* [The Sleepless One: Kierkegaard read aesthetically/biographically] (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1995). In broader formulations, interpretations that locate the stages or spheres of existence as central to Kierkegaard's thought seems quite alive and well. See, e.g., C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), but there are numerous examples.

[3] *Either / Or*'s two parts feature a number of literary genres (including critical essays, aphorisms, epistles, diary entries, and a sermon) across six pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are Victor Eremita ('Victorious Hermit'), the editor of the two volumes who originally stumbled upon their contents within a secret compartment of a used writing desk (*en Secretair*, alluding to the Latin word *secretus*, meaning 'secret'); A, an otherwise unnamed young man whose writings most of the first volume comprises; Johannes, whose letters and diary entries – stumbled upon by A – chronicle the seduction of a woman named Cordelia; Cordelia, several of whose letters are included within the documents collated by A; Wilhelm, a married employee of the local judiciary whose friendship with the younger A is documented in letters that constitute most of the second volume; and an unnamed friend of Wilhelm serving as a pastor in Jutland, whose written sermon Wilhelm attaches to the lengthy letters he has sent to A.

[4] In this respect, we might view Kierkegaard's portrayal of A, Johannes the seducer, assessor Wilhelm, and even the unnamed pastor from Jutland all as slices of the search for how to live a good life, similar in this base respect to what is portrayed as a continuous narrative in, for example, Augustine's *Confessions*.

[5] Sometimes Kierkegaard spells this word *Kjerlighed* (for instance, in *Works of Love*), and other times *Kjærlighed* (such as in *Either / Or*).

a passion or suffering, which likely involves desire), *Lyst* (desire, broadly, but often sensuous), *Tilbøielighed* (inclination, usually natural inclination), *Trang* (thirst, urge, craving), and *Ønske* (desire, broadly, or wish), but other terms as well. I use the English term 'desire' to refer to the set of wants, needs, goals, pursuits, inclinations, urges, loves, and goals that an individual has, and which participate in motivating that individual. One may, for instance, desire to eat eggplant, one may desire to become a great writer as a career goal, one may (as Johannes the Seducer does) desire to be sexually desired, and one may desire happiness and a life well-lived. One may have natural desires or spiritual desires; some desires may be both, or may have aspects of both, such as the desire involved in Kierkegaard's concept of love for the neighbor (*Kjærlighed til Næsten*). Kierkegaard does not deploy only one term to cover all of these concepts. However, I believe it justifiable and indeed necessary to discuss desire as a key concept in his thought because, as I demonstrate in this chapter, the fundamental differentiae between the stages of existence involve how each corresponds to a broad scheme for organizing a life around satisfying desires with the goal of living a good life or attaining happiness. *Either / Or* is, if not transparent in doing so, particularly dedicated to illustrating and critiquing the shared presumption of the aesthetic and the ethical that natural desires are both paths toward, and obstacles against, living a good life.[6]

The interpretation of *Either / Or* that I offer does not treat the text's portrayal of the aesthetic and ethical stages as progressive steps toward the religious. While there is a sense that the ethical is a more abstract, mature way to approach life, to adopt an ethical method of living

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[6] For more on desire in Kierkegaard, see Nathaniel Kramer, "Desire," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts (Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm)*, eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart, *KRSRR* 15 (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 153-158.

should not be understood as a straightforward improvement over living aesthetically.[7] Instead,

Either / Or should be recognized as a form of stylized dialectic between two archetypes, neither

of which is adequate for ordering a life that would satisfy the human being. A helpful

comparison is to the antinomies in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787). As in each of

the antinomies, *Either / Or* portrays its thesis and antithesis as staking their claim on the failure

of the alternative (its negative image). The character of A (*Either / Or*'s 'antithesis') argues for

an aesthetic mode of living based on the failures of its contrary, an ethical life, to create the

conditions of a life worth living. Assessor Wilhelm (*Either / Or*'s 'thesis'),[8] in turn, argues for an

ethical life based on the aesthetic life's inability to do the same. Viewed from above – and hinted

at in the "Ultimatum" at the end of *Either / Or* (authored by an unnamed Jut pastor) – the failures

of both A and Wilhelm demonstrate the need for a third view, a religious one, which can connect

and complete what is incomplete in the aesthetic and ethical.[9] Crucially, both A and Wilhelm

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[7] On this, I disagree with many interpretations of the book that frame the ethical as, for Kierkegaard, strictly speaking higher than the aesthetic. See, e.g., David R. Law, "The Place, Role, and Function of the 'Ultimatum' of *Either/Or*, Part Two, in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Writings," in *IKC*, vol. 4 *(*Either/Or *Part II)*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 1995), 257: "As a whole *Either/Or* is the presentation of two lifeviews, the aesthetic and the ethical, between which the individual is called upon to choose. Kierkegaard, of course, wishes the reader to choose what he regards as the higher sphere, namely the ethical." Law's interpretation is not without nuance – and he recognizes the "Ultimatum" at the end of the second part of *Either / Or* as a window into the religious life, which Kierkegaard holds to be higher than either the aesthetic or ethical – but he views the stages of existence as progressive, with the ethical being closer to an ideal Christian existence than the aesthetic.

[8] There are two peculiarities about how Hong and Hong represent assessor Wilhelm. First, they translate the name Wilhelm as William, a change I find unnecessary. Second, they translate Wilhelm's title – "I do my work as a judge [*Assessor*] in the court" (*EO2* 323 / *SKS* 3, 305) – as 'judge,' while 'assessor' (a literal translation) is almost certainly a better representation of Wilhelm's position. Hong and Hong elsewhere in *Either / Or* translate *Dommer* as 'judge,' which indeed is the Danish equivalent of judge as either a professional title or as a term for a person judging some matter whether formally or informally. The position of assessor, which the character Wilhelm claims he occupies, still involved in judging (*at dømme*) legal matters, and seems to have required moderating between parties and conferencing between various legal bodies, including proper judges. Presumably, though, the character Wilhelm would not have been a trial judge. See *SKS* K2-3, 343 (305,28).

[9] It is not that every word A and Wilhelm utter is false or foolish. They are both insightful, but are nonetheless the brushstrokes of Kierkegaard's satire. It is rather in the broad methods with which each orders his life that the absurd result of each way of living becomes clear. In this sense, the satire of *Either / Or* is like that of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" (1729), which takes individually plausible granular steps toward an irrational and horrific conclusion. See Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal and Other Writings* (Richmond, UK: Alma, 2018 [1729]), 23-46. Kierkegaard owned a collection of Swift's writings, and read at least Swift's fiction: Jonathan Swift,

frame their arguments in terms of how one can decide how to live (a first principle or

Grundsætning); though this question takes several shapes in *Either / Or*, the persistent thread

through both parts of the text comprises, metonymously, a conversation about how the individual

ought best to explore, express, and constrain erotic desire for a woman or women. (In this text, as

with much of Kierkegaard's writing, the pronoun is masculine, and the desire heteronormative).

More specifically, the text focuses these broader questions on whether, and how, a young adult

man should decide to marry.

 Despite structural similarities to Kant's antinomies, unlike any strictly intellectual-

philosophical dialectic, *Either / Or* is crafted to reveal the failures of its thesis and antithesis, not

through a discursive, propositional *reductio ad absurdum*, but rather through the palpable

inadequacy (and corresponding anticipation of regret) of living either the thoroughgoing

aesthetic life, or a rigidly ethical life, made manifest through the conversation between A and

Wilhelm. In this way, Kierkegaard transposes the structure of a philosophical dialectic (whether

Kantian, or even Socratic) onto the narratives of fictional characters; the *reductiones ad*

absurdum are to be found within the lives (of the pseudonyms) the text explores. Indeed, the

subtitle of each part of the book is "A Life-Fragment." These lives, the reader can discern,

inevitably result in a form of regret (*Fortrydelse*) due to how each organizes their desires.

"Unmaßgeblicher Vorschlag," in *Satyrische und ernsthafte Schriften*, trans. Johann Heinrich Waser [under pseudonym Johann von Breitenfels], vol. 1 of 8, 3rd ed. (Zurich: Orell, Geßner, Füeßlin und Comp., 1766) [*ASKB* 1899], 51-68.

 The method of *Either / Or* is perhaps even closer to that of filmmaker Paul Verhoeven in *Starship Troopers* (1997), which depicts through satirical hyperbole a practical result of the logic of American militarism and neo-colonialism. In an interview, Michael Ironside (Lt. Jean Rasczak, in the film) offered the following account of Verhoeven's satirical method: "Paul [Verhoeven] said, 'Let's talk about you doing this.' …I said, 'I gotta ask you a question' …I said, 'Can you explain to me why you're doing a right-wing, fascist… movie based on this book [*Starship Troopers* by Robert A. Heinlein; 1959]?' And he says…, 'If I tell the world that a fascist way of doing things doesn't work, nobody would listen to me. So I'm gonna make a perfect fascist world, where everyone's beautiful, everything's shiny, everything has big guns and fancy ships but it's only good for killing fucking bugs.'" Adam Carolla, "Michael Ironside and Kristen Chenoweth" (14 Nov. 2014), *The Adam Carolla Show* (podcast), last accessed 14 July 2020, <http://theadamcarollashow.libsyn.com/Podcast/acs-michael-ironside-and-kristen-chenoweth>, 1:17:01.

Either / Or is a complex text, and there is certainly more to say about it than what I can accomplish here. What I need to establish for my thesis is how Kierkegaard characterizes the aesthetic, ethical, and eventually religious stages. They are, for Kierkegaard, archetypal attempts through which an individual formulates, critiques, and sets up practical rules to direct living their life with respect to their particular natural desires, and desire in general. (In the case of the aesthetic and ethical, these are – for reasons I explore throughout this dissertation – inadequate to the nature of the human being.) Doing so will provide a preliminary formulation of the nested 'either / or' structures that are significant through much of Kierkegaard's corpus, and which will recur throughout the texts I assess directly and argue about substantively.

A. A

> Alexander wept when he heard Anaxarchus discourse about an infinite number of worlds, and when his friends inquired what ailed him, "Is it not worthy of tears," he said, "that, when the number of worlds is infinite, we have not yet become lords of a single one?"[10]
>
> "For having only that one Hope, the accomplishment of it, of Consequence must put an End to all my Hopes; and what a Wretch is he who must survive his Hopes! Nothing remains when that Day comes, but to sit down and weep like *Alexander*, when he wanted other Worlds to conquer."[11]

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[10] Plutarch, *On Tranquility of Mind*, in *Moralia, Vol. VI*, trans. W. C. Helmbold, *Loeb Classical Library* 337 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 176-177 (466D).

[11] Fainall, to Mrs. Marwood. William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (as performed in 1710), in *The Works of William Congreve,* vol. II, ed. D. F. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 130 (Act II, Scene III, lines 4-9). This is the passage that villain Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman) alludes to in a well-known line from *Die Hard*: "And when Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer." John McTiernan, Lawrence Gordon, Joel Silver, et al., *Die Hard* [Motion picture] (Gordon Company and Silver Pictures, 1988).

We (may as well) begin with A, our representative of the *aesthetic* stage. In a subsection itself titled "Either – Or" within a collection of aphorisms labeled "Diapsalmata," A recounts a bit of wisdom before he explains his fundamental practical principle:

> Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way… Hang yourself, and you will regret it. Do not hang yourself, and you will also regret it. Hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. Whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. This, gentlemen, is the quintessence of all life-wisdom.[12]

Every choice ends in regret. And regret indicates that the chosen first principle, which concludes in dissatisfaction and regret, was a mistake. In light of this, on what principle does A begin?

> My wisdom is easy to grasp, for I have only one principle [*Grundsætning*], and even that I do not depart from [*gaaer ud fra*]. One must differentiate between the subsequent dialectic in either/or and the eternal one proposed here. So when I say that I do not depart from my principle, this [statement] does not have the opposite of being a point of departure [*en Gaaenudderfra*] but is merely the negative expression of my principle, that by which it comprehends itself in contrast to being a point of departure or a non-point of departure. I do not depart from my principle, because if I departed from it, I would regret it, and if I did not depart from it, I would also regret it.[13]

A's first principle is ostensibly not to begin. Yet A also refuses to begin with this principle, thus avoiding even making not-beginning the point from which he would begin. Why? Because he would regret beginning from any point of departure, and also from not doing so. Intellectually, he is trapped in a self-refutation, one framed to criticize a cross version of Hegel's philosophy as a system that begins without presuppositions; for a principled refusal to begin is to begin with such a refusal. But what is more significant is that the hesitation to begin is governed by the anticipation of regret. Regret in *Either / Or* is, for A – and I believe, for Kierkegaard – a tragic marker of goals unreached, desires unfulfilled. In the interest of avoiding this type of regret (and

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[12] *EO1* 38-39 / *SKS* 2, 47-48. I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong.

[13] *EO1* 39 / *SKS* 2, 48. I have modified the translation by Hong and Hong, deploying the term 'principle' for *Grundsætning*, instead of 'maxim' and making other minor changes. Hong and Hong are inconsistent with how they translate *Grundsætning* even within the first part of *Either / Or*.

in the interest of living a good life), A self-consciously avoids beginning. The philosophical

directive to not begin thus serves to ballast A's life in light of anticipating regret at any decision

to pursue one desire rather than another. Such a regret might result from simple misfortune, from

A's failure to achieve his goal as a result of his own limitations, or even the inevitability of death

of a beloved, which would distance the desire once more. (This move is further explored in the

"Rotation of Crops," discussed below.) Descartes began methodologically with doubt, but only

moved beyond it through the reliability of his intellect, and the goodness of God to guarantee it.[14]

But a philosophical beginning is, for A and for Kierkegaard, never *only* methodological; if it is

sincere, it is practical in some way.[15] A, offering a hyperbolic form of Pyrrhonism, doubts any

proper beginning, doubts the doubt, and doubts the doubting of the doubt. So he decides not to

begin, as *both* a practical and philosophical rule.

But A *does* begin, and he knows it. (This is why he explicitly distinguishes between "the

subsequent dialectic in either/or," which refers, I believe, to his writings further on in the book,

and the "eternal" dialectic established parodically in these statements of mock-philosophical

principles.) He begins frequently, multifariously, sometimes deliberately and sometimes

erratically. He begins one way and then then begins the opposite way, again and again. He *has to*

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[14] About doubt, A notes, "I have, I believe, the courage to doubt everything; I have, I believe, the courage to fight against everything; but I do not have the courage to acknowledge anything, the courage to possess, to own, anything" (*EO1* 23 / *SKS* 2, 32).

[15] Kant's notion of the primacy of practical reason is resonant here. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 236-238 / AA 5:119-121. For the German edition, I have consulted [Kant], *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken* [AA], originally published as *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Katharina Holger, Eduard Gerresheim, Antje Lange, and Jürgen Goetze (Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969–); in *Elektronische Edition der Gesammelten Werke Immanuel Kants*, ed. Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaften der Universität Bonn (Korpora.org, 2008–), <https://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-esse n.de/Kant/>.

begin because *in concreto*, rather than in the "eternal dialectic," he *has* desires he acts on; each attempt to satisfy one of them is to begin again. There is no avoiding this.

After a grand intellectual exploration of different schemes for desiring, satisfying desire, and of regretting it in one way or another (beginning with an assessment of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in "The Immediate Erotic Stages"[16]), A arrives explicitly to assess the structure of his own desire in "The Rotation of Crops." He begins this short text by returning to the question of how to begin: "To depart from a principle [*At gaae ud fra en Grundsætning*]—experienced people affirm—shall be quite reasonable; I yield to them and depart from the principle that all human beings are boring."[17] The program A advocates is pragmatic; it is to avoid idleness by self-consciously beginning things, quitting, and beginning again— "The method I propose does not consist in changing the soil but, like proper crop rotation, consists in changing the method of cultivation and the kind of crops."[18] Do not cultivate or modify your own desires, but rather, in order to avoid staleness, shift the external factors in which you find yourself. Effectively, the plan is to begin and begin again so frequently that the regret of failure or unfulfillment can be muted, even if never avoided entirely. This is the lived, practical shape that approximates the abstract ("eternal") skepticism about beginning with which A began the "Diapsalmata."[19]

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[16] *EO1* 45-135 / *SKS* 2, 53-136. I have retranslated this sentence. Here Hong and Hong use different English words for the terms *Grundsætning* and *at gaae ud fra* than they do in the "Diapsalmata."

[17] *EO1* 285 / *SKS* 2, 275.

[18] *EO1* 292 / *SKS* 2, 281.

[19] Moreover, it seems, formally, to mimic the exploits of Don Giovanni, yet not with mistresses and victims but instead with practical principles.

In the "Rotation of Crops," A makes the following recommendations – "Guard… against *friendship*,"[20] "Never become involved in *marriage*,"[21] and "Never take any *official post* [Kaldsforretning],"[22] – before concluding, "In arbitrariness [*Vilkaarligheden*] lies the whole secret."[23] We should be careful about how we understand his conclusion. It might seem that A's method is exhausted in arbitrariness, in choosing to pursue whatever capricious desire pulls hardest. But A's point is not that arbitrary choices ought to be promoted or defended *per se*. (Here *Vilkaarlighed* implies both selecting things without a deeper reason, that is, meaning 'capriciousness' or 'indifference,' as well as preserving the power of choice, meaning something like 'choice-ness.') In fact, *aeterno modo* ('by means of the eternal mode' of *thinking*, that is, on the basis of intellection with his mind) – and A notes he operates "continually *aeterno modo*"[24] – the choice of whom to marry, whom to befriend, and which career to take on – that is, which temporary desires should be codified into an eternal commitment – are themselves actually quite arbitrary. Such decisions are the product of commitment to a desire, which *aeterno modo* has no special claim on a person; for example, to decide whom to marry would, on this account, be itself arbitrary, not reflecting some deeper rational good or purpose. The method of crop rotation secures against this sort of commitment. To do so would be to restrict future arbitrary choices, resulting in regret. For this reason, A warns us about marriage because such a commitment, if it

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[20] *EO1* 295 / *SKS* 2, 284.

[21] *EO1* 296 / *SKS* 2, 285.

[22] *EO1* 298 / *SKS* 2, 287.

[23] *EO1* 299 / *SKS* 2, 288. I have slightly adjusted the translation by Hong and Hong.

[24] *EO1* 39 / *SKS* 2, 48. This is likely an allusion to Baruch Spinoza's phrase *aeternus cogitandi modus* ('eternal mode of thought'), as it occurs in Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1 of 2, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 615 (VP40S; II/306.22). In the Latin version Kierkegaard owned: [Spinoza], *Benedicti de Spinoza opera philosophical omnia*, ed. A. Gfrörer (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1830) [*ASKB* 788], 429. It refers to the human mind, which is, on Spinoza's ontology, a mode under the attribute of thought.

really is the commitment it claims to be, will result in regret born of unhappiness in the marriage.[25] An "official post" is similar, for "A title can never be disposed of."[26] Friendship, too, risks compromising the goal of achieving "complete suspension."[27]

I want to focus in on two important ideas that have been exposed here. The first is that A, regardless of his principled skepticism about where to begin, begins despite himself. He begins by attempting to suspend his beginning, but inevitably this suspension itself collapses. It is impossible for him – for anyone, Kierkegaard wants to say – to choose entirely not to choose. A's choice is clear; it is, hopelessly, to stave off boredom and regret. Second, A's discussion of arbitrariness surrounding the (perhaps bourgeois Golden-Age-Danish) life goals of marriage, close friendship, and an official title draws attention to a feature of such commitments: they are no less arbitrarily decided upon than the flippant seductions of a Don Giovanni. A's observation about arbitrary choices is noteworthy, and I believe Kierkegaard wants us to keep it in mind, as I turn to the *ethical* stage of existence in the second part of *Either / Or*.

But before moving to the *ethical* archetype of assessor Wilhelm, there is the infamous "Seducer's Diary." The focus of the diary is the self-conscious decision to commit to a principle (namely, the figure of the woman Cordelia). While marriage, friendship, and an official title are suggestive of the sort of commitment that would constrain, or even deny desire, the commitment in the "Diary" is to an object *qua* object of desire. Put differently, the "Diary" analyzes the effect on a subject of self-consciously choosing to let an accidental desire become a fixation and

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[25] *EO1* 296 / *SKS* 2, 285.

[26] *EO1* 298 / *SKS* 2, 287.

[27] *EO1* 295 / *SKS* 2, 284.

principle for action. (As we will see, this is not quite the same as, in the case of Wilhelm, choosing to marry; in the "Diary," the excitement of desire is still in the driver's seat.)

The "Seducer's Diary" is a collection of journal entries and letters by a man named Johannes, though some letters by the object of his affection, Cordelia, are also included at the beginning. (A lists himself as the editor of the letters and entries, but not the author of any them.[28]) Johannes stumbles on the maiden Cordelia exiting a carriage and, smitten in the moment, selects her, somewhat arbitrarily, to become the object of his seduction. He self-consciously makes her his *idée fixe*; he will desire that she desire him.[29] After a long, even tedious build-up of seduction, the moment comes. The sexual act itself goes undocumented, but immediately after: "Why cannot such a night last longer? …But now it is finished, and I never want to see her again. When a girl has given away everything, she is weak, she has lost everything, for in a man innocence is a negative element, but in woman it is the substance of her being. Now all resistance is impossible, and to love is beautiful only as long as resistance is present… she has lost her fragrance."[30] The diary ends on this note, with palpable shame and regret. Setting aside – if at all possible – the misogyny and sexist essentialism of this passage,[31] it

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[28] *EO1* 8 / *SKS* 2, 16. Victor Eremita, the pseudonymous editor of *Either / Or*, expresses skepticism that A is a separate individual than Johannes (*EO1* 9 / *SKS* 2, 16).

[29] Johannes' initial encounter with Cordelia (from a distance) is not at first distinct from a moment of attraction or infatuation; he is smitten by her "beauty" and (disturbingly) her "tiny feet," about which he remarks several times (*EO1* 314 / *SKS* 2, 304-305). However, after watching her the first day, he is not satisfied to let her be one object of desire among many. He places her self-consciously at the center of his desires: "No impatience, no greediness—everything will be relished in slow draughts; she is selected, she will be overtaken" (*EO1* 317 / *SKS* 2, 307).

[30] *EO1* 445 / *SKS* 2, 432.

[31] Even if we grant that Johannes is a pseudonym within a pseudonym within a pseudonym (and also framed as a Hannibal Lecter-like aesthetic villain pursuing a victim), Kierkegaard's use of the woman character Cordelia to make a broader point about the nature of desire (not to mention the sexual coercion implied in the term "resistance") strikes me as unnecessary, sexist, and – simply put – cruel. My brief interpretation of this section of *Either / Or* should in no way be understood as a defense of its author, who demonstrates here and elsewhere his penchant for instrumentalizing women in the composition and publication of nauseating fanfiction about himself – equal parts self-gratifying and -lacerating. Later I will investigate other analogies and allusions to narratives in which a male character's desire (desire understood broadly) for a woman character is used by Kierkegaard to examine the

is clear from it that, in the consummation of his desire to seduce Cordelia, Johannes' desire itself dissipates. Cordelia's virginity was a type of "resistance," which maintained the distance between his desire and its conclusion; without it, there is no longer any pull for him. Johannes has, in a word, succeeded at grasping what he desired. Upon reaching its destination, desire foundered on the rocky shore. His desire – an allegory for all such particular desires – is revealed to be merely negative, a lack (like the Latin ablative).[32] To fulfill the desire is to fill the lack, and thus to annul it. The result is emptiness and regret.

Passion: An Aside

But why should the fulfillment of a desire result in emptiness? Should it not constitute the very the moment of satisfaction Johannes sought? The explanation for this lies in Kierkegaard's notion of passion (*Lidenskab*), explored prominently throughout A's writing. Passion is

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conditions and limits of desire in general. Indeed, this is something of a trope in Kierkegaard. For instance, in a (non-pseudonymous) 1844 journal entry, Kierkegaard has the following to say: "The silence of individual life is like a woman's virginity, and the one who breaks it is like a woman who is about to love for a second time, and a woman who is about to love for a second time is like a broken flower" (*KJN* 2, 200 / *SKS* 18, 219; JJ:244). I believe there is no reason to save Kierkegaard from the charge that these tropes consistently undermine the agency of human beings other than men, specifically women. I will not take up this issue prominently in the dissertation simply because there is not the space to do it justice, and because other scholars have conducted serious studies on this topic. See, e.g., Wanda Warren Berry, "The Heterosexual Imagination and Aesthetic Existence in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Part I," in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Céline León and Sylvia Walsh (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 24-49; and for a more recent work, Deidre Nicole Green, *Works of Love in a World of Violence: Feminism, Kierkegaard, and the Limits of Self-Sacrifice* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

[32] One is also reminded of Augustine discussing the nature of desire in the *Confessions*: "What is it in the soul, I ask again, that makes it delight more to have found or regained the things it loves than if it had always had them? …The victorious general has his triumph, but he would not have been victorious if he had not fought; and the greater danger there was in the battle, the greater rejoicing in the triumph… There is no pleasure in eating or drinking, unless the discomfort of hunger and thirst come before." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2nd ed., trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2006), 145-146 (VIII.3.7) / Augustine, *Confessions, Vol. 1: Introduction and Text*, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 91.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus also suggests a connection between non-Christian desire and a lack, or something "missing": "But then the understanding stands still, as did Socrates, for now the understanding's paradoxical passion that wills the collision [with something that cannot be understood] awakens and, without really understanding itself, *wills its own downfall*. It is the same with the paradox of erotic love [*Elskov*]. A person lives undisturbed in himself, and then awakens the paradox of self-love as love for another, *for one missing*" (*PF* 38-39 / *SKS* 4, 244; my italics).

inextricably connected with desire, but a desire is not precisely a passion. One of the clearest articulations of passion is in the "Diapsalmata":

> On the whole, a reason [*Grund*] is a curious thing. If I regard it with all my passion [*Lidenskab*], it develops into an enormous necessity that can set heaven and earth in motion; if I am devoid of passion, I look down on it derisively. —For some time now, I have been speculating about what really was the reason that moved me to resign as a schoolteacher. When I think about it now, it seems to me that such an appointment was just the thing for me. Today it dawned on me that the reason was precisely this—that I had to consider myself completely qualified for this post. If I had continued in my job, I would have had everything to lose, nothing to gain. For that reason, I considered it proper to resign my post and seek employment with a traveling theater company, because I had no talent and consequently had everything to gain.[33]

If satisfying a desire is like completing a circuit, then passion corresponds to the voltage of the battery, something which 'pressures' the electric current, and which motivates the individual toward action. This is why, if A regards a reason to perform an action with passion, he "can set heaven and earth in motion." Without passion, the reason is just a consideration, which exerts little force on him. Even if it is a 'good' reason for doing something (that is, *rationally*), it might generate only indifference. After all, someone can have good reasons for doing different actions, some of which might be mutually exclusive; which reasons hold the most sway (if any) resides in this idea of passion. (This captures the common emotional circumstance of a person with depression knowing that some action might improve their condition but being unable to 'will' themselves to perform that action on that basis.)

This passage further reveals that passion is not independent of one's desires but is a function of how those desires are organized, and how close the individual is to satisfying them. A recognizes that he has good reasons to be a schoolteacher, but he has resigned this post because he was too qualified. It seems that passion is stronger when someone has everything to gain, but here, because A already had achieved his goals, there was nothing more to gain. The 'distance'

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[33] *EO1* 32-33 / *SKS* 2, 42.

between him and his desire was reduced to zero, so he was no longer passionate about it. His desire only provided an attractive force (by way of his passion) insofar as it offered something *missing*, insofar as it promised to fill a lack. When two magnets come together, the system's net force is annulled. Because he is so *unqualified*, he takes up a new profession in a traveling theater company, hoping to jump-start his passion again. Passion is like a wound that requires the object of desire to heal and complete it. (Here, Kierkegaard plays on the word *Lidenskab*'s double meaning: *passion* and *suffering*.) When the suffering wound is healed, the motivation is annulled.

A's attempt to jump-start his passion by changing jobs also explains why, in the "Rotation of Crops," A might find some initial pleasure in cycling through different objects of desire; as A puts it elsewhere in the "Diapsalmata," "Wine no longer cheers my heart… My soul is dull and slack; in vain do I jab the spur of desire [*Lystens Spore*] into its side…"[34] But A is aware this is no genuine fix. He needs something else, a meta-desire that will maintain passion charged: "If I were to wish [*ønske*] for something, I would not wish for wealth or power but for the passion of possibility, for the eye… that sees possibility everywhere. Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not. And what wine is so sparkling, so fragrant, so intoxicating."[35] Here A, perhaps without knowing it, anticipates Kierkegaard's Christianity as a solution to his problem. *Possibility* (Mulighed) – which I will explore explicitly in Chapter IV but obliquely throughout the thesis – in conjunction with Kierkegaard's conception of faith – may create the conditions for, or even be, this special object of desire. Hinting at this, A likens possibility to an intoxicating wine, possibly intended as an allusion to the Eucharist by Kierkegaard (the hand behind A).

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[34] *EO1* 41 / *SKS* 2, 50.

[35] Ibid.

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Johannes' regrettable seduction of Cordelia is the closing punctuation on the claim that

the passion of any natural desire will, if it is made a point of departure, conclude in its own

downfall. In this way, A proves the point with which he began: namely, one should not begin,

lest they regret it. But at the same time, A's refusal self-consciously to begin is self-refuting as a

practical principle. A's attempt to secure arbitrariness in the "Rotation of Crops," and the

dissipation of Johannes' desire upon consummation of the seduction, are testimony to the

inadequacy of the aesthetic way of life, in which one's decisions about how to organize one's life

are subordinate to particular (natural) desires that emerge.

This holds a key implication for how Kierkegaard understands the aesthetic stage.

Namely, human beings are creatures with particular desires, most of which do not emerge from

any rational source. The aesthetic way of living lets these desires take the lead when making

decisions (or refusing to make decisions) about how to live a life, and the quality of the life lived

depends on the fulfillment of such desires. However, regret at these pursuits is inevitable whether

the object of desire is grasped or not. On the one hand, the limitations of the individual or the

world may frustrate their pursuit, leaving them unfulfilled. One's love may be unrequited; even if

it is reciprocated, the love or beloved will eventually die. Here, we can recall Plutarch's account

of Alexander's tears: Alexander wept because – in his finitude – he could not conquer even one

of infinite worlds.

On the other hand, grasping an object of desire satisfies in a limited way, but then leaves

the individual without the guiding star of passion. For example, in the pursuit of revenge,[36]

completing vengeance concludes a journey by erasing the destination. The individual has the

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[36] This is a feature common to Greek tragedy and to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, for which A demonstrates fascination, but also a repulsion for his own fascination.

burden of beginning again. This is seen in the first part of *Either / Or* with the case of Johannes the Seducer, whose completion of the act leaves him floundering. Here we are reminded of William Congreve's account of Alexander: Alexander wept because he had succeeded at his tasks; with all worlds conquered and all hopes realized, what is there to be passionate about?

B. The Ethical: A Choice

It is a reasonable expectation of *Either / Or*'s reader that Wilhelm's letters will attempt a wholesale refutation of A's aesthetic approach to life, that ethics aims to argue in favor of commitment and (more specifically) marriage against the validity of the forms of desire that drive aesthetics. Indeed, Wilhelm is firm in his judgment that A's aestheticism – which he has experienced by exchanging letters and sharing his company – is deficient, but this is not because A's natural desires are somehow immoral, nor is it because natural desires are themselves unworthy of pursuit. Wilhelm describes his goals as follows: "There are two things that I must regard as my particular task: to show the esthetic meaning of marriage and to show how in it the esthetic may be retained despite life's numerous hindrances."[37] Wilhelm has no ideological

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[37] *EO2* 8 / *SKS* 3, 18. I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong, but in a way that is potentially (though not necessarily) significant. They place the translation of *deri* ('in it,' or 'therein') after "the esthetic" in a way that loads (perhaps inadvertently) thicker meaning into the English rendition than is in the original Danish. This has the effect of making *deri* an adverb qualifying the clause that follows ("may be retained despite life's numerous hindrances") such that it refers to the aesthetic already retained in the marriage. This indeed replicates the order of the words in Kierkegaard's original Danish: "…og at vise, hvorledes det Æsthetiske deri tiltrods for Livets mangfoldige Hindringer lader sig fastholde." However, given Danish grammatical rules and the structure of the entire subordinate clause beginning with "at vise, hvorledes…" (*to show how…*), there is nowhere else that the adverbial *deri* can be placed (except possibly after "fastholde"). Thus, it is ambiguous whether it should be translated as the Hongs do ("the esthetic in it"), or as I do ("in it the esthetic"). In my rendering, *deri* does not directly qualify "the esthetic" in the same way; it is not *only* the aesthetic within the marriage that "may be retained despite life's numerous hindrances." Rather, it is that in marriage or through marriage (*deri*), the aesthetic *in general* may be preserved despite life's numerous hindrances that would, outside of marriage, put it even more at risk. (I am grateful to Cæcilie Varslev-Pedersen for her assistance in interpreting the Danish in this passage.)

As I go on to say above, this has the effect of emphasizing that the aesthetic (in all cases) is put at risk by "life's numerous hindrances," and that marriage secures the aesthetic from these hindrances; the Hongs' translation instead seems to suggest that "life's numerous hindrances" still put the aesthetic within a marriage at risk, yet – as Wilhelm would, on this reading, argue – the aesthetic may still be retained despite this. I believe my interpretation is superior because, given the logic of Kierkegaard's construction, it would not make sense for Wilhelm to defend

opposition to attempting to live a good life by fulfilling natural desires. On my reading of this sentence, Wilhelm's point is that marriage serves as a tool for the aesthetic – which, in general, organizes desires in such a way that they risk being frustrated by "life's numerous hindrances" – to be preserved, in the same way that, for example, a fireproof safe might secure someone's photographs, documents, and riches from theft or conflagration. Thus, Wilhelm thinks making a committed decision (such as marriage) is the best way to organize desire for the purpose of living the best possible life. As Mackey puts it, "Indeed the whole point of his critique of aestheticism is just that: it is not *practical*."[38] Put differently, Wilhelm's twofold task is to show that commitment does not conflict with pursuit of natural desires and in fact makes the pursuit of desire more satisfying (this is what is meant by marriage having an "esthetic meaning"), and second, that a decisive commitment secures the individual's pursuit of a desire in a world that, without it, would present "numerous hindrances" (i.e., misfortune, vicissitudes of life).

The common element to both Wilhelm's and A's conceptions of the best possible life is that, to get there, one needs some method of attempting to fulfill natural desires despite the limitations of the world and of the human being. In A's case, we saw that practical rules could be set up to make sure that desires could be explored, pursued, and fulfilled, but, as expressed in the "Rotation of Crops," it was essential to preserve openness to future desires by limiting commitment to any one of them. (The anticipation of regret motivates this arrangement, for A never wants to *lose* any possible object of desire; he only ever, as it were, memorizes scripts,

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marriage as a mode of expressing the aesthetic *despite* "life's numerous hindrances" that *yet continue to put the aesthetic at risk within marriage*. Moreover, this section of the chapter aims to show how marriage is Wilhelm's strategy for channeling and preserving the aesthetic for the very reason that without it (or without a similar sort of commitment), natural desires risk greater frustration due to misfortunes and the limitations of the self to achieve them (that is, "life's numerous hindrances"). Such hindrances are a challenge to aesthetics (and desire) in all circumstances; marriage is simply a form of protective armor.

[38] Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, 40.

never performs them.) In Wilhelm's case, desire is understood to be optimally pursued by making a decision about a particular one and sticking to it (unlike Johannes the seducer), as though by yoking oxen and using them to drive the cart.

Wilhelm's model functions by preserving the possibility of a good-enough life in the tension between expectancy and loss. We can see this at work in his description of his happy relationship with his spouse:

> You [A] have known me for many years; you have known my wife for five. You consider her rather beautiful, exceptionally charming, which I do, too. I know very well, however, that she is not as beautiful in the morning as in the evening, that a certain touch of sadness, almost of ailment, disappears only later in the day, and that it is forgotten by evening when she truly can claim to be appealing. I know very well that her nose is not flawlessly beautiful and that it is too small, but it nevertheless pertly faces the world, and I know that this little nose has provided the occasion for so much teasing that even if it were within my competence I would never wish her one more beautiful. This attaches a much more profound significance to the accidental in life than that which you are so enthusiastic about.[39]

The most prominent features of Wilhelm's relationship to his spouse reside not in her proximity to some ideal standard of beauty; it is actually in the elements of his spouse that fall short of some eternal standard ("the accidental in life") that Wilhelm invokes when explaining the success of their marriage. It is this attention to the accidental that explains Wilhelm's defense of marriage in general, and moreover, his defense of the ethical. The presence of minor flaws attests to the security and stability of Wilhelm's way of life: he does not, as A does attempts to do, pursue every possible desire with unmeasured passion, instead resting in what pieces of the good life he has secured. A, on the other hand, anticipates regret when confronted with the reality that his pursuits of desire will fall short of some ideal standard. Without being able to grasp every possible good, what would be the use of a commitment like marriage? It would secure *some* good, certainly, but at the cost of every other romance he would sacrifice in order to do so.

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[39] *EO2* 9 / *SKS* 3, 19.

Hence, aesthetics does not make such a choice, while the ethical is willing to be satisfied with less; indeed, the ethical *chooses* to be satisfied with less. In one sense, the ethical (which marriage represents) is a form of self-denial that chooses to maintain *some* space between oneself and the object of desire.

This notion of choice is crucial, but it requires further elucidation. After all, the seducer Johannes *chose* to pursue Cordelia. What is the difference between marriage and Johannes' brand of seduction? For Wilhelm, the difference lies in how marriage structures the relationship between the self and the object of desire. For Johannes, seduction of the virginal Cordelia is an act of desire overcoming resistance, only to find that in closing the distance (and eliminating the resistance), the self is without the anticipated satisfaction. It has spent its passion in order to achieve what it passionately desired but does no longer. For Wilhelm, marriage effectively maintains a subtle distance between the self and the desired object; it preserves a shred of the resistance (and corresponding passion) in its attention to the accidental, which falls short of an (eternal) ideal. (This is what is meant by Wilhelm's claim that the aesthetic can be maintained in marriage despite "life's numerous hindrances.") In the case of Wilhelm and his spouse, he has chosen to marry a woman who is beautiful but finds comfort in how she falls short of perfection. To wish her a nose more beautiful, or to pursue a spouse with a very particular sort of beauty, would be to fall into the aesthetic trap in which fixating on limited (finite) desires results in regret. Effectively, the decision to marry keeps desire in suspension. This suspension protects desire from "life's numerous hindrances" through commitment, keeping it from complete frustration, and it also keeps it from resolving or dissolving, maintaining the passion behind it by preserving the gap.

This is why it is important that Wilhelm's wife "is the only one [he has] ever loved, the first…"[40] This aspect of their relationship can be accounted for in two ways. First, the person who becomes one's first love is arbitrary; no one chooses who it will be based on some rationale. Wilhelm never speaks of his spouse being a perfect person or perfectly compatible match; he does the opposite of A's recommendation in the "Rotation of Crops," instead choosing to commit to his first (arbitrary) love and closing off, through this choice, the possibility of other desires. Second, Wilhelm and A (likely Kierkegaard, as well) both appear committed to the idea that romantic love relationships (even unrequited loves) mimic one another in terms of the structure of passion and desire. Because of this, an individual's *first* experience of love is an original, maximally passionate desire of which all other loves are partial versions that simply replay the original. (This is why Wilhelm frequently discusses how, because he has married his first, they can practice "rejuvenat[ing] continually" their "first love"[41]; this is also why A writes, in the "Diapsalmata," "call[ing] to mind my youth and my first love—back then I longed [*da længtes jeg*]; now I long [*længes*] only for my first longing [*Længsel*]."[42]) Wilhelm's practical advice about marriage is thus to constrain and channel desire in a way that it can be fulfilled in moderation through some accidents, even as it means excising alternative options. Furthermore, the choice to commit to one's first love circumvents the potential problem of a gradual reduction in passion as later loves invoke and mimic the first one.

To follow Wilhelm's advice is to invite eternity, indeed to transform sensuous desire into "a little eternity" through a choice, or "determination of will," in the act of commitment.[43] This

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[40] Ibid.

[41] *EO2* 10 / *SKS* 3, 19.

[42] *EO1* 42 / *SKS* 2, 51. I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation.

[43] *EO2* 22 / *SKS* 3, 30.

commitment is formalized as a duty, and its arbiter is (nominally) the church, of which it is a sacrament. The culmination of this strategy is to balance the expression of love (*Kjærlighed*) to achieve a "harmonious unison of different spheres. In the same subject, only expressed esthetically, religious, and ethically."[44] To live ethically, for Wilhelm, is thus to muster the forces of commitment, through the authority of the church in marriage, to preserve love and, in so doing, keep the "despair" and "pain" of the aesthete at bay.[45] But this move is an act of relinquishing, or resignation— an admission that in this life, due to the nature of finitude, it will not be possible to secure every desire; therefore, some desires will be surrendered so that others may be pursued and kept— "Better by far to lose six men and keep your ship…"

Yet it is perhaps unclear why Wilhelm claims to champion *ethics* as a way of living. Wilhelm mentions duty, but how is the choice to commit in marriage an *ethical* choice *per se*? Surrendering some of one's own natural desires to secure others with greater reliability seems simply to be a type of prudential hedonism or perhaps a crude eudaimonism at best. Such a framing is not entirely incorrect, but Wilhelm's account is much more complex.

Let us examine Wilhelm's reasoning. Explicitly critiquing A's aesthetic way of life, Wilhelm writes, "Your choice [to live aesthetically by avoiding commitment] is an esthetic choice, but an esthetic choice is no choice. On the whole, to choose is an intrinsic and stringent term for the ethical. Wherever in the stricter sense there is a question of an Either/Or, one can always be sure that the ethical has something to do with it."[46] The basis of Wilhelm's logic is that any committed decision involves selecting one option at the expense of others; thus, an

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[44] *EO2* 60 / *SKS* 3, 65.

[45] *EO2* 147 / *SKS* 3, 145.

[46] *EO2* 166 / *SKS* 3, 163.

"Either/Or," if it is genuinely a choice between two options and not mere capriciousness or arbitrariness, implies letting something go, a type of sacrifice that A is unwilling to make. Engaging in this form of committed choice is to enter the ethical.[47] When Wilhelm writes immediately after, "The only absolute Either/Or is the choice between good and evil, but this is also absolutely ethical," his point is not quite that the ethical involves choosing good over evil[48]; it does, but more importantly it is that the distinction between good and evil is the absolutization of *any committed choice* on the ethical model. To be ethical is to choose to choose between good and evil. And any choice, if it involves absolute commitment (that is, if it is absolutely ethical on this scheme), is a choice of the good, making any less-committed quasi-choice a choice of evil. (Under ethics, Scylla is the only good choice because basing one's hopes on fortune – Charybdis – is choosing not to choose, thus to choose evil. The deliberate choice *constitutes* the ethical.)

But the ethical position, in taking up the same interest of aesthetics, has a complex dual perspective. For Wilhelm, both the following are the case:

> …I only want to bring you [A] to the point where this choice truly has meaning for you. It is on this that everything turns. As soon as a person can be brought to stand at the crossroads in such a way that there is no way out for him except to choose, he will choose the right thing… Consequently, either a person has to live esthetically or he has to live ethically. Here, as stated, it is still not a matter of a choice [*Valg*] in the stricter sense, for *the person who lives esthetically does not choose* [*vælger*]*, and the person who chooses the esthetic after the ethical has become manifest to him is not living esthetically, for he is sinning and is subject to ethical qualifications, even if his life must be termed unethical.*[49]

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[47] A promise is an example (though not a core tenet, necessarily) of this logic, for a promise is simply a commitment that one will endeavor toward one state of affairs at the cost of pursuing other possible states of affairs. What constitutes such a promise or commitment? It may indeed be the case that, for Kierkegaard, minor commitments (such as, 'I'll call you tomorrow evening.') count as *ethical*. Because A and Wilhelm are hyperbolic characters (and archetypal representations for how to organize desire *aesthetically* and *ethically*), Wilhelm might indeed find failing to hold to a minor commitment to be a mark of one's youth or immaturity and a dereliction of duty, while A might even find such minor commitments to be, at least in principle, far too constraining.

[48] *EO2* 166-167 / *SKS* 3, 163.

[49] *EO2* 168 / *SKS* 3, 164-165 (my italics).

Rather than designating the choice between good and evil, my Either/Or designates the choice by which one chooses good and evil or rules them out. Here the question is under what qualifications one will view all existence and personally live. *That the person who chooses good and evil chooses the good is indeed true, but only later does this become manifest, for the esthetic is not evil but the indifferent.* And that is why I said that the ethical constitutes the choice. Therefore, it is not so much a matter of choosing between willing good or willing evil as of choosing to will, but that in turn posits good and evil.[50]

The space between the aesthetic and the ethical is the distinction between arbitrariness and intentional decision. Hence, as Wilhelm writes in the second passage, "the esthetic is not evil but the indifferent." But from within the ethical, choosing the aesthetic – or, choosing not to choose – is to sin. Outside the ethical, one may be led into the ethical for prudential reasons.[51] But from within the ethical, to move to the aesthetic would be to doubt the integrity of a commitment to secure happiness better than the posture indifference.

Though Wilhelm nowhere says that one cannot return to an aesthetic life from an ethical life, it is clear how there is a 'stickiness' to the ethical. Within the ethical – once one has chosen to choose – one must ask which accidental desires to commit to, in order to secure them from "life's numerous hindrances." As Wilhelm notes, the ethical involves choosing between two

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[50] *EO2* 169 / *SKS* 3, 165 (my italics).

[51] Note that this runs contrary to MacIntyre's interpretation of *Either / Or* in *After Virtue*, in which he attributes to Kierkegaard's thought a thoroughly non-rational chasm between the aesthetic and ethical. MacIntyre writes, "But now the doctrine of *Enten-Eller* is plainly to the effect that the principles which depict the ethical way of life are to be adopted *for no reason*, but for a choice that lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count for us as a reason" (*After Virtue*, 42). MacIntyre goes on to criticize Kierkegaard on this point: "Yet the ethical is to have authority over us. But how can that which we adopt for one [*no*; sic] reason have any authority over us? The contradiction in Kierkegaard's doctrine is plain" (ibid.). (The phrase "one reason" includes a typographical error that persists throughout several published editions of *After Virtue*. Anthony Rudd also reads "no reason" instead of "one reason." See, e.g., Rudd, "Alasdair MacIntyre: A Continuing Conversation" in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy (Tome III: Anglophone Philosophy)*, ed. Jon Stewart, *KRSRR* 11 (Farnam, Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 125; and MacIntyre, "Excerpt from *After Virtue*," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2001), xxxviiin2.) As I have argued, Wilhelm's argument is based on what – prudentially – results in the best way for the self to relate to what it desires. The movement between aesthetic and ethical indeed involves *choosing* the ethical, but this choice is *not* arbitrary. The authority of the ethical does not lie in the abstract power of choice, but in the prudential decision to commit to some accidents over others. A more serious question would be whether reason (prudential or otherwise) is sufficient to move someone from the aesthetic stage to the ethical stage. (It is clear that reason is insufficient to move someone into Christianity.)

(between good and evil) because if a person, such as A, "ponders a host of life tasks, then he…does not readily have one Either/Or but a great multiplicity."[52] (One recalls A's "Rotation of Crops" or the seductions of Don Giovanni.) But this means "the self-determining aspect of the choice has not been ethically stressed"[53]; since the "Either/Or" has not been 'felt,' no choice is yet absolute, and it is in fact still within aesthetics. In this nexus of self-determination, William claims that a new form of dignity arises. The person who lives aesthetically and "says that he wants to enjoy life," writes Wilhelm, "always posits a condition that either lies outside the individual or is within the individual in such a way that it is not there by virtue of [*ved*] the individual himself."[54] For Wilhelm, this is what makes the aesthetic life vulnerable. But duty, on the contrary, emerges from personality (in its several meanings), and also constitutes the individual in history. To be an "ethical individual, then" is not to have "duty outside himself but within himself."[55] At the apex – and in accord with Kierkegaard's interpretation of Hegelian ethics – "The task the ethical individual sets for himself is to transform himself into the universal individual."[56] Through the power of choice, what began as a prudential concern with living happily and satisfying desire despite "life's numerous hindrances" serves as the point of departure for an ascent into a morally concerned "social" or "civic self," one where what is personally desired is subordinated to the universal good.[57] Hence, according to Wilhelm, "as [the

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[52] *EO2* 167 / *SKS* 3, 163.

[53] Ibid.

[54] *EO2* 180 / *SKS* 3, 175. This sentence is emphasized in the original and the Hongs' translation. I have removed the italics from Hong and Hong's English translation for easier readability.

[55] *EO2* 256 / *SKS* 3, 244.

[56] *EO2* 261 / *SKS* 3, 248-249.

[57] *EO2* 262 / *SKS* 3, 250.

ethical individual] becomes aware…, he takes upon himself responsibility for it all. He does not hesitate over whether he will take this particular thing or not, for he knows that if he does not do it something much more important will be lost."[58]

Wilhelm's explanation of how ethics involves an elevation of the power of self-determination into a form of social duty is incredibly complex, obliquely invoking elements of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.[59] I have barely touched on Wilhelm's account. What is crucial for now, for this dissertation, is that what began as a prudential critique of A's method of living the best life commits Wilhelm to a broader enterprise that, grounded in the power of self-determination, generates a demand that writes over the individual's natural desires with a form of social-moral responsibility (*Sittlichkeit*, or in Danish, *Sædelighed*). Self-determination becomes so significant that it trumps the goal of preserving the very natural desires which prompted the ethical turn in the first place.[60]

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[58] *EO2* 251 / *SKS* 3, 239. This formulation forecasts the dilemma of the tragic hero in *Fear and Trembling*.

[59] This connection between Hegel and Wilhelm has been claimed by numerous interpreters. Scholars have long drawn comparisons between Hegel's account of immediacy and mediation and Wilhelm's discussion of marriage's preservation of the aesthetic (on the one hand), and (on the other hand) between Hegel's discussion of universality and particularity and Wilhelm's attempt to balance the aesthetic and ethical. For the first, see Harald Høffding, *Søren Kierkegaard som filosof* […as a Philosopher] (Farum: Danske Forlag, 1989 [1892]), 97-113; and for the second, see Knud Hansen, *Søren Kierkegaard; ideens digter* […Poet of the Idea] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1954), 83-92. This tradition of scholarship is well-documented in Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially 183-184. Based on an assessment of Wilhelm's account of marriage, Stewart provides his own argument that Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* is at play here: "It should be noted here that Judge Wilhelm's doctrine of marriage is essentially Hegelian with respect to its content. In the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel treats the concept of marriage. In both places he argues that in marriage the immediate feelings of love that come from nature are *aufgehoben* and brought into an ethical [*sittliche*] relation by spirit. From this discussion it is clear that Judge Wilhelm is as much a Hegelian as the esthete at least with respect to methodology" (229; interpolation Stewart's).

[60] In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre charges Kierkegaard with incoherence based on the norms involved in Wilhelm's ethical view. MacIntyre remarks on "the conservative and traditional character of Kierkegaard's account of the ethical. In our own culture the influence of the notion of radical choice appears in our dilemmas over *which* ethical principles to choose. We are almost intolerably conscious of rival moral alternatives. But Kierkegaard combines the notion of radical choice with an unquestioning conception of *the* ethical" (*After Virtue*, 43). For MacIntyre, Kierkegaard is smuggling in conservative mores to his theory of radical choice, which MacIntyre attributes to an implicit commitment to Kant's ethics. I believe MacIntyre is right to be suspicious of Wilhelm's movement. It is not obvious how founding the ethical stage on a radical notion of commitment ends up in a broader conception of social duty that involves, as MacIntyre highlights, duties such as "promise-keeping, truth-telling." (ibid.). However,

Yet – and here we return to what is most compelling in A's account – for all Wilhelm's praise of marriage (and through an elaborate extension of reasoning, his praise of ethical commitment in general) as the best possible way of living, his stance does not actually respond to the most significant question of the aesthete: What about everything I forsake (in order to live ethically)? To empower the idea of choice with the notion of actualizing an element of eternity does not contest that, *aeterno modo*, each commitment has an opportunity cost. In short, Wilhelm's prudential account of the ethical is insufficient to satisfy the aesthete whose desire is that desire *as such* be wholly satisfied.[61] A would never choose the Scylla of ethics – not because of indolence or dilettantism or even pure indecisiveness – but because he would be unwilling to lose, per Circé's prediction, six of his soldiers. In the end, all A's hopes and desires will end up swallowed in some maw or other, but this is not – as Wilhelm often accuses him – the result of taking an ungenuine or unprincipled stance.[62] Wilhelm, in short, does not take seriously enough A's rebellion against the limitations of himself and of the world. But through pseudonymous editor Victor Eremita's side-by-side arrangement of the aesthetic and ethical stances into an 'either / or,' we see that Kierkegaard does.

MacIntyre is incorrect in identifying Wilhelm's perspective with Kierkegaard's. While Wilhelm's logic is hard to follow, and indeed seems shaky, it likely represents Kierkegaard's own (often faulty) interpretation of Hegel, which Kierkegaard hopes, in *Either / Or*, to criticize through Wilhelm's pen as a problematic basis for life.

I have not located sufficient textual clues to argue the following definitively: My hypothesis for how Kierkegaard works out the relationship between, first, a commitment to one's first love in marriage, and, later, a broader form of *sittlich* duty (which marks the apex of the ethical stage), is that, by taking an arbitrary commitment as a point of departure, the ethical individual is thrust into his own dilemma: given the reality of lingering natural desires and the opportunity costs involved in any major life commitment, the individual can revert to an aesthetic life (faltering in their commitment), or they can further fetishize the act of commitment itself. Kierkegaard indeed associates the surface features of Kant's or Hegel's Enlightenment-era social ethics with this type of free will-fetishization. But more importantly, Kierkegaard (through Wilhelm) seems to think that any decision to meaningfully organize a life based on the possibility of free commitment will collapse into one of those two directions: aestheticism (again), or a theory of universally binding ethical commitment (whatever shape it may take).

[61] Moreover, Wilhelm's sincere life (alongside his tedious, dry epistles) really conveys to *Either / Or*'s reader the boredom that A so fears.

[62] See Wilhelm's accusation of A that A does not genuinely believe in his own "Either/Or," that is, his own model of indifference or arbitrariness: *EO2* 157-166 / *SKS* 3, 155-163.

What we can learn from the conversation between A and Wilhelm is that the aesthetic and ethical each maintain a position that the other cannot quite refute. (Though *Either / Or* does not offer us enough information to determine with certainty whether, for Kierkegaard, each side crucially gets something correct about what the human being needs to find fulfillment, I believe that, for him, this is indeed the case.) The aesthetic organization of life refuses to relinquish anything; it is skeptical of any principled starting point because it is unwilling to sacrifice one shred of the possibility of happiness it would, in beginning, need to give up. The ethical, on the other hand, is willing to commit, to risk, and to give up something because it recognizes the role of the human rational capacity for choice in finding happiness. It starts dogmatically because it is aware it could lose everything by being afraid of losing something. Strangely, both are equally 'rational' positions, insofar as they unfold the implications of a possible scheme for coordinating desire. Each comprises a partially completed cantilever, but with the tools A and Wilhelm have at their disposal, they lack the ability to finish the bridge to the other side. The implicit question lurking behind, or perhaps above both is: is there a possible position, pursuit, object, and/or desire that could close the gap? Is there something like A's yearned-for *possibility*?

C. Final Words

> Human thought knows the way to much in the world, penetrates even where darkness and the shadow of death are…, but the way to the good, to the secret hiding place of the good, this it does not know, since there is no way to it, but every good and every perfect gift comes *down* from above.[63]

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[63] *EUD* 134-135 / *SKS* 5, 137.

It is perhaps unsurprising that for Kierkegaard, God is the very thing an individual can love and

desire without dissipating their passion, in virtue of which all other loves click into place (or at

least *can* click into place). This idea has a particular valence introduced in the "Ultimatum" to

Either / Or and expressed with some subtly elsewhere: namely, the role of my own responsibility

in satisfying or failing to satisfy my desires because of "life's numerous hindrances."

 The 'final word' of *Either / Or* introduces a new voice to the text, that of an unnamed

pastor (*Præst*) from the Jutland heath (*jydske Hede*). While he does not explicitly refute either A

or Wilhelm – indeed, Wilhelm claims that the pastor "has grasped what I have said and what I

would like to have said to you [A]; he has expressed it better than I am able to"[64] – it does

introduce a more robust theological concept of sin than what appears in the conversation between

our aesthete and ethicist. For the purposes of this chapter, what is important to note is how its

perspective is distinct from both A and Wilhelm, and how it offers a method (other than

aesthetics or ethics) for responding to the vicissitudes of life.

 The "Ultimatum" is composed as a sermon, sent to Wilhelm, and then forwarded to A.

Under the title, "The Upbuilding That Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We Are

Always in the Wrong," its voice is similar to that of Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous

upbuilding discourses published in parallel to *Either / Or* and other pseudonymous works.

Critical to its inclusion in *Either / Or* is the religious commitment of the sermon's author, which,

unlike Wilhelm's involvement with Christianity (which seems to serve primarily as a way of

enforcing and validating duty), highlights the transcendence of God.

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[64] *EO2* 338 / *SKS* 3, 318.

The pastor begins by quoting Luke's narration of Jesus' cleansing of the temple.[65] It then shifts immediately into a recounting of prophetic visions about the destruction of Jerusalem,[66] before dwelling on the destruction of Sodom: "Is this the zealousness of God—to visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation, so that he does not punish the fathers but the children? What should we answer?"[67] The sermon makes no effort to calm its listeners by appealing to the role of God's goodness in alleviating suffering. In fact, the sermon presumes its audience's anxieties are not about suffering itself; rather, it presumes the listener is more deeply ill at ease about the theological question of how to resolve the realities of suffering with God's omnipotence and justice. So when the pastor writes, "In relation to God we are always in the wrong—this thought puts an end to doubt and calms the cares," the "doubt" to be quenched is much more abstract than experiential.[68]

What occurs over the sermon is a subtle redress of both A's and Wilhelm's methods for attempting to live the best possible life. This is accomplished not by showing how God guarantees the fulfillment of desires, but rather by showing that the sin of the individual justifies the possibility of God not providing the conditions for satisfying such desires:

> If your one and only desire [Ønske] was denied to you, my listener, you are still happy; you do not say: God is always in the right—for there is no joy in that; you say: In relation to God I am always in the wrong. If you yourself were the one who had to deny yourself your highest desire, you are still happy; you do not say: God is always in the right, for there is no rejoicing in that; you say: In relation to God I am always in the wrong. If your desire were what others and you yourself in a certain sense must call your duty, if you not only had to deny your desire but in a way betray your duty, if you lost not only your joy but even your honor, you are still happy—in relation to God, you say: I am always in the wrong. If you knocked but it was not opened [Mt 7:7], if you worked but received

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[65] *EO2* 341 / *SKS* 3, 321.

[66] The authors of the *SKS* commentary volumes are uncertain about the sources of the pastor's references. They mention as possibilities 1 Kings 9, Jeremiah 1 and 9, Ezekiel 7, Micah 3, and Revelation 10.

[67] *EO2* 342 / *SKS* 3, 322. See also Gen 18-19.

[68] *EO2* 353 / *SKS* 3, 332.

nothing, if you planted and watered but saw no blessing [1 Cor 3:7], if heaven was shut and the testimony failed to come, you are still happy in your work; if the punishment that the iniquity of the fathers had called down came upon you, you are still happy—because in relation to God we are always in the wrong.[69]

If we reflect on A's refusal to begin – lest he fail and regret it – we can recognize how the pastor's words offer both a vindication and a rejoinder to A's logic. As a vindication of A, the pastor avoids recapitulating Wilhelm's model of living; he does not suggest that one should desire a bit less, demand a little less of life, and begin with the choice of which things to surrender for the sake of the others. Indeed, it seems that we are right to have natural desires, right to pursue them and demand that life provide the conditions to satisfy them. From the perspective of the unnamed pastor, A's error rather would be, first, in not attributing fault to himself for his anticipated regret (rather than to finitude), and second, in presuming that happiness involves some satisfaction of natural desires. (Indeed, it seems that Wilhelm would also assent to this latter point.) The pastor's move is to dismantle the presumption that frustration of natural desires obstructs living the good life, and to locate a higher form of happiness in God's maintenance of justice *as such*, delimited by a thesis about the sin of the human being.[70] Genuine happiness is not, the pastor is saying, to get good finite things out of life according to your literal expectation (that is, to have your natural desires, no matter how noble, met). To have this conception of happiness would leave someone in the position of A, despondent that the game is

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[69] *EO2* 353 / *SKS* 3, 331-332. I have slightly modified this translation by Hong and Hong.

[70] In a late-1842 or early-1843 notebook entry tracing Leibniz' arguments (in the *Theodicy*) against Pierre Bayle, Kierkegaard anticipates the claim he makes as the unnamed pastor in *Either / Or*'s "Ultimatum," linking sin to happiness: "One can't deny that there is a weakness to all the responses L[eibniz] gives Bayle…; he tries to avoid the difficulty by saying that the issue is not about the individual hum. being but [rather] about the entire universe. This is foolishness, for if there is a single hum. being who has a legitimate reason to complain, the universe doesn't help. *One cannot deny the answer is that even in sin, hum. beings are greater, happier, than they would be if it* [*sin*] *had never come; for even his disunity means more than immediate innocence*" (*KJN* 3, 389 / *SKS* 19, 392; Not13:23; translators' interpolations, my italics). The association Kierkegaard explicitly makes is between being "greater, happier" in sin, due to this disunity "mean[ing] more than innocence." It is unclear what this form of happiness reflects psychologically, or in terms of desire.

rigged, or like Wilhelm, willing to settle for less under the guise of an arbitrary attribution of dignity to self-determination. Genuine happiness is instead rooted in (even if ultimately not completed by) the recognition of being wrong (*at have Uret*; being unright), and that being wrong means the game is not rigged (for you *deserved* not to have your natural desires met).

The "Ultimatum" performs the task of asserting that the limitations on the individual to fulfill desire and on the world to condition the transforming of those desires' fulfillment into a good life are the fault of the individual. By making it the individual's responsibility, one is prepared to readjust one's priorities and recognize the limitations of pursuing happiness in terms of natural desires. This move is even forecast in the opening prayer: "Father in heaven! Teach us to pray rightly so that our hearts may open up to you in prayer and supplication and hide no furtive desire [*Ønske*] that we know is not acceptable to you, nor any secret fear that you will deny us anything that will truly be for our good…"[71] What is left open is the possibility of a new (religious) type of desire and a corresponding new happiness, both commensurate even with a life of misery or of "heaven" being "shut." (Perhaps this is the *possibility* A yearns for in the "Diapsalmata."[72]) Though more will be said about this throughout the rest of the thesis, what is – here – understood (by the pastor) to be upbuilding is that an individual is responsible for their

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[71] *EO2* 341 / *SKS* 3, 321.

[72] The character A foreshadows Christianity elsewhere. Perhaps most strikingly, he writes, "If I were offered all the glories of the world or all the torments of the world, one would move me no more than the other; I would not turn over to the other side either to attain or to avoid. I am dying death." (*EO1* 37 / *SKS* 2, 46). In effect, no *worldly* desire (even to avoid "all the torments of the world" or "receive all the glories of the world") can stir his passion. But he continues: "And what could divert me? Well, if I managed to see a faithfulness that withstood every ordeal, an enthusiasm that endured everything, a faith that moved mountains [Mk 11:23; 1 Cor 13:2]; if I were to become aware of an idea [*en Tanke*] that joined the finite and the infinite. But my soul's poisonous doubt consumes everything. My soul is like the Dead Sea, over which no bird is able to fly; when it has come midway, it sinks down, exhausted, to death and destruction" (ibid.). Here A alludes to the idea of the incarnation ("an idea that joined the finite and the infinite"), revealing, first, that he already *is* aware of such an idea, and second, that such an idea – which Kierkegaard addresses in *Philosophical Fragments* as Johannes Climacus – holds promise for his passion.

own damnation. It is on this basis – not on aesthetic or ethical bases – on which one can being to arrange and pursue their desires.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

In this section of the chapter, we examined *Either / Or* as an effort to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of both the aesthetic and ethical methods of life for providing the conditions of happiness. The individual can either make a principled beginning for themselves or refuse to do so. If they refuse, they will never acquire happiness; yet if they take an arbitrary point of departure, they lose whatever possible elements of happiness they elected *not* to pursue and find themselves disappointed by what they do pursue and achieve. We can see through this how Kierkegaard conceives the fundamental crisis of being human. A's anticipation of regret upon the exercise of his freedom demonstrates a crucial problem intrinsic to the structure of desire. The human self wants more than it can by itself achieve. Due to no *apparent* fault of its own, its desires outstrip its capacities, and the capacity of the world, to realize. Yet the ethical does not solve the problem; by using the power of choice to constrain and channel desires, it proclaims the worthiness of a particular aspect of the human being (choice) while refusing to deliver all that it desires. Effectively, it finds a way to make the individual responsible for their own desires at the cost of grossly limiting what desires can be pursued.

Nonetheless, both A (the aesthetic) and Wilhelm (the ethical) advance components of a full picture of the good life that should be kept in mind throughout the dissertation. The central passion of the aesthetic, indeed its worthiness, resides in its refusal to surrender anything— it would never, by choice, abandon a limb in a trap's jaw. It *wants everything*. Yet this means it cannot give up anything to get anything else; it always skirts the edges of Charybdis— How long until the mouth opens? The core insight of the ethical is that the individual's subjectivity *must*

<p align="center">86</p>

intervene in the field of possible desires. The individual must play an active role in shaping their world, making cuts, drawing boundaries, limiting options, for it recognizes that the individual, under their own power, cannot *get everything*, cannot *sustain everything* based only on finitude and fortune. It sees the aesthetic at the edge of the whirlpool and says, "No thanks, I'll take my chances – that is, no chances – with Scylla." It makes itself into something satisfied with less than everything, less than perfect happiness.

Finally, in the "Ultimatum," we see foreshadowed a theological conception of sin, which ballasts, perhaps paradoxically, the notion that the individual is indeed responsible for living well. The "Ultimatum" swings in by changing the terms of the question, not offering a third paradigm for pursuing desires in order to achieve a good life, but rather rebranding what appeared to be a problem of finitude as a problem of sinfulness. Effectively, the ascription of blame challenges the ultimacy of the world's tragedy. It is, for the anonymous pastor, edifying (or upbuilding, *opbyggelige*) to know that one's inability to find happiness is one's own fault, not simply a limitation of existence. That is to say, consciousness of sin provides a foundation for constructing a Christian life that enables a new form of happiness. The pastor's remarks gesture to the Kierkegaardian axiom I mentioned in the introduction, namely that for the best possible life, one must be thoroughly responsible for whether they do or do not live such a life. The "Ultimatum" also supplies a response to both A and Wilhelm by gesturing to a spiritual desire – one pertaining to the justice of God's creative enterprise – that encompasses the natural desires, the satisfaction of which both of their strategies attempt to navigate.

CHAPTER II.
FAITH AND INCARNATION IN PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS:
CLIMACUS' THOUGHT-EXPERIMENT

> What good is a book that does not even carry
> us beyond all books?[1]

There is an odd moment in Matthew's Gospel – after the feeding of the thousands but before

Jesus' arrival in Caesarea Philippi – where Jesus chides his disciples for failing to understand his

warning: "Watch out, and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."[2] "It is because

we have brought no bread," they say, worrying that, because they had not packed their own food,

they might have to consume the potentially poisonous food of their rivals.[3] Jesus responds:

> "You of little faith, why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not
> perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many
> baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets
> you gathered? How could you fail to perceive that I was not speaking about bread?
> Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" Then they understood that he had
> not told them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and
> Sadducees.[4]

This pericope has resisted efforts at interpretation by theologians and Biblical scholars.[5] It seems

clear enough that the disciples have failed to recognize that Jesus' warning contains an analogy.

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 215 (eKGWB *FW-248*). The German edition consulted is Friedrich Nietzsche, *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe* [eKGWB], ed. Paolo D'Iorio (Paris: Nietzsche Source, 2009–), <http://www.nietzschesource.org/>; electronic facsimile of Nietzsche, *Werke (Kritische Gesamtausgabe)*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1967–); and Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel (Kritische Gesamtausgabe)*, eds. Colli and Montinari (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1975–).

[2] Mt 16:6 (*NRSV*). A parallel conversation is depicted in Mk 8:14-21 (*NRSV*), but its content and structure are quite different.

[3] Mt 16:7 (*NRSV*).

[4] Mt 16:8-12 (*NRSV*).

[5] See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2 of 3, trans. James E. Crouch, *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 349-352. I am grateful to Jennifer Nyström and Maria Sturesson for directing me to this resource.

The "yeast" referred to teachings, but the disciples first thought it referred literally to the fermenting agent for bread. Hence Jesus' answer: "I was not speaking about bread."

But Jesus scolding his disciples for failing to recognize an analogy is not particularly noteworthy. The oddness of the passage is rather in Jesus' reference to the feeding of the thousands before he remarks, "I was not speaking about bread." Why does he bother reminding them of this event?[6] It is possible that Jesus' admonishment is about the disciples' anxiety about physiological hunger. In this case, mentioning the feeding of the thousands would remind them that he has the power to generate or multiply food whenever they need, so they would not ever have to consume any local food. But this interpretation is awkward. In the canonical Gospels, Jesus does not perform miracles for the sake of his and his disciples' convenience. Moreover, the passage is situated between Jesus' refusal to provide a sign to the Pharisees and Sadducees[7] and a statement of his incognito,[8] both of which cut against presuming a cavalier deployment of Jesus' supernatural power.

I propose an alternative interpretation. My interpretation is not informed by critical scholarship on Matthew, and it is not an attempt to capture some historical, contextual meaning of this pericope; instead, I intend it to reflect how Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), conceives of the relationship between Christian teachings and (empirical) signs that affirm those teachings: When Jesus asks, "How could you fail to perceive that I was not speaking about bread?" the identities of the speaker and of the audience shift. In a moment of self-metatextual criticism, Jesus' voice becomes that of the

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[6] Luz poses a similar (rhetorical) question: "The disciples do not understand Jesus' saying [about leaven] because he speaks metaphorically. But how does it help in understanding the metaphor when Jesus reminds them of the feedings that involved real bread?" (ibid., 350).

[7] Mt 16:1-4 (*NRSV*).

[8] Mt 16:20 (*NRSV*).

narrator; the disciples become the reader: 'How could you (reader) fail to perceive that I (the Gospel according to Matthew) was not speaking about bread?' *When?* 'Now, and in the narrative of the feeding of the thousands.' The text calls out, through the character of Jesus, as if to say, 'Do not interpret me literally.' The bread means the substance of the teachings. The miraculous feeding of the thousands was only ever the multiplicative effect of the kerygma. Do not conflate teachings with bread, even as one may come to stand for another. Do not conflate a story of parables – a parable of parables – for a mere chronological-mythological account of past occurrences, and certainly do not idolatrize those occurrences or the miracles described therein.

In his corpus Kierkegaard never explicitly refers to the substance of this conversation between Jesus and the disciples.[9] But the meaning I have found in this pericope resonates with a key element of Kierkegaard's theology; it detaches the sensory miracles and other details about the sensory form of Christ from the soteriological content of God's incarnation. This is a theme that we can find through an investigation of *Fragments*, Kierkegaard's first major work on Christology, which, I will demonstrate, treats the relationship between Christ's (empirical) appearance and his teachings similarly to how I have read this passage of Matthew 16. In *Fragments*, Climacus raises philosophical questions about teaching and learning. He does so to occasion a description of a soteriology and a corresponding conception of faith that requires the occurrence of a decisive shift in history and opens up the possibilities available to subjectivity.

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[9] Kierkegaard invokes the language (as it appears in *NT-1819*) of Jesus admonishing the disciples many times in his scholarship, which occurs in Mt 16:6-12 and in Mk 8:14-21, as well as many other locations in the Gospels. For example, he alludes to the *NT-1819* translation of Mk 8:18 during a discussion of Socrates in the *Concept of Irony*: "one who has eyes to see… one who has ears to hear" (*CI* 211 / *SKS* 1, 255). But there are no confirmed examples of Kierkegaard addressing the content of this particular conversation between Jesus and the disciples. See *Ind.* 411 / *SKS-E*, "Bibelregister" (2014), accessed 12 July 2020, <http://sks.dk/reg/bib_0.asp>.

This occurrence is the incarnation. As an "absolute fact" (*absolut Faktum*), it must walk an ontological tightrope between necessary truths and the common facts of history.[10]

Though *Fragments* contains a complex series of images and arguments (several of which I evaluate here and in Chapters III, and IV), we can find an initial foothold on the text's trajectory in the book's title, which calls on the motif of bread and teachings visible in the pericope quoted above.

This book's full title in Danish is *Philosophiske Smuler, eller, En Smule Philosophi*; the title is translated into English as *Philosophical Fragments, or, A Fragment of Philosophy* or as *Philosophical Crumbs, or, A Crumb of Philosophy*.[11] The former (as rendered by Hong and Hong) emphasizes Kierkegaard's connections to German Romanticism.[12] But the latter draws attention to the fact that in the Danish New Testament, the word *Smule* usually refers to small pieces of bread: crumbs. Most prominently, *Smuler* indirectly points to the episode of Jesus' exorcism of the Canaanite or Syrophoenician woman's daughter.[13] A common Danish saying that the title likely alluded to is, "Even the crumbs are bread" (in today's Danish, "Smulerne er også Brød"), which expresses that having any small amount of something is better than having

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[10] *PF* 99 / *SKS* 4, 297.

[11] Because it has become the scholarly standard through Hong and Hong's English translation in the Princeton University Press series, I will continue to refer to the book as *Philosophical Fragments* or simply *Fragments*.
    Both translations of the word *Smuler* are reasonable, though each emphasizes one aspect of the term *Smule* at the cost of the other. The Hongs translate the term *Smule* as "crumb" within the body of the text on one occasion, demonstrating the difficulty of rendering its several meanings in English (*PF* 50 / *SKS* 4, 254). For a version with the term *Smuler* translated as 'Crumbs' in the title, see Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). The English word 'bits' could also suffice. See *ODS*.

[12] See, e.g., [K.] Friedrich Schlegel, "Fragmente," *Athenäum: eine Zeitschrift von August Wilhelm Schlegel und Friedrich Schlegel* 1, no. 2 (1798): 3-146 / Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's* Lucinde *and the Fragments*, trans. and ed. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 161-240. Kierkegaard owned copies of a great deal of Schlegel's writing and would have been familiar with philosophy in the style of aphorisms or fragments (*ASKB* 45, 76, 91).

[13] This episode occurs at Mt 15:21-28 and Mk 7:24-30 in both the *NRSV* and *NT-1819*.

nothing.[14] This saying, signified (in elided form) by the word *Smuler*, alludes in turn to the Canaanite woman's response to Jesus in Matthew 15 (which occurs not long before the events of the pericope I quoted above).[15] In this passage, the woman approaches Jesus to request help with her daughter's possession by a demonic entity. He is at first hesitant to act:

> But he answered, and said, "I was not sent out except to the prodigal sheep of Israel's house." But she came, and fell down before him, and said, "Lord, help me!" But he answered, and said, "It is not fitting to take the children's bread and cast it to small dogs." But she said, "Indeed, Lord. But dogs also eat from the crumbs [*Smuler*] that fall from their lords' table." Then Jesus answered, and said to her, "O woman, your faith [*Tro*] is great; let that which you want happen to you!"[16]

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[14] See Allan Karker, "Nordic language history and literary history I: Denmark," in *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vol. 1, eds. Oskar Bandle, et al. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 444. See also Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, 181, for Piety's defense of rendering the title *Philosophical Crumbs*.

Translating *Smuler* as 'Crumbs' in the title is not uncontroversial. One argument against it could proceed thusly: Should Kierkegaard have wanted to imply a connection to bread, he could have used *Stykker* instead of *Smuler*. (The former term more often refers to larger pieces of a food item, such as bread, pastry, or other baked goods, while the latter often connotes shreds of paper. See *DDS* and *ODS*.) Instead of a reference to bread (which 'Crumbs' highlights), it is likely that *Smuler* was chosen late in the authorial process of the book as a replacement of the word 'Pamphlets' (*Piecer*), which had formerly been part of the draft title and subtitle: *Philosophiske Piecer / eller / En Smule Philosophi* (with slashes indicating line breaks). (For the manuscript's title page with Kierkegaard's modification, see *PF* 176-177 / *SKS* K4, 173, 180.) One plausible reconstruction of Kierkegaard's thought process is that he sought to create a visual chiasm on the page with the title and subtitle, electing to do so by changing the term *Piecer* to *Smuler* in the title (rather than *Smule* to *Piece* in the subtitle). As an artifact of this original scheme, the word 'pamphlet' (*Piece*) still appears several times at the beginning and end of the book (*PF* 5-7, 109 / *SKS* 4, 215-217, 305). With the chiasm being Kierkegaard's primary goal in the late title change, no additional rationale for the word *Smuler* in the book's title – including any allusion to Biblical passages pertaining to bread – is necessary. (I am grateful to Niels-Jørgen Cappelørn for challenging me with the above argument, which I am about to oppose.)

While I find this line of reasoning convincing in part, I do not believe that Kierkegaard's late choice of changing *Piecer* to *Smuler* to create a chiasm is exclusive with an intention to allude to the bread imagery of the Gospels. For instance, Kierkegaard could have instead created the chiasm by changing the subtitle *En Smule Philosophie* to *En Piece (af) Philosophi*, but he did not; doing so would have made the text's residual self-references to a 'pamphlet' less awkward, leading me to believe Kierkegaard's reasoning behind the change had a deeper rationale than only to generate the chiasm. Therefore, I believe it is reasonable to recognize an allusion to bread in the book's title. For more details on the manuscripts and chronology of Kierkegaard's drafts of *Philosophiske Smuler*, see *SKS* K4, "Tekstredegørelse," 171-196.

[15] Karker, "Nordic language history and literary history I: Denmark," 444.

[16] Mt 15:24-28 (*NT-1819*). In the Danish: "Men han svarede, og sagde: jeg er ikke udsendt uden til de fortabte Faar af Israels Huus. Men hun kom, og faldt ned for ham, og sagde: Herre, Hielp mig! Men han svarede, og sagde: det er ikke smukt at tage Børnenes Brød, og kaste det for smaa Hunde. Men hun sagde: jo, Herre! Hunde æde dog og af de Smuler, som falde af deres Herrers Bord. Da svarede Jesus, og sagde til hende: o Qvinde, din Tro er stor, dig skee, som du vil!"

Though it is far from decisive, I believe I have further evidence that Kierkegaard had been considering the episode of the Canaan woman when titling *Fragments*, based on a line from a passage cut before the final draft of the book, which resembles a line from the episode of the Canaan woman in *NT-1819*. The (cut) passage was originally to have appeared in the final long paragraph of the first chapter, which – through the voice of an imagined

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Jesus rewards the Canaanite woman's insistence that she is worthy of his assistance despite not being a "sheep of Israel's house," that is, Jewish. She recognizes that whether one has a table setting or eats only what falls to the floor does not determine whether one is deserving of food (salvation). Jesus praises the woman for her faith (*Tro*) that those other than Jews are worthy of being granted *access* to salvation. Faith, for the Canaanite woman, is a faith that salvation and blessedness do not make arbitrary distinctions. The difference between the dogs and those with a seat at the table is like the 'difference' drawn in *Fragments* between firsthand witnesses of the incarnate god and those who come later, in which the contemporaneity between the individual and the god is preserved regardless of temporal and spatial distance.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

We already have several themes before us: a teaching that saves, the significance (or not) of sensorily experienced miracles, and the limits of faith. *Fragments* will weave together these themes in its argument about the dynamic and content of revelation through Christ (though neither the term "Christ" nor the name "Jesus" appear in the book). However, it is unclear to what extent *Fragments* contains a sincere theological project, rather than comedic play. I contend that – despite its comedic elements – the book genuinely advances a view about Christ, the nature of history, the structure of the human being, and the possibility of salvation, happiness, or blessedness (all viable translations of the term *Salighed*). Throughout Chapters II, III, and IV, I will argue that *Fragments* presents a defamiliarized version of Christianity, in light of which

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interlocutor – questions the novelty of the ideas central to the book (*PF* 21-22 / *SKS* 4, 229-230). The final line of the cut portion, in the voice of the imagined critic, reads, "Your projects are not just snatched out of thin air—but borrowed from the mayor's desk [*Bord*]" (*PF*, "Supplement," 189 / *Pap.* V B 3:14, 58; *PS* ms.4; I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation). The phrasing and final word of this cut line in Danish parallel the end of Mt 15:27 in *NT-1819*; the draft line reads, "…men laante hos Borgmesters Bord" ("but borrowed from the mayor's desk"), and the line in *NT-1819* reads, "…som falde af deres Herrers Bord" ("which fall from their lords' table"). The parallel rhythm and common ending between these two lines suggest to me an intentional allusion.

Climacus disconnects faith and salvation from the individual's capacity to recognize who was the incarnate God and where/when God incarnated: What may at first appear to be a book demonstrating the soteriological necessity of Jesus – or at least the received narrative about Jesus in the Gospels – more importantly argues for an account of the structure, capacities, and organization of the human being that make salvation (or happiness) possible, based on a defense of the historical novelty of Christianity. As I will show, Climacus' argument revolves around the distinction between (Kierkegaard's conceptions of) 'Paganism' and Christianity.

* * *

Straightaway, I want to remind my reader that the terms 'Paganism' (*Hedenskab*) and 'pagan' (*hedensk*) are, on my interpretation, technical terms for Kierkegaard. In the case of *Fragments*, Climacus' articulation of Socrates' religiosity (position A) attempts to capture the highest possible formulation of 'Paganism.' In this chapter I will continue the trajectory of this thesis, claiming that, for Kierkegaard (here, Climacus), these terms ('pagan' and 'Paganism') refer to the *boundaries* of any essentially historical soteriological scheme. And the term 'Christianity' (*Christendom*), on Climacus' definition, is the umbrella under which any such soteriological scheme falls. To this extent, the terms do *not* refer to peoples, cultures, or religious groupings in the way that someone might label an individual or society 'pagan' as slur. However – as is quite apparent – the terms are mustered by Kierkegaard (in *Fragments* and elsewhere) to channel connotations of peoples, cultures, and religious groupings in a way that blatantly dismisses or devalues those who have historically been labeled 'pagan.' Moreover, the distinction he makes overlooks religious traditions outside of Christianity that also advance a historical soteriology, and even denies the multiplicity of ideas that fall within the collection of traditions known as Christianity. Kierkegaard was – even if mainly through second- or third-

hand reports he had read – aware of religious and cultural diversity within and apart from Christianity; thus, he deserves criticism for his callous and uncritical decision to use this terminology. I will continue to use these terms because Kierkegaard does so, and because my task is largely exegetical. Should a constructive theological or philosophical project one day be developed on the basis of Kierkegaard's thinking, it would do well to move beyond these terms and their associations, in the interest of both inclusiveness and intellectual integrity.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

My thesis's account of *Philosophical Fragments* comprises three chapters. In this chapter (Chapter II), I outline the structure and analyze the terminology of the thought-experiment developed over the first three chapters of *Fragments*. What is crucial here is to explain the concepts of incarnation, occasion, condition, and faith as anchors for the possibility of the individual's happiness, and also to introduce a potential problem in Climacus' conception of faith, namely that it requires the historical occurrence of the incarnation ("absolute fact") but denies the role of historical evidence and knowledge of necessary truths as the basis for faith. I then assess the significance of the Climacus pseudonym and ask whether Climacus' arguments are supposed to be rationally convincing to his readers. Though a more complete engagement with Climacus' method of argument will wait until the end Chapter IV, it is worth noting before it begins that Climacus' thought-experiment is unlikely intended to be compelling in a strictly rational sense. Many of his arguments are incomplete, vague, hasty, or outright bad (several of which I draw attention to in footnotes). Even though I take these arguments seriously *as arguments*, my review of Climacus' thought-experiment will not endeavor to patch its holes; such a task would be to begin developing a systematic theology no one asked for, from material by an author who consistently denounced such efforts.

Chapter III contains the core part of my interpretation. In it I focus on a major locus of criticism by *Fragments*' readers that has been dubbed the "faith/history problem."[17] After reviewing scholars' interpretations of it, I use the faith/history problem as an occasion to investigate, and put pressure on, three sets of tensions between concepts central to Climacus' soteriology. These are tensions between (i) the god-teacher's offer of the faith-condition and the individual's decision to become a follower, (ii) the incarnation as a historical fact and the individual's receipt of the faith-condition by means of some occasion, and (iii) becoming a follower and the belief that a particular historical description of the incarnate god (for example, a narration of the life of Jesus of Nazareth) corresponds to the incarnation *qua* absolute fact. Put in traditional theological terms, these are tensions between (i) an offer of grace and justification, (ii) the incarnation and the offer of grace, and (iii) justification and concomitant beliefs about when and where God incarnated. Though Climacus' comments about these conceptual relationships are often ambiguous, the exegesis I perform and inferences I draw make it possible to pry open spaces between these sets of concepts in order to advance a solution to the faith/history problem. I conclude that, if the implications of Climacus' arguments are properly understood, being faithful (and finding happiness or salvation) does not require that any particular set of historical details, including context or descriptions, be identified *as* the particulars of the incarnate god. Faith needs (and permits) only a pinprick of historical data; instead, Climacus prioritizes the

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[17] Scholars who refer to this tension with the term "faith/history problem" include Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem"; C. Stephen Evans, "The Relevance of Historical Evidence for Christian Faith: A Critique of a Kierkegaardian View" (1990), in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 151-167; and Joshua Cockayne, "Empathy and divine union in Kierkegaard: solving the faith/history problem in *Philosophical Fragments*," *Religious Studies* 51, no. 4 (Dec. 2015): 455-476. Though scholarship has focused on *Fragments* as the primary locus of this tension, it is found, too, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, also authored under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Though the tension does not appear as centrally in Kierkegaard's other works, I believe a solution to the faith/history problem in *Fragments* bears strongly on how one would interpret issues (for example: Christology, faith, revelation) that overlap with the topics of other works, especially *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Works of Love* (1847), and *Practice in Christianity* (1850).

(subjective) moment in which the individual is modified by the incarnate god, as well as the subjective commitment to the facticity of the incarnation, over any act of belief (*Tro*) that aims to *locate* the incarnation in time and space. Indeed, the very feature of the incarnate god that enables a soteriology satisfactory to human beings and to the god essentially displaces the incarnation from any *particular* particular time and location in history, and any empirical description of that occurrence. The crucial fact of salvation must be historical and particular, but no purported origin point can be definitive. At the same time, the historicity of the incarnation is secured through a cryptic but recurring argument connecting the incarnation *qua* occurrence to the *idea* of the incarnation. (Ferreira has hesitantly characterized this argument as an "*a priori* 'proof'" that the god has incarnated.[18])

In Chapter IV, I provide an interpretation of *Fragments*' overall trajectory that affords a more thorough characterization of the model of the mechane I sketched in my introductory chapter. I begin by further untangling the '*a priori* proof' introduced in Chapter III (though, following Climacus, I refer to it here as the "wonder" – *Vidunder*[19]). The "wonder" is not really a proof, but instead prompts Climacus' reader to evaluate their own constitution as a subject in terms of a distinction between 'Paganism' and Christianity. This demarcation confronts the reader – who has presumably entertained Climacus' thought-experiment – with a decision about which structure of subjectivity (and which world) they inhabit: 'Pagan' or Christian. Without faith (available only if the Christian position is the case), the human being is left in a state of noetic entrapment that permits no plan for how the individual's life (as a finite being in time) can succeed in the pursuit of happiness or salvation (*Salighed*). In this way, Climacus' goal is not

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[18] Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem," 339-345.

[19] *PF* 36 / *SKS* 4, 242. See also Marcar, "Climacus' Miracle."

only to convince his reader of the possibility of (Christian) faith as a solution to a Socratic ('Pagan') problem; it is also to show that, if the idea of the incarnation holds any sway over someone, they are already the sort of subject that has been transformed by the incarnation, that is, the sort of being capable of seeing itself (and indeed becoming) suspended by the mechane. Perhaps this is because they live in Christendom and so have – like mother's milk[20] – tasted the teachings of Christianity, even if they remain in offense. Or perhaps it is because, for the first time, Climacus has made them aware of these ideas, serving as an occasion no less important to conveying the essence of Christianity than the historical Jesus.

A. Christianity as a Thought-Experiment

> To me a determinist world is quite abhorrent – this is a primary feeling. Maybe you are right, and it is as you say. But at the moment it does not really look like it in physics – and even less so in the rest of the world. I also find your expression, the 'dice-playing God', completely inadequate. You have to throw dice as well in your deterministic world; this is not the difference.[21]

Fragments announces on its title page three formulations of its guiding question: "Can a historical point of departure [*Udgangspunkt*] be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a thing be of more than historical interest; can one build an eternal salvation [or, happiness; *evig Salighed*] on a piece of historical knowledge [*en historisk Viden*]?"[22] The puzzle is whether

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[20] See Augustine, *Confessions*, 6 (I.6.7) / 7.

[21] Max Born, "[Letter to Albert Einstein,] 10 October 1944," in *The Born-Einstein Letters: The correspondence between Max & Hedwig Born and Albert Einstein, 1916/1955*, trans. Irene Born (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971), 155.

[22] *PF* 1 / *SKS* 4, 213. I have adjusted the translation by Hong and Hong. They translate *evig Salighed* as 'eternal happiness.'

it is possible to anchor a soteriological enterprise (or more generically, a plan for the good life

– again, *Salighed* can imply salvation, happiness, or blessedness[23]) on something temporal, or at

least on something finite. (Immediately, we can see the overlapping themes between *Fragments*

and *Either / Or*; recall A's lamentations about the impossibility of finding an adequate first

principle; *Fragments* will pose two models of the *religious* stage as candidates to respond to A

and Wilhelm.) It is not entirely clear what would motivate this question, yet presupposed within

the question is what makes it difficult to answer it: that there is a gap between the eternity of an

"eternal consciousness" and the temporality of a prospective "historical point of departure." Why

would this gap matter? Because readers of *Fragments* are historical beings (this will turn out,

according to the book's "Interlude," to mean finite beings that have come into existence) but, in

being human beings (*Mennesker*), also have eternal consciousnesses; to satisfy the human

being's eternal consciousness, any plan for happiness (*Salighed*) must somehow involve eternity.

So, according to Climacus, it must be the case this gap poses a serious enough problem to require

bridging or otherwise circumventing it. (Climacus does not endeavor to explain or defend the

notion that human beings have an *eternal consciousness*. In other works by Kierkegaard, such as

Fear and Trembling, the term refers to human beings' desires and interests that go beyond their

own finite, temporal lives, in contrast to, for example, the categories of the (merely) animal or

vegetal.[24] Presumably it means something similar here.)

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[23] The word meaning specifically 'salvation' specifically is *Frelse*, whose variants also appear in *Fragments*, particular with respect to the god-teacher *qua* savior (*Frelser*). Though I will often use the English word 'salvation' in this chapter, I mean it in the sense of *Salighed*, a broad and not necessarily religious form of blessedness.

[24] See *FT* 15 / *SKS* 4, 112, where Johannes de Silentio imagines a (counterfactual) world in which "one generation emerged after another like forest foliage, …one generation succeeded another like the singing of birds in the forest…" This would be the case if "there no eternal consciousness in the human being" (ibid.; I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation).

Climacus then introduces two possible accounts of how the gap might be overcome. The first is the Socratic, and the second – which, despite how obviously it is rooted in the eponymous tradition, goes (comically) unnamed until near the end of the book – is the Christian. Climacus frames the Christian as a thought-experiment (*Tanke-Projekt*), with the Socratic account serving as the null hypothesis.[25] Though they are organized parallel to one another (the Socratic labeled 'A,' the Christian 'B'), from the outset, there is an asymmetry between the two that reveals something about Climacus' motives for asking the driving questions of the book. To explain this will require recounting the Socratic position first.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

The Socratic position is launched with a reference to Meno's paradox: "Can the truth be learned?" Climacus asks. "With this question we shall begin… Here we encounter the difficulty that Socrates calls attention to in the *Meno*…: a person cannot possibly seek what he knows, and, just as impossibly, he cannot seek what he does not know, for what he knows he cannot seek, since he knows it, and what he does not know he cannot seek, because, after all, he does not even know what he is supposed to seek."[26] Climacus' articulation of the Socratic position captures

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[25] Hong and Hong translate *Tanke-Projekt* simply as "Thought-Project" (*PF* 9 / *SKS* 4, 218), but it certainly has the structure of a thought-experiment, whereby those conditions are thoroughly explored which would enable a hypothetical alternative to a null hypothesis to be true. There is a precedent for calling Climacus' *Tanke-Projekt* a "thought-experiment." See, e.g., Louis P. Pojman, "Kierkegaard on Faith and History," *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 13, no. 2 (1982), 57-68; Lee C. Barrett, "The Paradox of Faith in *Philosophical Fragments*: Gift or Task?" in *IKC*, vol. 7: Philosophical Fragments *and* Johannes Climacus (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1994), 261-284; and Evans, "The Relevance of Historical Evidence for Christian Faith," 151-167.

[26] *PF* 9 / *SKS* 4, 218. For the relevant passage of the *Meno* in English, see Plato, *Meno*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 880 (80e).

The *SKS* commentators suggest that, based on textual comparisons and on the availability of books to Kierkegaard, Climacus' quotations and allusions to Plato's corpus come from a combination of a Greek/Latin compilation of Plato's complete extant works produced by Friedrich Ast, and either Danish or German translations – it appears that Kierkegaard preferred Danish over German translations when they were available – by C. J. Heise (Danish), Friedrich Schleiermacher (German), and several other German translators (*SKS* K4, 206-207 (218,12)). Though Kierkegaard's ability to translate Greek was strong, I suspect – judging from his allusions to, and quotations of, Christian Wilster's Danish translations of Homer and Euripides in *Fear and Trembling* – he preferred to read Ancient Greek works in Danish, German, or Latin translations when possible but consulted the Greek versions often. For 80e of the *Meno*, see [Plato], *Platonis quae exstant opera*, trans. and ed. Friedrich Ast, vol. 9 (Leipzig:

(roughly) Socrates' resolution of Meno's paradox: what appears to be learning or teaching about eternal things (mathematical, metaphysical, *a priori* truths) to a learner or their teacher is not actually so. This is not because the individual lacks the knowledge, but because the truth is already something I, the individual, "possess" and "in which I rest."[27] In short: to explain the finite human's ability to be certain about truths that hold eternally, Socrates concedes that what seems like learning is in fact better described as recollection, *anamnesis*. This means that, for Climacus, "Viewed Socratically, any point of departure in time is *eo ipso* something accidental, a vanishing point, an occasion [*Anledning*]. Nor is the teacher anything more…"[28] Human beings do not need to step out of themselves to find the truth, nor do they need to receive anything from outside. Hence, "In the Socratic view, every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge."[29] The contents of the ultimate truth and the human being intersect. Finding eternal happiness, to the extent it is possible, is not something anyone else can (or needs to) assist with; no event, no companion, no book can help in a way that is not reducible to merely prompting introspection in the individual.

This is also why the Socratic position remains, in *Fragments*, bound up with questions of knowledge, reason, and epistemology. From the Socratic position, the human faculty of reason is understood as sufficient to involve the human being in eternity and moral reasoning (as, for example, in the *Protagoras*). Insofar as the Christian position rejects *ex hypothesi* the Socratic assertion that learning is actually just recollection (by seeing Christ's drama as necessary for

Weidmann, 1827) [*ASKB* 1152], 222; and [Plato], *Platons Werke*, trans. and ed. F. Schleiermacher, vol. 2.1, 2nd revised edition (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1818) [*ASKB* 1160], 360.

[27] *PF* 12 / *SKS* 4, 221.

[28] *PF* 11 / *SKS* 4, 220.

[29] Ibid.

human salvation), it will also reject the sufficiency of merely human faculties such as reason for engaging the truth. Thus, if we only 'learn' Socratically, it means there is no historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness that is important *because* of its historicity, for human beings are already at their destination (even if it takes effort to recognize how); their lives and history are accidental with respect to the truth and the good life.

Climacus is not explicit about it, but the implications of the Socratic position's negative answer to the questions, "Can the truth be learned?" and "[C]an one build an eternal salvation [or happiness] on a piece of historical knowledge?" reveal his subtle devaluation of the position. Though the Socratic is praised as an honest position, and Socrates an honest midwife, no particular of such a life can be the lynchpin of living well. (History remains, as it were, untransfigured.) Climacus writes, "The temporal point of departure is a nothing, because in the same moment I discover that I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal, assimilated into it in such a way that I, so to speak, still cannot find it even if I were to look for it, because there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere]."[30] On Climacus' reading, by admitting that human beings are by their nature already individually capable of accessing the truth (and in fact, they are only ever individually capable of doing so), the events of one's life, and one's relationships to other human beings, become inconsequential with respect to achieving eternal happiness or salvation. This is not to say that, from the Socratic perspective (on Climacus' account), it is impossible for the human being to achieve happiness (though it may be), but rather that happiness does not coordinate with the finite aspects of life and history (on a grand scale, or a personal one). As Socrates famously says in the *Phaedo*, "those who practice philosophy in the

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[30] *PF* 13 / *SKS* 4, 221.

right way… most want to free the soul," so the philosopher is to "train himself in life to live in a state as close to death as possible."[31] Such a remark captures Climacus' interpretation of the Socratic view of life— life is not an avenue toward truth but an impediment.

The driving questions at the beginning of *Fragments* do not presume this lack of coordination between life and happiness, but it may be Climacus' reason for asking them. I suspect the asymmetry between the Socratic and Christian reflects Climacus' interest in saving temporality (that is, *ex hypothesi christiana*) from the Socratic conclusions about the role of temporality in a good life. *Can a finite life be good,* Climacus asks*, or are the finite aspects of life obstacles to be overcome in pursuit of eternal happiness* (evig Salighed)*?* The Socratic position does not openly proclaim that a finite, embodied life is an *obstacle* for eternal happiness, but for Climacus, there would be more satisfaction in a more thoroughly justified finitude; if not, why ask the questions with which *Fragments* begins? To the Socratic position, *Fragments'* thought-experiment offers a rejoinder; it is not quite a formal apology for Christianity, but rather a (re)construction of the elements of a philosophy necessary to anchor the goodness of the finite world on historical access to eternity as a (if not *the*) crucial condition for happiness. In this way, it is not simply that – for Climacus – Christianity is one tradition among several capable of providing an affirmative and life-affirming solution (which the Socratic cannot provide) to the driving questions from *Fragments'* title page. Rather, Climacus' game is to construct a version (minus some traditional Christian dogma) of the *only* metaphysical framework that could provide such an answer.[32] That is, he attempts to "build an eternal salvation." (This is not to say that

[31] Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 58 (67d-e). See also *Udvalgte Dialoger af Platon*, trans. and ed. C. J. Heise, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1830) [*ASKB* 1164], 21; and *Platonis quae exstant opera*, vol. 1 (1819) [*ASKB* 174, 1144], 496.

[32] Barrett has described Climacus' method in Kantian terms, labeling the deductive process whereby *Fragments* derives Christianity from the hypothesis of the falsity of the Socratic position a "transcendental deduction." See Barrett, "The Paradox of Faith in *Philosophical Fragments*," 268. Kant's "Transcendental Deduction of the

Climacus *succeeds* in proposing the only possible configuration of a historical soteriology,

though as a deduction from a supposedly single hypothetical premise, it does, at least on the

surface, portray itself as doing so.) Indeed, when Climacus is finished with it— *surprise!* – it

resembles inherited Christian doctrine. But these playful hints, and this resemblance, do not

mean that the game was merely a ruse. *Fragments* is not simply a comic actor only pretending to

conceal the face of Christianity underneath; for under the mask of philosophy is not yet a face,

but a second, Christian mask, which itself hides the human being's earnest desire to find eternal

happiness without casting off history – either global history or an individual's (personal) history

– as chaff.

What follows throughout the book's five chapters (and two major inter-chapter sections)

is a performance of the 'invention'[33] of a metaphysical and anthropological scaffolding that

would make it possible for *the moment* (in Danish, *Øieblikket*[34]) – a decisive, temporal point or

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Categories" is found at Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 219-266 (*KrV* A84-130/B116-169). Page numbers corresponding to the German originals for Kant's first *Critique* come from [A] Immanuel Kant, *Critik der reinen Vernunft* (Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1781) and [B] Immanuel Kant, *Critik der reinen Vernunft, Zweyte hin und wieder verbeserte Auflage* [2nd edition, improved here and there] (Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1787). I find Barrett's description somewhat misleading. Kant's transcendental deduction attempts to argue *a priori* from the persistent structural elements of experience (*Erfahrung*) to the conditions of such an experience. While the structure of Climacus' argument in *Fragments* is similar in the sense that it works, as it were, backward to derive conditions that would make its hypothesis (that there is a historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness— the moment) possible, it does not involve the structure of experience, which is the key differentia of Kant's method. Climacus' move is indeed a 'deduction,' but nothing about this makes it uniquely Kantian. (Indeed, deductions like this are what purport to make thought-experiments, in general, worth entertaining.) Though I believe there to be important epistemic tenets shared between Kant and Climacus, John D. Glenn's structural comparison between *Fragments* and Anselm's arguments about Christ and atonement in *Cur Deus Homo* strikes me as more instructive. See John D. Glenn, Jr., "Kierkegaard and Anselm," in *IKC,* vol. 7, 223-244.

[33] Climacus interjects into his own project to remind his reader that it is not genuinely an invention, but self-consciously a "plagiarism" (e.g., *PF* 35 / *SKS* 4, 241). I will say more on this later.

[34] This term refers to the well-known passage from 1 Corinthians as it appears in *NT-1819*: "Look, I will tell you all a secret; we shall indeed not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in a moment [*et Øieblik*], at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead should rise uncorrupted, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:51-52). In Danish: "See, jeg siger Eder en Hemmelighed; vi skulle vel ikke alle hensove, men vi skulle alle forandres; i en Hast, i et Øieblik, ved den sidste Basune; thi Basunen skal lyde, og de Døde skulle opstaae uforkrænkelige, og vi skulle forandres."

finite temporal duration – to be crucial for an individual's relationship to eternal truth.[35] Such a

scaffolding turns out to resemble tenets of Christian doctrine (with several noteworthy missing

pieces, such as the resurrection), which Climacus seems to contend are rationally entailed in the

possibility of the moment: "…for just as soon as we assume the moment, everything goes by

itself."[36] In the following pages, I recapitulate and analyze Climacus' line of reasoning.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

The thought-experiment begins by hypothesizing the possibility of *the moment*, a

particular temporal point that could be decisive for my eternal happiness. If (*ex hypothesi*) the

moment matters for me (or *could* matter for me), then I, unlike as envisioned by the Socratic

position, must not have access to eternal truth and happiness without it: "Now if the moment is to

acquire decisive significance, then the seeker up until that moment must not have possessed the

truth, not even in the form of ignorance, for in that case the moment becomes merely the moment

of occasion [*Anledningens*]; indeed, he must not even be a seeker…"[37] If I were to possess the

truth even in the form of ignorance (Socratically), then it would mean I already possess the

condition (*Betingelse*) for understanding the truth, and could simply recollect the truth through

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[35] Anthony Eagan proposes that Kierkegaard structured *Fragments* to resemble the form of a five-act Shakespearean comedy. See Anthony Eagan, "*Philosophical Fragments*: The Infinite Comic Drama," *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* 66 (Dec. 2016), 8. I find this observation provocative. Climacus refers to Shakespeare throughout the book. More importantly, Eagan's claim resonates with various comedic tropes in the text, several of which will be discussed in the body shortly, including the god-teacher living among humans incognito (*PF* 64 / *SKS* 4, 266), the king elevating a low-class maiden to royal status (*PF* 26-32 / *SKS* 4, 233-238), and the offense that may occur due to the understanding mistaking itself as the source of the paradox (*PF* 49-54 / *SKS* 4, 253-257).

[36] *PF* 51 / *SKS* 4, 255.

[37] *PF* 13 / *SKS* 4, 222. A note about the term "truth" as it appears here— For the Christian position Climacus is just beginning to develop, "truth" points to Jesus' self-ascription as "the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6, *NT-1819*). For the Socratic, in which the truth would already be possessed, it is not entirely clear, but Climacus may be referring to some Platonic notion of the unity of the good and the true in virtue of which an individual may live happily. (If Climacus is indeed referring to some Platonic conception of the good that overlaps the true, and in virtue of which happiness may be pursued, he is ascribing this conception to Socrates uncritically.)

<p style="text-align:center">105</p>

my will vis-à-vis the condition.[38] (Critically, the term *condition* is to be distinguished from the term *occasion*; the former represents a necessary cause, while the latter represents an instance in which causation occurs, or possibly a vehicle through which it occurs. For Socrates, all instances that prompt recollection are merely occasions since I, the individual, already have the condition.) Thus, for Climacus' proposition, I must be absent the (truth-)condition now and must receive it somehow (in order to receive the truth): "Ultimately, all instruction depends on that the condition is present [*er tilstede*]; if it is lacking, then a teacher is capable of nothing…"[39] Much later in *Fragments*, the condition is identified as faith (*Tro*).[40]

Yet given that I am a human being, my lack of the condition (faith) must not be a mere negation, but rather a privation.[41] Moreover, the condition could not have been removed by accident (given that it is an essential feature of the human being). Thus I must be responsible for having given it up.[42] In a move reminiscent of Kant's argument about the nature of evil in relation to the moral law, Climacus writes, "The untruth [which I am], then, is not merely outside

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[38] *PF* 14 / *SKS* 4, 223.

[39] Ibid. I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong.

[40] *PF* 59 / *SKS* 4, 261.

[41] Climacus writes, "Now, insofar as the learner exists, he is indeed created, and, accordingly, God must have given him the condition for understanding the truth (for otherwise he previously would have been merely animal, and the teacher who gave him the condition along with the truth would make him a human being for the first time)" (*PF* 15 / *SKS* 4, 223). Climacus' reasoning here seems to presume that all human beings have, by their nature, the condition, or they would not be human beings. This strikes me as an unwarranted claim. How do we know human beings have the condition according to their nature at the creation? If this is simply stipulated, then how do we know that we readers of *Fragments* are not "merely animal"? There are many such leaps in Climacus' reasoning, though I suspect they matter very little for his project in *Fragments*.
    Perhaps even more interesting is that Climacus seems to suppose in this passage that the creation of the human being *essentially* involved bestowing the condition for "understanding" the truth, which would (later) be surrendered in the first sin. Yet despite being part of Climacus' narration of the Christian position (in which an individual relates to truth in faith, not intellectually), the phrase "understanding the truth" reflects the intellectual element of the Socratic position's relationship between 'learner' and truth. I do not know what to make of this, but it seems that, at least here, Climacus' picture of the prelapsarian human resembles his picture of the Socratic 'learner.'

[42] *PF* 15 / *SKS* 4, 223-224.

the truth but is polemical against the truth, which is expressed by saying that he himself has forfeited and is forfeiting the condition."[43] This active form of untruth – the forfeiture of the truth-condition – is called sin (*Synd*).[44] Thus to learn the truth, this noetic form of sin must be beaten back; so in this moment I must be, not reformed (*omdanne*[45]), but ontologically transformed (*omskabe*) to counteract sin, a task that *only* the god is capable of.[46] Therefore the teacher must be the god. "What, then, should we call such a teacher who gives him [the learner] the condition again and along with it the truth?"[47] Climacus asks. Among the appropriate names for such a god-teacher are "savior," "deliverer," "reconciler," and "judge."[48] But between human beings, Climacus is clear that the highest relationship one can have for another remains that of a (Socratic) midwife, an *occasion*.[49]

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[43] *PF* 15 / *SKS* 4, 224. See also Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. George di Giovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and di Giovanni (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72n (AA: 6:22n). Here Kant argues that for the moral law to fail to be the sufficient motivation behind a moral action, it must be *counteracted* by an opposing force at the same level of motivation, not simply amoral inclinations. Thus, there must be a "positive ground antagonistic to the good, = –a."

[44] *PF* 15 / *SKS* 4, 224.

[45] The Protestant Reformation is not referred to in Danish with this term, which the Hongs translate as "reform." Normally this movement is called simply *Reformationen* (*ODS*, *DDS*); another translation for *omdanne* could be 'reshape,' though it would be somewhat awkward to deploy that English word given that the word *omskabe* (which follows *omdanne* in the text as a contrary verb) contains the cognate to the English 'shape.'

[46] *PF* 14-15 / *SKS* 4, 223.

[47] *PF* 17 / *SKS* 4, 226.

[48] *PF* 17-18 / *SKS* 4, 226. These terms in Danish are, respectively, *Frelser*, *Forløser*, *Forsoner*, and *Dommer*. Recall, from my introductory chapter, that Kierkegaard describes the decision by which one – after being forced into awareness – becomes a Christian or does not, a judgment: "By forcing him to become aware, I succeed in forcing him to judge [*dømme*]. Now he judges [*dømmer*]" (PV 50 / SKS 16, 32). *Assessor* Wilhelm is not a proper judge.

[49] For instance, when initially describing the Christian position, Climacus writes,

> [P]recisely by reminding him, the teacher thrusts the learner away, except that by being turned in upon himself in this manner the learner does not discover that he previously knew the truth but discovers his untruth. To this act of consciousness, the Socratic principle applies: the teacher is only an occasion, whoever he may be, even if he is a god, because I can discover my own untruth only by myself, because only when *I* discover it is it discovered, not before, even though the whole world knew it. (Under the assumed presupposition about the moment, this becomes the one and only analogy to the Socratic.) (*PF* 14 / *SKS* 4, 223)

Through what mechanisms might the god-teacher accomplish this? Climacus proposes two models through which the god and the learner might achieve "understanding with one another" (or, "mutual understanding"): ascent and descent.[50] Each is, effectively, a scheme for the atonement.[51] In the first, "The unity is brought about by an ascent. The god would then draw the learner up toward himself, exalt him, divert him with joy lasting a thousand years, let the learner forget the misunderstanding [*Misforstaaelsen*] in his tumult of joy."[52] Even though "the learner would perhaps be very much inclined to consider himself blissfully happy because of this," doing so, claims Climacus, would be effectively for the god to deceive the learner.[53] It is difficult to make out Climacus' logic, but it seems to be that an attempt at atonement through ascent could never complete a process of deification for the learner; they would essentially be bound by their past finitude, precluding a thoroughgoing "understanding" between god and

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Later, he writes, concerning the role of the will: "[O]nce the condition is given, that which was valid for the Socratic is again valid" (*PF* 63 / *SKS* 4, 264). It seems unlikely, though, that in either passage Climacus means that – within the Christian position – *self-knowledge*, understood narrowly, would still lead to eternal happiness. With the condition given, the boundaries of the human subject have been shaken, and the faculties that can engage with the truth have been expanded to involve faith. Thus, the commonality between the Socratic and Christian to which Climacus is referring is only a commonality in light of the dispensation of the condition, which regenerates the will, at least to some extent. The god is the only being capable of providing the condition, but even the god cannot coerce or compel someone into faith and thus – as with human beings who are not the god – willful assent to faith is required. I say more about this in Chapter III.

[50] See, e.g., *PF* 47 / *SKS* 4, 252.

[51] Hong and Hong translate *Forstaaelse med hinanden* as "mutual understanding." This is reasonable, though I have here translated it more literally. (Hong and Hong translate other phrases in *Fragments* as "mutual understanding," too, so I believe the literal translation avoids the appearance of standardized terminology, which is not present in this case.) I do, however, think Kierkegaard's language is important here. *Forstaaelse* contains the root of the verb *at staae* (to stand); a "mutual understanding" or "understanding with one another" implies standing before one another. What I believe Kierkegaard is after (through the mouth of Climacus) is a scheme for the atonement (in Latin, *adunamentum*, literally '*at-one*ment'), not any *intellectual* connotation that the word *Forstaaelse* also has (in which Climacus is elsewhere, even in this text, interested as well). Cockayne uses the term "union" to refer to this concept, which I believe to be helpful. See Cockayne, "Empathy and divine union in Kierkegaard, 457-459.

[52] *PF* 29 / *SKS* 4, 235.

[53] Ibid.

learner.[54] Alternatively (in a variant of the ascent scheme), the god might bring about unity "by the god's appearing to the learner, accepting his adoration, and thereby making him forget himself."[55] In this case, the god-teacher would go unsatisfied by glorying god-self for the learner rather than glorying the learner, and the learner would brought low before the god. Thus, in both scenarios, the ascent of the finite learner might bring about some measure of happiness for the learner, but – due to the mutual understanding (atonement) between them being imperfect – the god would be unsatisfied with the incomplete happiness the learner would acquire. The unity between them – the act of salvation – would not be complete.

The alternative scheme involves the god's descent into an ontological status that enables atonement: "Let the learner be *X*, and this *X* must also include the lowliest… In order for unity to be effected, the god must become like this one."[56] In short, the god's incarnation is necessary to share the condition with the learner, which is required to bring about "understanding with one another."[57] "He will appear, therefore, as the equal of the lowliest of persons," writes Climacus. "[C]onsequently, the god will appear in the form of a *servant*. But the form of a servant is not something put on like the king's plebian cloak… it is his true form."[58] Indeed, for Climacus, the incarnation must be thoroughgoing and exhaustive, at least insofar as soteriology is concerned: "Therefore the god must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the

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[54] Later, Climacus attempts to clarify this point: "For love, any other revelation [than accommodation] would be a deception, because either it would first have had to accomplish a change in the learner (love, however, does not change the beloved but changes itself) and conceal from him that this was needed, or in superficiality it would have had to remain ignorant that the whole understanding between them was a delusion (this is the untruth of paganism). For the god's love, any other revelation would be a deception" (*PF* 33 / *SKS* 4, 239).

[55] *PF* 29 / *SKS* 4, 236.

[56] *PF* 31 / *SKS* 4, 238.

[57] Climacus does not mention other schemes for atonement by descent that do not involve an incarnate god-human.

[58] *PF* 31-32 / *SKS* 4, 238.

desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings—look, behold the man [*see, hvilket Menneske*; Jn 19:5]! The suffering of death is not his suffering, but his whole life is a story of suffering, and it is love that suffers, love that gives all and is itself destitute."[59]

Incarnation is not easy for the human being to swallow. It is a paradox (*et Paradox*), which is to say, from the vantage point of a position whose apex is the Socratic, it is ungraspable by the faculty of the understanding and appears absurd or even *a priori* impossible. But does the term 'paradox' denote a self-contradiction *per se*? Much later, in the "Interlude," Climacus explicitly describes "the content of our poem" as a "historical fact" that is "based upon a self-contradiction."[60] But in what sense is this the case? Climacus' most succinct explanation for what is paradoxical (and self-contradictory) in the incarnation is the following:

> What, then, moves him [the god] to make his appearance? He must move himself and continue to be what Aristotle says of him, ἀκίνητος πάντα κινεῖ [unmoved, it moves all things]. But if he moves himself, then there of course is no need [*Trang*] that moves him, as if he himself could not endure silence but was compelled to burst into speech. But if he moves himself and is not moved by need, what moves him then but love, for love does not have the satisfaction of need outside itself but within. His decision [*Beslutning*], which does not have an equal reciprocal relation to the occasion, must be from eternity, even though, fulfilled in time, it expressly becomes *the moment*, for where the occasion and what is occasioned correspond equally, as equally as the reply to the shout in the desert, the moment does not appear but is swallowed by recognition into its eternity.[61]

What I believe Climacus has in mind with the paradox is that it is something incommensurate with Platonic or Aristotelian lines of reasoning that would conceive eternity, or the god, to

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[59] *PF* 32-33 / *SKS* 4, 239. I speculate that Climacus subordinates the role of the Father to that of the Son and Spirit. With respect to the salvific enterprise, it seems that God's love requires the Incarnation to leave no remainder of the Father, with the entirety of the Godhead entering time. Such a position might have the charge of patripassionism leveled at it, but I believe Climacus would concede the point, noting that to be overly concerned with the aseity of God the Father is essentially to deny the paradox of God's suffering love for the created world.

[60] *PF* 87 / *SKS* 4, 285.

[61] *PF* 24-25 / *SKS* 4, 232. I have elected to translate *Beslutning* as 'decision' rather than the Hongs' 'resolution.'

involve the perfection of aseity, *and thus preclude the possibility of Incarnation*.[62] The

(Christian) wrench thrown into this ('Pagan') logic is a conception of altruistic love imputed to

the highest being. The unmoved mover acts out of a love or desire that is not a *lack*. (This makes

this desire different from every desire that A demonstrated in *Either / Or*.) Climacus continues:

> Out of love, therefore, the god must be eternally resolved in this way, but just as his love
> is the basis, so also must love be the goal, for it would indeed be a contradiction
> [*Modsigelse*] for the god to have a basis of movement and a goal that do not correspond
> to this. The love, then, must be for the learner, and the goal must be to win him, for only
> in love is the different made equal, and only in equality or in unity is there
> understanding.[63]

The paradox only implies something absurd, self-contradictory, or impossible to the extent that

motivation by altruistic love is absurd, self-contradictory, or impossible.[64] In an attempt to isolate

and intellectually entertain such an idea (that is, the idea of the highest being condescending out

of selfless love) within a framework such as Plato's or Aristotle's, Climacus thinks it will indeed

result in an absurd or contradictory conclusion: the highest, completely self-sufficient being

cannot shed its ontological perfections; for it to do so would be absurd. But Climacus specifically

uses the language of contradiction to *defend* the notion of divine love for the individual learner as

a motivation for the god's incarnation (that is, that it would be contradictory to think otherwise).

Essentially, love within the Christian position is a *causa sui* that expresses the god's reason – as

an unmoved mover – for other-regarding self-sacrifice, a sacrifice which simultaneously

(paradoxically) serves the interest of the god. If the highest being can sacrificially love a lesser

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[62] This is only to say Climacus *thinks* Platonic or Aristotelian conceptions of aseity preclude incarnation. The distinctions Climacus (also Kierkegaard) draws between Christian and Greek thought are often poorly supported.

[63] *PF* 25 / *SKS* 4, 232.

[64] Admittedly, this attribution of impossibility to altruistic love is a position that Kierkegaard ascribes to 'Pagan' thinking more generally. I will return to this in Chapter VI, when discussing *Works of Love*.

being, then the antinomy is, depending on one's perspective, either avoided or embraced (though *where* such an idea comes from is still a question, which will be addressed in Chapter IV).

As mentioned, the human being's understanding cannot comprehend the paradox. This means that, to the extent the paradox can be approached as an idea that the intellectual faculty attempts to grasp (that is, the idea of a god-human, and of the god's self-sacrificial love for creatures), it is always slippery, or vague.[65] The understanding can try to grasp it (and fail), or it can be relieved of its operations. About a successful engagement between the individual and paradox, Climacus says the following:

> Now, how does the learner come to an understanding [*Forstaaelse*] with this paradox, for we do not say that he shall understand [*forstaae*] the paradox but only understand that this is the paradox? …It occurs when the understanding [*Forstanden*] and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding [*Forstanden*] steps to the side and the paradox gives itself over; and the third thing in which this happens (for it of course does not happen through the understanding, which is discharged [*der er entlediget*], nor through the paradox, which gives itself over—consequently *in* something) is that happy passion [*lykkelige Lidenskab*] to which we will now give a name, although for us it is not a matter of the name. We will call it: *faith* [*Tro*].[66]

The paradox encounters the individual in *faith*, an organ of subjectivity distinct from the understanding referred to as a *passion*. (Faith is also described as paradoxical.[67]) If the understanding does not resist, the paradox and understanding "happily encounter one another." The understanding's non-resistance is described in both active and passive voice: it "steps to the

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[65] What I have in mind is captured effectively by the notion of *vagueness* as articulated in Charles Sanders Peirce, "Issues of Pragmaticism," *The Monist* 15, no. 4 (Oct. 1905), 487-488. In this case, the idea of incarnation is easy to determine with respect to its essence, but what other features it may have, or what empirical descriptions might apply to it, are not internally definite, that is, they are vague.

[66] *PF* 59 / *SKS* 4, 261. (I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong.) The words *Forstaaelse* and *Forstand* both translate to "understanding" (*DDO*; *ODS*). The former refers to a state of awareness (that is, the sort of understanding that comes about when two individuals become aware of one another's needs). The latter refers to the faculty of the intellect.

[67] *PF* 65 / *SKS* 4, 267.

side" but also "is discharged."[68] In this scenario it is ambiguous whether the paradox or some human faculty (such as the will, or even some spontaneous power of the understanding itself) is the agent behind discharging the understanding. Presuming that the understanding is discharged, one is happy through faith.

But if the understanding does not step aside, then the individual demonstrates offense (*Forargelse*).[69] The term resonates with the second antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount: "But if your right eye offends [*forarger*] you, then rip it out, and throw it away from you; for it is beneficial to you that one of your limbs be spoiled, and that your whole body shall not be thrown into Hell. And if your right hand offends [*forarger*] you, chop it off, and throw it away from you…"[70] Offense is, for Climacus, a new qualification of sin that only afflicts an individual if the condition is offered to them. It is a form of sin or suffering (*Lidenskab*[71]) through which the understanding falsely takes itself to have stumbled upon the paradox as an external problem to be solved or dismissed through its own intellectual operations, rather than what Climacus takes to

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[68] The word *entlediget* ('discharged') is somewhat archaic (*ODS*). It means to be removed of responsibility for a task, or to be asked to leave. Another candidate translation is "dismissed," as a classroom of students might be dismissed at the end of the hour or a soldier might be dismissed after performing their duties.

[69] See *PF* 49 / *SKS* 4, 253: "If the paradox and the understanding [*Forstanden*] encounter each other [*støde sammen*] in shared understanding [*fælleds Forstaaelse*] of their difference, then the encounter between them [*Sammenstødet*] is happy…—happy in the passion to which we as yet have given no name and which we shall not name until later [that is, faith (*Tro*)]. If the encounter between them [*Sammenstødet*] is not in understanding [*ikke i Forstaaelsen*], then the relation is unhappy, and the understanding's [*Forstandens*] unhappy love…, we could more specifically term *offense* [Forargelse]." (I have modified the translation by Hong and Hong in the interest of clarity.)

[70] Mt 5:29-30 (*NT-1819*). The Danish reads: "Men dersom dit høire Øie forarger dig, saa riv det ud, og kast det fra dig; thi det er dig gavnligt, at eet af dine Lemmer fordærves, og ikke dit ganske Legeme skal kastes i Helvede. Og om din høire Haand forarger dig, hug den af, og kast den fra dig; thi det er dig gavnligt, at eet af dine Lemmer fordærves, og ikke dit ganske Legeme skal kastes i Helvede." Kierkegaard himself makes this connection at *PF* 50n / *SKS* 4, 254n.

[71] *Lidenskab* means both 'passion' and 'suffering.' Kierkegaard uses the term both ways and sometimes plays on the fact that they are each signified by the same term. For instance, in *Fragments*, Climacus describes offense and faith as two sides of the same coin: offense is a suffering (*Lidenskab*) while faith is a "happy passion" (*lykkelig Lidenskab*) (*PF* 54, 59 / *SKS* 4, 257, 261). As discussed in Chapter I, passion is often a function of how close or distant one is to achieving their desires. In the case of the "happy passion" (faith), passion does not require a lack.

be the case, namely that the paradox has prompted offense in the offer of the condition. As Climacus puts it: "[T]he offense *comes into existence* with the paradox…,"[72] but "the offense remains outside the paradox…"[73] In this relationship, Climacus claims "the paradox is *index* and *judex sui et falsi*"[74] (criterion and judge of itself and the false) because the paradox *qua* the condition offered to the human being is what prompts the understanding's interest in the first place.[75]

The result of offense is a comedy of errors: The understanding is interested to become (intellectually) certain about something about which it is not certain. This would not be a problem for it, except – *because* of its limitations – it has been confronted by something it *cannot* become certain about (the paradox, the condition). *Fragments* suggests that cases of offense – that is, when the understanding refuses to "step to the side" in terms of its priority over all domains of the human being, and an individual continues to seek intellectual security for the truth of the condition – can take on two shapes. There are those that attempt to secure the truth of the paradox (that is, incarnation or suffering divine love) by attempting to locate the moment in spatiotemporal history. Examples would include Biblical and archaeological scholarship engaged in locating evidence of Jesus' life, miracles, and resurrection. And there are those that attempt to do so by ascertaining the truth of the moment with respect to other necessary truths, such as

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[72] *PF* 51 / *SKS* 4, 255.

[73] *PF* 52 / *SKS* 4, 256.

[74] *PF* 51 / *SKS* 4, 254-255. The Latin phrase *index sui et falsi* alludes to two loci in Spinoza's corpus, in which Spinoza remarks that, similar to light and darkness, truth is to be understood as the criterion of itself and what is false. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, 479 (2P43.Sch, II/124.16); and Spinoza, "Letter 76 (OP) [to Albert Burgh, 10 Sep. 1675]," in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 475 (IV/320a.9-10). Both instances appear, respectively, at *Benedicti de Spinoza opera philosophical omnia* [*ASKB* 788], 340, 662.

[75] Climacus thus refers to offense in this way: "So it is with offense. Everything it says about the paradox it has learned from the paradox, even though, making use of an acoustical illusion, it insists that it itself has originated the paradox" (*PF* 53 / *SKS* 4, 256).

proofs of God's existence.[76] As Climacus notes regarding the latter (though it could equally be applied to historical research), "It hardly occurs to the understanding to want to demonstrate that this unknown (the god) exists."[77] That is to say, it would hardly occur to the *understanding apart from being confronted by the paradox*; this condition involves the "paradoxical passion" in light of which the understanding overreaches its bounds. The passion of the understanding is the desire to know the unknown. The understanding alone is a power with limitations; offense (made possible by the offer of the condition, which requires the paradoxical incarnation) is the *primus motor* of such historical and necessary proofs.

I should be clear here that my interpretation of the encounter between the paradox and the individual's understanding (resulting in faith, or in offense) is not altogether obvious. I want to highlight two elements in need of some explanation and defense. First, I have forwarded a description of the encounter between the understanding and the paradox as one between the individual's intellectual faculty and an attempt to grasp the idea or thought (*Tank*, but usually *Indfald*) of incarnation, which may appear to over-intellectualize the encounter.[78] Second, I have implied that the understanding's attempts to grasp the paradox (such as through historical and *a*

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[76] Hegel represents, for Climacus, an attempt to combine both faulty methods into one. On Climacus' interpretation (and, I believe, also on Kierkegaard's), Hegel's philosophy of history constitutes an attempt to secure the *moment* with necessity by finding shapes of reason in history. These rational elements of history, including the development of the idea of God's incarnation as a crucial component of a soteriology, are understood as the effects of God or the Idea as a formal and final cause. One of the goals of *Fragments*' "Interlude" is to contest the logic of attributing necessity to any historical phenomenon, while leaving open the possibility of a different type of historical commitment (*Tro qua* belief, then *Tro* in its eminent sense *qua* faith) that can carry the same 'force' as rational certainty but which does not hinge on necessity. See, especially, *PF* 78n / *SKS* 4, 277n.

[77] *PF* 39 / *SKS* 4, 245.

[78] See *PF* 20, 109 / *SKS* 4, 228, 305: The words Climacus uses most often when discussing the idea, notion, or representational impression of the incarnation are *Indfald*, which implies an idea that occurs suddenly, or a notion, and *Tank*, which simply means a 'thought' in general (*ODS*; *DDO*). Though *Tank* is ambiguous, *Indfald* certainly does not imply a Platonic idea, nor does it connote any other formal psychological, philosophical, or epistemological features associated with the term idea. The corresponding Danish word would, in that case, be *Idee*, which also appears occasionally in *Fragments*, but not in this context (*ODS*).

priori proofs) are for Climacus examples of offense; thus I have not treated offense only as a

wholesale rejection of the incarnation or Christian narrative. While it is not definitive, I believe a

passage near the conclusion of Climacus' discussion of offense corroborates these two

contentious positions:

> When the understanding wants to have pity upon the paradox and assist it to an
> explanation, the paradox does not put up with that but considers it appropriate for the
> understanding to do that, for is that not what philosophers are for—to make supernatural
> things ordinary and banal? When the understanding cannot get the paradox into its head,
> this did not have its origin in the understanding but in the paradox itself, which was
> paradoxical enough to have the effrontery to call the understanding a clod and a dunce
> who at best can say "yes" and "no" to the same thing, which is not good theology. So it is
> with offense. Everything it says about the paradox it has learned from the paradox, even
> though, making use of an acoustical illusion [*Bedrag*], it insists that it itself has originated
> the paradox.[79]

When Climacus mentions "assist[ing]" the paradox "to an explanation," the task of the

philosopher "to make supernatural things… banal," and the attempt by the understanding to "get

the paradox into its head," I believe he is referring to forms of philosophy, theology, and history

whose offense involves attempts to explain incarnation through the powers of the understanding.

Even though "offense remains outside the paradox," this does not mean that examples of offense

refuse to engage the paradox. A Christian theologian may attempt, for instance, to explain

precisely how the incarnation happened, or how divine and human natures can co-exist in a

human being. In this sense, Christendom and offense may co-exist in an individual; the

understanding may fumble with Christian categories and narratives while attempting to affirm

their broader religious significance.

   A further implication is that it must be possible, according to Climacus, to receive and

entertain the idea of incarnation in such a way that it stimulates the understanding (as an

unknown needing to be explained) while simultaneously resisting it. Indeed, the idea (*Indfald*) of

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[79] *PF* 53 / *SKS* 4, 256.

incarnation, as a paradox, seems to prompt obsession from disordered (that is, un-"discharged")

understandings, as exemplified by philosophers, theologians, and historians of Christianity.

Much like how Anselm's idea of that-than-which-no-greater-can-be-conceived[80] points beyond

itself to something independent and actual (God's existence), Climacus thinks that the idea of

incarnation prompts the "paradoxical passion" of the understanding to reach outside its range.[81] I

will come back to this aspect of the paradox in Chapters III and IV.

Returning to Climacus' line of thought— If historical research and philosophical proofs

cannot take the individual closer to the 'truth' of the absolute fact (incarnation), what can?

Lurking here is a question of (historical) distance between the incarnation and the potential

disciple: how can the god – who must come into existence (that is, enter time) – provide the

condition even to those who would seek eternal happiness many generations later? It might seem

clear how a contemporary disciple could be directly transformed by being taught the condition

by the incarnate god, but what of "the follower at second hand"?[82] Effectively, these questions

emerge in the wake of Climacus' development of the hypothetical (Christian) answer to the

questions that drive *Fragments*: Let us say there *is* a historical point of departure for salvation or

eternal happiness (*evig Salighed*)— All of a sudden the specter of unequal access to *Salighed*

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[80] See Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, trans. M. J. Charlesworth, in *The Major Works*, eds. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, 87ff. / *Proslogion*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 of 6, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946), 101ff. In the early 1840's and before, it is likely Kierkegaard encountered Anselm's thought primarily through a German textbook (which included excerpted sections from the Latin original). See Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie* [History of Philosophy], vol. 8.1 of 11 (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1810) [*ASKB* 822], 114-153.

[81] *PF* 39 / *SKS* 4, 244.

[82] The title of *Fragments*' fifth chapter is "The Follower [*Discipel*] at Second Hand" (*PF* 89 / *SKS* 4, 287). It will turn out that, according to Climacus, there is no follower at second hand because all followers are contemporaneous with the god by receiving from the incarnate god the condition directly (*PF* 104-105 / *SKS* 4, 301-302). For this reason, I do my best to refer to individuals as 'firsthand witnesses' and as 'those who come later' depending on what is their relative spatiotemporal distance from the occurrence.

rears its head, for it would seem that, within history, some individuals may be more proximate than others to any given historical point of departure.

To address this issue, Climacus channels Lessing's "On the Proof of the Spirit and the Power" (1777).[83] Lessing, engaging with a remark by Origen that persistent miracles attest to the salvific power of the Logos manifest in Jesus,[84] asks what is to be done when such miracles have ceased, as seems to be the case in modern Europe. (Though it is likely that Lessing's assumption of Origen's premise is ironic, for the sake of argument he assumes it to be the case.) He writes,

> If I had lived at the time of Christ, the prophecies fulfilled in his person would certainly have made me pay great attention to him. And if I had actually seen him perform miracles, and if I had had no cause to doubt that these were genuine miracles, then I would certainly have gained so much confidence in one who worked miracles and whose coming had been predicted so long before, that I would willingly have subordinated my understanding to his and believed him in all matters in which equally indubitable experiences did not contradict him.[85]

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[83] It is known that Kierkegaard specifically had Lessing's piece in mind when composing *Fragments*. The evidence is: First, in an early sketch of *Fragments*, Kierkegaard mentions Lessing's name prominently (twice) in conjunction with draft versions of the text's introductory, driving questions (*PF*, "Supplement," 182-183 / *Pap.* V B 1:2-3, 53; *PS* mss.1.1-2). Second, under the same pseudonym in the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard devotes a major section of the book to Lessing (*CUP1* 61-125 / *SKS* 7, 65-120). Third, in *Fragments'* "Interlude," which specifically interrogates the dimensions of historical knowledge, Climacus quotes exactly the same phrase from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* that Lessing quotes near the conclusion of "On the Proof of the Spirit and the Power." See *PF* 73 / *SKS* 4, 273: "…the question leads to a μετάβασις εἰς ἀλλὸ γένος…" See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and the Power," trans. H. B. Nisbet, in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 87: "…if this is not a 'transition to another category', I do not know what Aristotle means by the phrase." Kierkegaard owned a copy of Lessing's piece in German, in which this phrase is printed in Greek, as it is in *Fragments*: "…μεταβασις εἰς ἀλλο γενος…" See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft," in *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Sämmtliche Schriften*, vol. 5 (*Zur Theologie*) (Berlin: Vossische, 1825) [*ASKB* 1751], 82. For the passage that both quoted, see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Jonathan Barnes, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle (The Revised Oxford Translation)*, ed. Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton and Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1984), 122 (75a38): "One cannot, therefore, prove anything by crossing from another genus…" However, even though Kierkegaard owned multiple versions of Aristotle's writings, he confesses in an 1844–1845 journal entry to not having read "the least bit of Aristotle" before about a year and a half prior (*KJN* 2, 212 / *SKS* 18, 231; JJ:288). Scholars have suggested that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Aristotle was gleaned almost entirely from secondary accounts, and often "he did not read these sources very carefully." See Håvard Løkke and Arild Waaler, "*Physics* and *Metaphysics*: Change, Modal Categories, and Agency," in *Kierkegaard and the Greek World (Tome II: Aristotle and Other Greek Authors)*, eds. Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun, *KRSRR* 2 (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 25.

[84] See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 8 (I.2). A section of this passage is quoted by Lessing at the beginning of his piece. See Lessing, "On the Proof…," 83. In the version owned by Kierkegaard, it appears in Greek, not translated into German: Lessing, "Über den Beweis…," 75.

[85] Lessing, "On the Proof…," 84 / "Über den Beweis…," 76-77.

Without the "miracles," and without the "prophecies fulfilled before my eyes," there are only "reports of miracles" and "reports of fulfilled prophecies," which are inherently dubious.[86] Thus, the proofs of Christian truth "have to act through a medium [historical testimony] which deprives them of all their force."[87] For Lessing, for an individual to be certain of their salvation, they would want their proofs to have the reliability of necessity, but without completely certain knowledge of a historical occurrence, this is unattainable: "If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated *by means of* historical truths. That is, *contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason*."[88] The result— "This… is the broad and ugly ditch which I cannot get across, no matter how often and earnestly I have tried to make the leap."[89] Testimony of the occurrence is insufficient.

Climacus' solution in the fourth and fifth chapters of *Fragments* is to appeal to the faith-condition as an equalizer: only in faith that the incarnation has occurred can there be an

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[86] Ibid., 84-85 / 78.

[87] Ibid., 85 / 78.

[88] Ibid., 85 / 80. In making this remark, Lessing seems to presume the soundness of a claim like Leibniz' in *Monadology* §33. See G. W. Leibniz, *The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology*, in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1989), 217: "There are also two kinds of *truths*, those of *reasoning* and those of *fact*. The truths of reasoning are necessary and their opposite is impossible; the truths of fact are contingent, and their opposite is possible." Climacus, throughout the "Interlude," appears to share this presumption, with Hong and Hong suggesting the same connection (*PF*, "Notes," 273-274). In the version of Leibniz' works Kierkegaard owned, it appears at [Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz], *God. Guil. Leibnitii Opera philosophica quae exstant latina gallica germanica omnia*, ed. Johan Eduard Erdmann, vol. 2 (Berlin: G. Eichler, 1840) [*ASKB* 620], 707. Moreover, Kierkegaard demonstrates familiarity with Leibniz' metaphysics in the personal notebook entries he wrote from 1842 to 1843. For example:

> The analogy that Leibnitz presents—that the rules of harmony exist before anyone plays [music]… proves nothing. In this way, only the abstract truth is proven. But Xnty is a historical truth; how can it then be the absolute truth? If it is the historical truth, it has of course appeared at a particular time and a particular place, and is thus only valid at a particular time and a particular place. If one would like to say that it existed before it came into being, like harmony does, then one says nothing more about it than one says about any other idea… (*KJN* 3, 390 / *SKS* 19, 392; Not13:23).

[89] Lessing, "On the Proof…," 87 / "Über den Beweis…," 83.

"understanding between" the god and the individual. In fact, any differences in temporal proximity with respect to the incarnation are irrelevant for the possibility of eternal happiness or salvation: "[L]et us not forget that in regard to the birth of the god he [the contemporary learner] will be in the same situation as the follower at second hand."[90] Later this is clarified. Climacus writes, "[T]here is not and cannot be any question of a follower at second hand, for the believer [*Troende*] (and only he, after all, is a follower) continually has the *autopsy* of faith [*Troens Autopsi*]; he does not see with the eyes of others and sees only the same as every believer sees— with the eyes of faith."[91] In other words, even though the historical occurrence of the incarnation is crucial for salvation (insofar as it enables the dispensation of the condition), historical proximity to the incarnation – as well as all historical evidence that would simulate proximity – is immaterial to salvation (and potentially constitutes a temptation toward offense). Both macrocosmic (world-historical) and microcosmic (personal) histories are involved. The incarnation as a world-historical *moment* (the "absolute fact") makes it possible for the subjective *moment* in the individual's life to be one in which the condition is delivered.

We may even be mistaken or unsure about the particular details of the incarnation without compromising the possibility for faith: "So now we have the god walking around in the city in which he made his appearance (which one is inconsequential)…"[92] The evidence that the incarnation occurred may even be so thin that we are left with only crumbs. Climacus goes so far as to say:

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[90] *PF* 59 / *SKS* 4, 261. This is not to say that the contemporary follower and the follower who lives later have identical *experiences* of the god-teacher, but Climacus is quite clear that, soteriologically speaking, both are equally contemporary with the god. In fact, Climacus suggests that being present to the sensory details of the incarnate god might generate additional difficulties (*PF* 59-61 / *SKS* 4, 261-263).

[91] *PF* 102 / *SKS* 4, 299.

[92] *PF* 57 / *SKS* 4, 260.

Even if the contemporary generation had not left anything behind except these words, "We have believed that in such and such a year [*Anno det*] the god has appeared in the humble form of a servant, has lived and taught among us, and has then died"—that is more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done what is needful, for this little announcement, this world-historical *nota bene*, is enough to become an occasion for someone who comes later, and the most prolix report can never in all eternity become more for the person who comes later.[93]

Though this is still enough for faith, it is here that the faith/history problem emerges: Does it make sense for the *historicity* of incarnation to be essential while the details (communicated through reports of it, even minimal reports) are not? If all that is available is a little yet "world-historical *nota bene*," is there enough detail to determine what sort of occurrence the incarnation would be? With only Climacus' *nota bene*, is there enough to get faith off the ground?

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What is significant is the basic outline through which Climacus moves from positing the significance of the moment *ex hypothesi* to the (conditional) consequences of incarnation, sin, faith, and the purported significance of history as an arena for these concepts. But I have closed, leaving a tension in the text as yet unresolved: it seems the case that, if we follow Climacus, the historical facticity of incarnation is necessary for faith and eternal happiness, while the historical evidence of incarnation (along with any doctrine about its historical details) is not. I will return to this matter later.

B. Why was *Fragments* authored under a pseudonym?

The pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Fragments* is Johannes Climacus. The only other works attributed to this pseudonym are (prominently) the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, and (less prominently) an unpublished polemical rejoinder to a

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[93] *PF* 104 / *SKS* 4, 300. I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong.

pseudonymously authored book by Icelandic theologian Magnús Eiríksson that criticized *Fear and Trembling*.[94]

There is good reason to doubt that the pseudonymous status of *Fragments* should significantly impact its interpretation. Kierkegaard only replaced his own name as the author of *Fragments* with that of Johannes Climacus shortly before publication, leaving the name 'S. Kierkegaard' on the book, listed as an editor.[95] This suggests that Kierkegaard conceived the work as being published in his own name and so written in his own voice. Moreover, there are few obvious differences in style or substance between pieces attributed to Climacus and those Kierkegaard authored non-pseudonymously. This had led scholars such as Walter Lowrie and Niels Thulstrup to downplay the role of the Climacus pseudonym.[96] Lee Barrett argues that this is because "'Climacus' is not the name of a single monolithic stance or perspective; he is the site of the intersection of several loosely converging authorial dynamics. Some of these voices do not cohere easily, and some even seem to contradict one another."[97] If Barrett is right, this means that Climacus is not a *character* in the way that A and Wilhelm are, and that to make Climacus the voice of a work would depend on the purposes of that particular work. To make sense of

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[94] Kierkegaard intended to publish this reply in an undetermined newspaper in 1850, though – despite being prepared for print even with formatting instructions – it never came to fruition (*FT*, "Supplement," 259-265 / *Pap.* X⁶ B 68-82, 72-88). It seems that Kierkegaard considered Eiríksson to be intellectually inferior and uncareful as an interpreter, and it appears he was irritated that Eiríksson would also write pseudonymously (even though it seems Eiríksson did so out of admiration for Kierkegaard's work). See also Theophilus Nicolaus [Magnús Eiríksson], *Er Troen et Paradox og "i Kraft af det Absurde"?* [Is Faith a Paradox and "by Virtue of the Absurd"?] (Copenhagen: Chr. Steen & Søn, 1850) [*ASKB* 831].

[95] *PF*, "Supplement," 177 / *SKS* K4, "Tekstredegørelse," 192-193; *Pap.* V B 39, 90; *PS* ms.5.9. Even in the latest draft manuscript versions of the title pages and preface that most closely resemble the published version – until the final available proofreading manuscript (ms.6) – the name Johannes Climacus is absent, the preface is quite different, and there is no "J. C." at the end of the preface (*PF*, "Supplement," 177, 182-186 / *SKS* K4, "Tekstredegørelse," 177-181; *Pap.* V B 22-40, 81-94; *PS* mss.5.3-9,6).

[96] See Lee C. Barrett, "Johannes Climacus: Humorist, Dialectician, and Gadfly," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*, ed. Katalin Nun and Jon B. Stewart, *KRSRR* 17 (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2015]), 117.

[97] Barrett, "Johannes Climacus," 119.

Either / Or, it is necessary to imagine what a life such as A's or Wilhelm's would be like to live; but this is, Barret seems to suggest, unnecessary for the pseudonymous author of *Fragments*.

Even though I agree with Barrett's claim that the Climacus pseudonym is not central to interpreting *Fragments*, I think that there several worthwhile observations to be made Johannes Climacus. By assembling these, I believe I can reconstruct Kierkegaard's rationale for assigning *Fragments* to Climacus.

First, John the Climber is the name of a 6th-7th-century Christian monastic who authored a work in Greek titled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* or *The Ladder of Paradise*. Kierkegaard must have been familiar with this figure because he quotes "The real Johannes Climacus (the author of *scala paradisi*)" in an 1849 notebook entry,[98] but there is no reason to think he engaged in any rigorous study of the text. The quotation from the "real Johannes Climacus" he writes in his journal seems to have little to do with the pseudonymous author of *Fragments* and *Postscript*: "There are but few saints; if we wish to become saintly and saved, we must live as do the few."[99]

Second, Kierkegaard mockingly remarks in a short early-1839 journal entry that "Hegel is a Johannes Climacus, who does not storm the heavens like the giants by putting mountain upon mountain, but *enters* it by way of his syllogisms."[100]

Third, we should note that the pseudonymous author of *Fragments* shares a name with the main character of Kierkegaard's *Johannes Climacus, or, De omnibus dubitandum est*, a text authored from mid-1842 to early-1843 but likely incomplete and published only long after

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[98] *KJN* 5, 306 / *SKS* 21, 296; NB10:73. I have adjusted the translation from the *KJN*. The Latin is Kierkegaard's.

[99] Alfonso Maria de Liguori, *Vollständiges Betrachtungs- und Gebetbuch vom heiligen Alphons von Liguori* (Aachen: Cremersche Buchhandlung, 1840) [*ASKB* 264], 569-570.

[100] *KJN* 1, 268 / *SKS* 17, 277; DD:203.

Kierkegaard's death.[101] This work was planned as a polemical piece, warning against the dangers of speculative philosophy and methodological doubt,[102] and there is little to suggest that the voice behind *Fragments* (or any of the other works attributed to the pseudonym) is that of this earlier work's central character.

Finally, Johannes Climacus' initials are J. C., which gesture to the name and title of Jesus the Christ (in Kierkegaard's Danish, usually written 'Jesus Christus'). Climacus signs the end of the preface of *Fragments* with only these initials.[103]

My suspicion is that Kierkegaard did not intend the pseudonym Johannes Climacus to allude substantively to the author of the *Ladder*, but that the association Kierkegaard drew from this historical figure involves, broadly, the idea of the human being's ascent, that is, movement from the ground upward. When Kierkegaard insults Hegel by referring to him as "a Johannes Climacus," he is channeling the author of the *Ladder* only obliquely, and the nickname serves more as a shorthand for someone whose thought can – because they arrogantly think they can connect the temporal to the eternal (or contingent to the necessary) by way of an incremental process, such as discursive reasoning – be casually dismissed (that is., dismissed offhand as "a Johannes Climacus"). It is from this association and nickname that the central character of *Johannes Climacus* gets his name, for – to Kierkegaard – the eponymous character would be, like Hegel, "a Johannes Climacus."

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[101] Dating the authorship of *Johannes Climacus* is problematic; manuscript evidence points to 1842, but in a late-1844 or early-1845 journal entry Kierkegaard himself recalls working on the piece only "a year and a half ago" (*KJN* 2, 212 / *SKS* 18, 231; JJ:288). For information on manuscript dating, see *SKS* K15, "Tekstredegørelse," 33-44. It is likely that the themes of the book gradually found a place in other works Kierkegaard finished, but exactly when this happened is unclear.

[102] See, e.g., *JC* 117 / *SKS* 15, 16.

[103] *PF* 8 / *SKS* 4, 217.

When Kierkegaard completed *Fragments*, I suspect he visualized the book's core

dynamic as a movement upward to what is eternal or religious from what is rational, temporal, or

merely human (that is, "build[ing] an eternal salvation"). But attributing *Fragments* to the

pseudonym Johannes Climacus represents a reconsideration of the motif of reaching upward that

originally appeared – through an allusion to the author of the *Ladder* – as a form of mockery in

his brief 1839 journal entry, as well as in *Johannes Climacus*. Climacus' project in *Fragments* is

indeed one that, in the shape of a rational deduction, *performs* a move from the ground upward,

but the name is not assigned to deride the content of *Fragments*. On the contrary, the name

highlights that the author's task involves articulating Christianity out of philosophical categories

and terminology, with the terms specific to Christian doctrine being (at first) merely stipulated as

names. This method could be contrasted with that of a much later pseudonym Johannes Anti-

Climacus, author of *Sickness Unto Death* (1849) and *Practice in Christianity*. The 'anti' of Anti-

Climacus does not signal that this pseudonymous author is *against* or *opposed to* the thought of

Johannes Climacus[104]; it is rather that Anti-Climacus' explicitly theological perspective and

dogmatic terminology involve a figurative 'downward climb' or descent, in contrast to

Climacus' method of climbing upward (that is, generating dogmatics through a performance of

reasoning). About the two pseudonyms, Kierkegaard has the following to say in an 1849 journal

entry: "J. Climacus and Anti-Climacus have several things in common, but the difference is that

while J. C. places himself so low that he even claims that he is[n't] Xn, one seems to sense that

Anti-C. considers himself to be Xn to an extraordinary degree…"[105] The major difference

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[104] Hong and Hong concur that the "anti" in Anti-Climacus has little to do with the concept of opposition. It refers, on their account, to an archaic spelling of *ante* (meaning 'before,' such as in 'anticipate'). See *SUD*, "Historical Introduction," xxii; and *PV*, "Historical Introduction," xvii.

[105] *KJN* 6, 127 / *SKS* 22, 130; NB11:209. The "[n't]" in brackets is interpolated by the *SKS* redactors; its absence in the entry is presumed uncontroversially to be an accidental omission. See also *KJN* 6, 125 / *SKS* 22, 127; NB11:204, authored at about the same time: "The pseudonym is named Johannes Anticlimacus, in contrast to Climacus, who

between them is not the content of their thought or whether one *is* Christian and the other not, but rather where they "place" themselves and what they "consider" themselves.

This journal entry might raise a further complication about *Fragments*: Since Climacus claims he is not Christian, can we trust him to properly (re)construct Christianity from philosophical categories? Such a question echoes a concern common to interpretations of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writing. Ferreira articulates it in this way: "[S]ince Johannes Climacus tells us (in his *Postscript* to *Philosophical Fragments*) that he is not a Christian, we should be very wary of thinking that Johannes Climacus gets the portrayal of Christianity (indirect as it may be) right."[106] Though Ferreira goes on to point out – as I did at the beginning of this section of the chapter – that the addition of the pseudonym was right before publication of the book (requiring a more nuanced form of skepticism), her question about Climacus' authority over theological matters is an obvious one. Two responses are in order.

First, Climacus does not explicitly declare he is not Christian before the *Postscript*, making it unclear whether Climacus' identification as not-Christian applies to *Fragments*.[107] Second, we should recall what was discussed in the previous chapter about what it means to "become aware" and to "become a Christian." To recall what Kierkegaard has written in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, becoming a Christian means to be aware, and then to *judge* (in the direction of Christianity).[108] (By judgment, Kierkegaard seems to imply some form of choice that can decide on what is ultimately 'true.') This suggests two further possibilities:

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claimed not to be Christian; Anticlimacus stands at the opposite extreme: a Christian to an extraordinary degree." In an August 4, 1849, letter to Rasmus Nielsen, Kierkegaard analogizes the relation between the two pseudonyms to the notions of climax and anticlimax, but I do not believe it is very helpful (*LD* 310; lt. 219 / *SKS* 28, 444; brev 288).

[106] M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 9.

[107] *CUP1* 617 / *SKS* 7, 560.

[108] PV 50 / SKS 16, 32.

first of all, that one can be perfectly aware of Christianity's implications (and capable of explaining them) but have decided (in offense) to not become Christian, and second, that being a Christian involves an internal process of decision that does not require proclaiming one's discipleship from the rooftops. In a parallel to the god-teacher's incognito – a theme in *Fragments* I will return to from an epistemological angle in Chapter III – the outward denial of being Christian is completely commensurable with being a Christian.[109] Indeed, it seems for Climacus that to be either Christ, or to be Christian, involves silence, or perhaps better, a sort of *Mona Lisa*-smile. And this silence, this secret, this uncertainty— it goes both ways: If no one can recognize who is Christian, then no one can determine who is *not* Christian. And if no one can recognize who is the god incarnate with certainty, no one can *know* with certainty that the person next door is *not* the historically incarnate god. Climacus may simply be a Christian incognito. Hence our author signs his preface "J. C."

To preview the trajectory of my interpretation in Chapter III— I will argue that the inability for an individual to perceive Christ reliably through sensory means is essential to the incarnation. One cannot even point to Jesus (or a description of any person) and say with certainty that he was Christ. Where and when did the moment occur, world-historically speaking? And, a distinct but related question: when was I offered or given the condition in my personal history?

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[109] For Climacus' discussion of humor and the incognito of religiousness (a concept which resonates here), see *CUP1* 505-506 / *SKS* 7, 458-459. However, later Climacus suggests that the incognito of the *Christian*-religious is not to be a religious humorist, though humor may still be involved (*CUP1* 531n / *SKS* 7, 438n).

C. Are Climacus' arguments rationally defensible?

Though Climacus' hypothetical (re)construction of Christianity appears to be performed by

reasoning from a hypothesis about the moment, it is cause to doubt that Climacus (or

Kierkegaard) thought of his own arguments as sufficiently compelling. First, *Fragments*'

arguments are rarely careful. (In an egregious example I mentioned earlier, Climacus makes a

sweeping claim about human sinfulness after quickly dismissing alternative explanations for how

a human being might not natively possess the truth.[110]) Second, Climacus does not endeavor

sincerely to conceal that his deductions map on to Christian doctrine, interspersing his arguments

with conversations between himself and an imagined interlocutor who accuses him of

plagiarizing the Gospels. (In these sections, Climacus playfully pulls the curtain aside to reveal

Christian doctrine behind it, disclosing his project as a jest, but one based on a sincere

interpretation of Christianity.) The arguments Climacus makes thus seem subordinate to the

comedic elements of *Fragments*, leading one to ask whether they need to be interpreted as

attempts at rational persuasion.

In a classic account of *Fragments*, Robert C. Roberts has sketched out the problems with

many of Climacus' arguments, referring to them as "hilarious," due both to its blatant flaws and

its comedic framing.[111] While I agree with Roberts that *Fragments*' arguments are comedic

– involving playful language, images of costumes and mistaken identities, plain allusions to the

Gospels that, with a wink, coyly pretend (for a moment) that they are not what they are – I

dispute his deflationary account of Climacus' development of the Christian position as not "a

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[110] *PF* 15 / *SKS* 4, 224.

[111] Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments,"* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), 59, 65, 79, 87, 91-92, 99.

serious attempt at philosophy" but merely "a design to get us thinking."[112] Roberts' position is that in *Fragments*, Climacus engages in a pattern of making "reckless arguments" and "stating (or suggesting) a truth, even a very simple one, but arriving at that truth by poor arguments, or couching the truth so obscurely that each reader must think his way to it on his own."[113] Though Kierkegaard would not have considered Climacus' thought-experiment to be rationally *compelling*, I suspect he thought of the overall argumentative thread of *Fragments* as something that could genuinely appeal to his readers' intellect, which if done self-consciously – as already discussed in the introduction to this thesis in conjunction with *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* – is one way of performing the method of indirect communication. (*Fragments* is obviously not a work beginning with a list of definitions and axioms like, for example, Spinoza's *Ethics*, and Kierkegaard has a significantly different position than an author such as Spinoza on the role of reason in the good life. But even in works organized like the *Ethics*, later interpreters recognize many lines of argument to be less satisfying than their author had originally supposed.)

Effectively, Roberts claims Climacus' arguments are bad on purpose, so that the reader has to work even harder than they would if the arguments had been strong. But I do not see the additional pedagogical usefulness that would emerge from *intentionally* bad arguments when, for both Climacus and Kierkegaard, no argument can be sufficient to move someone into Christianity. Instead, I believe they should be interpreted as arguments that often fail to be compelling, but whose airtightness never could – for Climacus' or Kierkegaard's purposes – sufficiently accomplish Christianity (for the reader) anyway.

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[112] Ibid., 99.

[113] Ibid., 100.

One might distinguish here between arguments and argumentation, as C. S. Peirce does: "An 'Argument' is any process of thought tending to produce a definitive belief. An 'Argumentation' is an Argument proceeding upon definitely formulated premises."[114] Climacus is indeed interested to persuade using reasoning, comedy, and other rhetorical elements, and to this extent makes arguments for conclusions he wants his reader to arrive at with him. These arguments often appear in the shape of formal argumentation yet fail (as Climacus is well aware) to rise to the level of thoroughly worked-out justified premises, deductions, and conclusions. *Fragments* uses the shape of deductive argumentation to communicate two key ideas, which I believe Climacus indeed takes to be provocative for the reader's intellect, though not rationally coercive: First, that Christianity can be reconstructed – with largely philosophical vocabulary – as a response to a problem that emerges in 'Paganism.' In this sense, Christianity is an answer to a question that even a human being untouched by Christian doctrine can *ask*. Second, that the tradition of Christianity can plausibly be reduced to a single metaphysical kernel,[115] from which all important soteriological doctrinal appendages can really be unfolded. *Fragments* makes the moment (and Christ, or incarnation) central, exposing sin-consciousness, paradox, faith, the possibility of *Salighed* (eternal happiness, blessedness, or salvation), and the concept of creative love, as several of its *inseparable* facets, which all must be engaged as novel and distinct world-historical possibilities in order to actualize them subjectively in the individual human life. (Other texts by Kierkegaard begin with one or more of these other concepts.) The inseparability of these ideas is something that Climacus (as well as Kierkegaard behind him) believes to be rationally appealing, even if their thoroughgoing continuity is not irrefutably argued in the text. This

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[114] C. S. Peirce, "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," *The Hibbert Journal* 7, no. 1 (Oct. 1908), 91.

[115] See, e.g., Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 12-14.

reinforces the tight connection between Kierkegaard's theology and the fact that in the judgement *to be* or *not to be* Christian, one need not make a multitude of decisions about this or that dogma, for everything that is important is bundled together. The rest is just packaging, or clothing, depending on one's preferred analogy.

Finally, I propose that the text's arguments challenge its reader further, not to reach the very same conclusions by means of independent mental effort, but rather to consider whether these arguments have implications not voiced aloud in *Fragments*. For instance, when Climacus writes about the incarnate god that, "for the follower [*Discipel*] the external form (not its detail) is not inconsequential," the attentive reader will inquire into the difference between Christ's "external form" and "its detail."[116] *That* there is an external form is consequential, but *which* or *what* external form ("its detail") is not. The reader will recognize what is hinted at, namely that the historical figure of Jesus (*one* possible account of incarnation's "detail") need not be the object of faith.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

In this chapter, I have provided a preliminary assessment of the structure, themes, and theology of *Philosophical Fragments*. The next chapter will pick up where this one leaves off, namely by interrogating the relationships between the various coordinates within the dynamic of faith. In so doing, it will attempt to provide a solution to the faith/history problem, a problem which I have already foreshadowed.

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[116] *PF* 65 / *SKS* 4, 266.

CHAPTER III.
THE FAITH/HISTORY PROBLEM IN *PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS*

All this happened, more or less.[1]

To frame the faith/history problem straightforwardly— Christianity (for Climacus, likely for Kierkegaard) is unique because its soteriology is essentially historical,[2] but all of the details commonly associated with its history are irrelevant for faith. This tension has been discussed at length in scholarship about the book, particularly in classic interpretations of *Fragments* by Louis Pojman, Michael P. Levine, Ferreira, and C. Stephen Evans. In a recent attempt to grapple with the issue, Joseph Cockayne helpfully formulates the faith/history problem in this way: Climacus "introduces an account of Christian faith which claims that historical evidence is neither necessary nor sufficient to acquire faith; however, at the same time on his view, the historical event of God entering history, that is, the Incarnation, is necessary."[3] To invoke Cockayne's terminology, the faith/history problem involves two claims Climacus makes clearly and repeatedly about faith: faith requires an *event condition* (that the incarnation occurred as a historical event) and an *evidence condition* (that historical knowledge of this event be excluded from the basis of faith).[4] These two conditions should not be confused with Climacus' own discussion of faith as the condition (*Betingelsen*) for apprehending the truth. For that reason, I will here on refer to them as the 'event requirement' and the 'evidence requirement.'

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[1] As narrated by Billy Pilgrim. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or, The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1994), 1.

[2] In a notebook entry from 1842–1843 in which Kierkegaard considers his own position vis-à-vis that of Leibniz, he writes, "…the historical is precisely [Christianity's] essential aspect, whereas in the case of other ideas, it [the historical] is the contingent" (*KJN* 3, 390 / *SKS* 19, 392-393; Not13:23).

[3] Cockayne, "Empathy and divine union in Kierkegaard," 455.

[4] Ibid., 459.

To be clear, the problem is not that a faithful individual is expected to *believe* simultaneously the content of the event and evidence requirements; Climacus never asks the follower (*Discipel*) to assent mentally to a proposition corresponding to the evidence requirement, i.e., *that* historical knowledge is unimportant. Rather, the issue lies in at least one of two apparent aporias that result from attempting to provide an account of how an individual could become faithful in light of the two requirements. Cockayne thus calls the faith/history problem a "pragmatic contradiction," for the problem emerges only when we consider how an individual is expected to become a follower, that is, a faithful Christian.[5]

The first aporia is between the historical occurrence of the incarnation and any report referring to that occurrence which could serve as the occasion through which an individual spatiotemporally distant from the occurrence receives the condition: what criteria must a report or experience meet to render it suitable as an occasion for the god to dispense the condition? Here, we might ask either how, abstracted from rational or historical details, the report has sufficient content and reliability to serve as an occasion to dispense the condition (following Pojman), or alternatively whether a relationship of causation or reference between the report and the occurrence is even necessary in the first place (Levine). The second aporia appears when one takes on the perspective of an individual spatiotemporally distant from the occurrence of incarnation: how can this individual faithfully assent to the historicity of the incarnation without historical details sufficient for adequately determining which occurrence they would be assenting to (Ferreira, Evans)? As I will show, of this selection of Climacus' interpreters, Pojman, Ferreira, and Evans believe the problem lies in the evidence requirement, while Levine suggests the problem resides in the event requirement.

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[5] Ibid., 460.

For all of them (including Cockayne[6]), the picture of faith they ascribe to Climacus is roughly the same: Something has *happened* (in history)— the god (or God) enters time in or as an individual human being (Jesus, they presume). Upon doing so, the god dispenses (through some combination of its presence and teachings) the condition to eyewitnesses, who, because of witnessing the incarnate god, can (and do) compose reports that refer to the occurrence. Some later reports may then refer to early reports, so the instantiation claim about the paradox is passed across history as a story told by one generation to the next. When a spatiotemporally distant individual encounters such a report, it could serve as the occasion for them to receive the condition from the god. Should that happen, they respond either by assenting to the truth of the occurrence's historicity (in faith, becoming a follower) or by refusing to do so (in offense).

The solution I propose to the faith/history problem disrupts this picture. Unveiling Climacus' logic from passages in *Fragments*, I argue there is reason to maintain some separation (volitionally) between the moment the condition is offered and the decision of faith, to problematize the ability to recognize the causal connection between the incarnation and the occasion through which the condition is dispensed, and to dislocate the object to which faith refers from the purported referent of the report. I prioritize the subjective (that is, microcosmic) encounter with the god through which condition is received over the world-historical event that enables its possibility, treating the world-historical occurrence of the incarnation as a historical requirement (a causal condition of possibility) deduced through the former.[7] (Indeed, this is what

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[6] Cockayne attempts his own solution to the faith/history problem, which draws on theologian Eleonore Stump's account of the divine-human union as a type of theological empathy. See Cockayne, "Empathy and divine union in Kierkegaard," 467-473; and, e.g., Eleonore Stump, "Omnipresence, indwelling, and the second-personal," *European Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 4 (Dec. 2013): 63-87. Cockayne's discussion of the faith/history problem is astute, but his solution seems not to resolve the tensions intrinsic to *Fragments*, so much as leverage a redescription of God's salvific activity (as empathy) to spackle the gap between the event and evidence requirements.

[7] In this sense, even though the world-historical incarnation is the *ratio essendi* for the subjective encounter, the possibility of the subjective encounter serves as the *ratio cognoscendi* (or rather, *ratio judicandi*) of the world-

Climacus himself does in the thought-experiment.) The kernel of *Fragments*' articulation of the

Christian position is indeed that a world-historical but non-necessary *change* makes access to

happiness or salvation (*Salighed*) possible through a new "organ" of subjectivity[8]: faith.

However, the details about this occurrence are written over by other elements of the (Christian)

position that Climacus develops throughout *Fragments*. To the extent Climacus' project involves

identifying and coherently connecting (to one another) the minimal metaphysical and

anthropological commitments that would be required to answer the questions with which the

book opens (about a historical point of departure for salvation or happiness), Climacus must be

committed to a concept of Christ that is even more resistant to empirical or historical

descriptions than his critics presume.

In this chapter, I first summarize articulations of the faith/history problem by Climacus'

critics. I then offer interpretations of several aspects of Climacus' account of faith that run

contrary to these scholars' presumptions. (These are the three disruptions I have foreshadowed in

the paragraph above.) Finally, based on the implications of my interpretation – also drawing

from aspects of Levine's and Ferreira's critiques of the faith/history problem – I reconstruct

Climacus' account of faith (and its relation to incarnation and history) to open up a resolution to

the faith/history problem. This reconstruction goes in a surprising direction. It will turn out

that, for Climacus' account of faith to be coherent and to avoid falling prey to the faith/history

problem: first, the event requirement can be stripped entirely of purported empirical descriptions

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historical occurrence. (Kant makes a parallel move when arguing on the basis of consciousness of the moral law that the human being must be free. See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 140n / AA 5:4n. This parallel is likely coincidental. But similar to how, for Kant, one may know that freedom exists even though its conditions of possibility cannot be cognized, for Climacus— faith means that the world-historical incarnation must have happened, yet – as I will argue – even for faith the historical-causal conditions through which the subject receives the paradox are uncognizable.)

[8] *PF* 81, 111 / *SKS* 4, 280, 306.

of its historical details; and second, no guarantee of the incarnation as a historical fact can reside in empirical descriptions, but it instead finds some support in the individual's ability to entertain the distinctiveness of the incarnation (what Ferreira has dubbed Climacus' "*a priori* 'proof'"). In this way, what appears to be a faith/history problem at first glance might be better described as a faith/empiricality problem. While, according to Climacus, the facticity of the incarnation (that god has entered history) must still be the case for faith to be possible, attempts to achieve certainty about when or where it took place – and with what sort of empirical description – are neither relevant, possible, nor demanded by faith.

A. Scholarly Accounts of the Faith/History Problem

For various reasons, scholars have criticized *Fragments* based on an interpretive and conceptual tension, which has become known as the faith/history problem. In this section I lay the groundwork for tackling this problem. In the following sections I critique these scholars' positions and offer a solution to the faith/history problem. Here, my exegesis of Climacus will be preliminary, elaborated only to the extent needed to explicate other scholars' interpretations.

In order for me to have faith/believe (*at tro*) that the incarnation has occurred, it seems that I must have heard about the incarnation from somewhere. Pojman refers to this as a "minimum of historical data" required for an individual to acquire faith.[9] Without this "minimum of historical data," the incarnation could not be represented sufficiently to occasion the condition's delivery. Recall Climacus' "world-historical *nota bene*," a brief communication from people in the past which contains only a stripped-down account of their creed: "We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and

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[9] Pojman, "Kierkegaard on Faith and History," 57.

taught among us, and then died." Pojman identifies this statement as the "minimum of historical data," which, for Climacus, is supposedly "more than enough." Yet Pojman worries it contains simultaneously too little and too much. On the one hand, it has insufficient content: "What does the name 'God' stand for here…? Would it have to include omnibenevolence or could the deity just be mostly good?"[10] Assuming the *nota bene* is without other context (that is, if it really is supposed to contain the minimum necessary historical data), there still seems to be not enough to communicate the particular metaphysical paradoxicality of incarnation that Climacus requires to dispense the condition. For example, for someone to believe in some limited way that the incarnation occurred without understanding that, otherwise, the god is eternal, seems not to rise to the level of faith.

On the other hand, even with the "minimum of historical data" in the *nota bene*, there might still be too much content for it to be secured from historical *disproof*: "Perhaps no single bit of evidence or the sum of all the evidence can enable us to infer a metaphysical proposition (for example, that God raised Jesus from the dead, the Scriptures are divinely inspired, Jesus is perfect God and perfect man), but the opposite situation may not be ruled out… The assertion that Jesus was raised by God from the dead is falsified by the proof that Jesus never lived…"[11] Pojman pushes the point further, imagining doubting the authenticity of both the occurrence and the report by using the example of a scribal error. After recognizing a scribe had mistranscribed the name of a man named 'Gade' as the word 'God,' "everyone had a hearty laugh. Would Climacus still want to maintain that no one's faith would be affected or should be affected by

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[10] Ibid., 59.

[11] Ibid., 63.

such a discovery?"[12] In the former case, something contradicting the report demonstrates with some reliability that the specific occurrence depicted in the report was unlikely to have happened; in the latter case, uncovering the error severs the report as an effect of the causal chain originating from the supposed occurrence.[13] Pojman seems confident that both induce a hurdle for faith.

Effectively, Pojman's argument is that Climacus has thrown out the baby without ever changing the bathwater. To meet the evidence requirement, a thin report must be sufficient, but its thinness inhibits the communication of the paradoxicality required for the condition to be given. And yet historical disproof of the reported events is still possible. This means that the evidence requirement has generated serious obstacles for a report to serve as an adequate *occasion* by means of which the god could dispense the condition to an individual. Either its facticity is not gripping, its concepts insufficiently communicate the paradox, or both.

Levine's move, on the contrary, seeks to undermine the necessity of the event requirement. He asks: "Why should God have had to enter into time rather than merely the proposition [that God had done so], and why should the proposition now suffice?"[14] This is a very different response (than Pojman's) to Climacus' claim about the *nota bene*, which, for Levine, overtakes the significance of the purported occurrence (incarnation) to which it claims to refer. If God does not have to be presently alive as a human being for the condition to be dispensed – and indeed, for one who comes later, this appears to be the case for Climacus, given

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Complicated questions of causality, reference, and naming emerge at this juncture, such as what is explored in Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). Though a courageous interpreter might find such a path fruitful, I avoid it for the duration of this thesis.

[14] Michael P. Levine, "Why the Incarnation Is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard," *Religious Studies* 18, no. 2 (Jun. 1982), 172.

his remarks about the "world-historical *nota bene*" – then why look outside the *nota bene* itself for the condition? Levine's suspicion is that the "actual incarnation" is an *ad hoc* "ontological requirement rather than a logical one."[15] The burden of proof, he suggests, should be on Climacus to demonstrate in a way consistent with the logic of his own soteriology why "the historicity of the incarnation is not a superfluous detail."[16] Thus, on Levine's reading, if we really need a *condition* and not simply a (Socratic) *occasion*, we might as well simply treat the teacher who communicated the proposition about the incarnation (on the *nota bene* or wherever we stumble upon it) as dispensing the condition for the first time.[17] For there is no need to suppose some corresponding past thing occurred which caused the report or to which the report refers: "Certainly the appearance of God is not necessary for the appearance of the proposition. It is the proposition itself and not the truth of the proposition that appears to be required."[18] Climacus, on Levine's interpretation, is incoherent; we may as well go back to the Socratic.

Ferreira's intervention into the faith/history problem is a crucial development in the debate, though she quickly dismisses her own major observation about *Fragments* as offering no workable solution to the problem. (What she uncovers will turn out to be a key part of my solution to *Fragments*' faith/history problem, despite its irrelevance to her.) Ferreira's piece responds explicitly to both Pojman and Levine.[19] She pushes Pojman's interrogation of the evidence requirement further: "The problem [with Climacus' rejection of historical details]… is that it is difficult to make sense of a notion of certitude that an *event* took place, which event is

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Climacus clearly wants to avoid this conclusion. See *PF* 100-101 / *SKS* 4, 298.

[18] Levine, "Why the Incarnation Is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard," 172.

[19] Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem," 340.

totally independent of *any* historical information as to its character – because an event must be distinguishable from other events. One asks *which* event took place."[20] While Pojman contends that only a "minimum of historical data," such as what is described in Climacus' *nota bene*, might mean the concepts in a report of the incarnation would be too underdetermined to serve as an adequate occasion for dispensing the condition, Ferreira's concern is that the historical details of the incarnation in the *nota bene* would be too underdetermined for someone to become a follower of the incarnate god: it is thus "difficult, that is, in principle, to assert the total irrelevance of historical information about a particular event or kind of event…"[21] What would it mean to have faith that incarnation occurred if the incarnation could be stripped of all historical details? Because, according to Ferreira, "the possibility of faith requires a characterizable historical event," we would need more historical information than is in the *nota bene*, "yet historical information about the event is not allowed by him [Climacus] to be crucial."[22] What Ferreira means by "characterizable" seems to involve empirical details (either as witnessed, or as inferred from witnessed accounts) that could differentiate an event from others.

Ferreira then steps in to offer Climacus an avenue of escape, gesturing to an often-ignored series of claims in *Fragments*, claims which together resemble an argument of the type uncharacteristic of both Climacus and Kierkegaard. She calls it, hesitantly, a "non-probabilistic proof"[23] and "an *a priori* or conceptual 'proof' of Incarnation or God in time."[24] Though the

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[20] Ibid., 339.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 341.

[23] Ibid., 342. Because it requires a (self-)assessment about whether the individual *has* an idea of incarnation, I do not believe it is actually non-probabilistic. Cf. Marcar, "Climacus' Miracle."

[24] Ibid., 341-342.

proof is not fully developed into a formal argument, Ferreira identifies three textual loci in

Fragments where it appears. (Ferreira abbreviates these passages for her short article.[25] I will

share them here – with her elisions – in the updated English translation by the Hongs.)

> Yet this oddity [– that it seems no *first* individual conceived of incarnation –] enthralls me exceedingly, for it tests the correctness of the hypothesis and demonstrates it.[26]

> …if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him? …This would indeed be… so bad a thought that it could not arise in him…[27]

> No[thing other than Christianity]… has ever had this idea [*Indfald*]—of which in this connection one can say with all multiple meanings that it did not arise in any human heart.[28]

Ferreira is self-consciously ambivalent about what these passages communicate. They could

either be bare assertions of the facticity of incarnation, or arguments intended to establish the

conclusion that the incarnation has happened.[29] She leans in the direction of the latter: "It seems

to be taken by Climacus as an argument to the effect that a peculiar characteristic of a concept

establishes an ontological conclusion – a claim about existence can be derived from the

concept's peculiar and obvious character."[30] In short: Because of what the incarnate god is, any

idea (or, notion; *Indfald*) of the incarnate god could only come from god, who could only deliver

the idea by incarnating; I have an idea of the incarnate god; therefore god incarnated.[31]

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[25] Ibid., 342.

[26] *PF* 22 / *SKS* 4, 230.

[27] *PF* 36 / *SKS* 4, 242.

[28] *PF* 109 / *SKS* 4, 305.

[29] Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem," 344.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Because this 'proof' involves a subject's self-assessment of whether they have an idea of the incarnation (something which may not be transparent to oneself), the 'proof' may not be *a priori* at all. Marcar has called it an "a posteriori argument," for which he finds an antecedent in Spinoza's assessment of Cartesian philosophy. See Marcar, "Climacus' Miracle," 61-62. For Spinoza's argument, see Spinoza, *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy*,"

Ferreira is interested neither in analyzing thoroughly the components of the 'proof' nor in defending its plausibility. Instead, she wants to show that it may play an important role in *Fragments* for securing faith's event and evidence requirements – in conjunction with one another – despite the tension between them.[32] Both Pojman's concern with the historical vulnerabilities of a thin report as well as the report's connection (historical and conceptual) to the purported occurrence, and Levine's concern that the proposition *that the incarnation has occurred* reveals the superfluity of the occurrence itself, are resolved if entertaining the proposition (regardless of the historical mechanism whereby it was occasioned) guarantees that what it refers to actually occurred.

Yet at the same time, Ferreira expresses reservations about the 'proof,' insofar as it appears to conflict with Climacus' project. With respect to *Fragments* in particular, Ferreira points out that an explicit proof of the truth of the Christian position contradicts the thought-experiment framework the text adopts (since Climacus develops the Christian position as a hypothesis).[33] More significantly, in a critique also applicable to the *Postscript*, she writes, "the possibility of such an *a priori* proof seems entirely at odds with the crucial emphasis… on the importance of risk and the incompatibility of objective certainty and the passion appropriate to faith. Climacus again and again claims that without risk there is no faith. He sees 'proof' and 'certainty' as the 'enemy' of faith."[34] Ferreira concludes that Climacus is stuck in a dilemma: "without such a proof-strategy Kierkegaard is left with an insoluble conflict between ontological

in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1 of 2 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985), 247 (IP6, I/159) / *Benedicti de Spinoza opera philosophical omnia*, 12.

[32] Ibid., 343-344.

[33] Ibid., 344.

[34] Ibid.

historical decisiveness and epistemological indifference of the historical, but with such a strategy

he undermines his own understanding of the passion and risk of faith."[35]

      Finally, Evans' reading of *Fragments* has a clear (confessional) theological motivation.

As with Pojman, Evans questions the evidence requirement without contesting the event

requirement. Unlike Pojman, Evans argues "that Climacus's account is coherent, and that on

such a view historical evidence is not sufficient for faith for anyone," but Evans also hopes to

modulate Climacus' eschewal of rational and historical evidence for incarnation.[36] The reason

for this modulation is that Climacus is, on Evans' account, too dismissive of the mutual support

between faith and historical beliefs given the realities of human psychology: "Evidence might

still be valuable and even necessary for some people."[37] Because the incarnation is, without

context, an abstract proposition, the *nota bene* may be inadequate to serve as the occasion for

people whose knowledge or psychologies are less attuned to metaphysics. He continues, asking,

"Is it possible to believe that Jesus Christ lived and died for me as the Son of God, and be

indifferent to critical questions about the factuality of my beliefs?"[38]

      Evans claims to agree with Climacus that faith "depend[s]… on a firsthand experience of

Jesus for which historical records serve only as an occasion," yet crucially for Evans, faith also

has an "ability… to supply a context in which the evidence available is sufficient."[39] This is to

say, faith – which is in principle soteriologically sufficient – *also* psychologically permits the

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[35] Ibid., 345.

[36] Evans, "The Relevance of Historical Evidence for Christian Faith," 151.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 156.

[39] Ibid., 151. Evans' invocation of "experience" exemplifies an all-too-common practice among scholars for explaining aspects of Kierkegaard's thought by appealing to religious experience, an idea not native to his theology.

individual to connect otherwise unconnected dots to bridge the uncertainties of history in order to secure itself (faith); through faith, one is better able to hold *in mente* the belief that Jesus was God incarnate despite the temporal distance and lack of historical and rational certainty (a belief Evans takes to be necessary for faith). This is to argue that attempts at objective verification of the content of beliefs mutually reinforce the subjective ground of faith, despite the fact that only the latter is necessary and sufficient for salvation. Rational argument and historical evidence perform ancillary psychological work to clear the ground of major doubts so that one's belief in the incarnation can persist during and after its source, a "firsthand encounter with Jesus Christ."[40]

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

To summarize my selection of Climacus' critics: Pojman and Evans think Climacus should have adopted a more moderate position in place of his evidence requirement. For Pojman, requiring a more historically robust report with thicker content than the *nota bene* would ensure that the faith-commitment could be both accurately yoked to a particular historical occurrence and that its content would be sufficiently determined. For Evans, permitting forms of rational argumentation and historical evidence to support the historicity of incarnation would direct attention to the unique world-historical moment when the teaching was dispensed. Levine's critique, on the other hand, is that, absent any logical requirement for incarnation to actually occur, Climacus has no reason to say that faith demands more than only the *idea* of incarnation. But to *invent* the idea of incarnation, according to Levine, clearly does not depend on the incarnation having occurred; hence, the Christian position is either incoherent or collapses into some version of the Socratic. Finally, Ferreira locates a potential rejoinder (on behalf of Climacus) to Pojman and Levine, which she hesitantly labels an '*a priori* proof' that the

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[40] Ibid., 167.

incarnation has occurred. But to embrace the 'proof' would require Climacus to jettison or at least substantially temper his opposition to rational argumentation as a basis for faith.

In the following sections, I attempt to wrest open the connections between several elements of Climacus' account of faith, history, and incarnation in order to demonstrate where Climacus' critics have erred, and to provide a foundation to resolve the faith/history problem.

B. Grace, Faith, Offense

When Climacus uses the word *Tro* (belief or faith) and its variants in *Fragments*, what does he mean? It is clear that sometimes *Tro* refers to the faculty of the human being that affirms things whose occurrence or existence is merely probabilistic. This *Tro* is called the "organ for the historical"[41] or "*Tro* in the ordinary sense."[42] Though Climacus complicates even this "ordinary sense" of *Tro*, it roughly means the capacity for *belief* as an epistemic posture (that is, *belief that*), the capacity involved in assenting or committing to some matter about which the subject is uncertain. In this sense, the term can refer to the organ that believes, or the beliefs that the organ forms. For example, Climacus writes, "belief believes what it does not see."[43] *Belief* is the faculty that can affirm ("believe") what is not immediately sensed, which affirmation would also be a *belief*. This first variant of *Tro* (belief) most frequently occurs in the "Interlude," where Climacus explicitly contrasts it with another meaning of *Tro*: *faith*. Climacus calls the latter "*Tro*… in the wholly eminent sense."[44] For most of *Fragments*, when Climacus uses the term *Tro* (or its variants), he means *faith*.

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[41] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 280.

[42] *PF* 87-88 / *SKS* 4, 286.

[43] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 281.

[44] *PF* 87 / *SKS* 4, 286. The Danish for "eminent" is *eminent*, meaning 'remarkable' or 'extraordinary' (*ODS*).

Yet here, too, there is an ambiguity that parallels that of belief. Climacus sometimes means the condition (*Betingelse*) for apprehending and affirming salvific truth.[45] In this sense, *Tro* is *faith*, the "new organ" or "passion" that functions as a faculty or capacity for apprehending and affirming incarnation (and – something I return to in Chapter VI – relata whose possibility depends on incarnation and faith, such as the presence of altruistic motivation in an individual). But as in the case with belief, faith can also be the *product* of this faculty, that is, a successful engagement between the individual (who has the faith-condition) and the paradox. When Climacus writes, "Whether one is offended [*forarges*] or whether one has faith [*tror*], the advantage is to become aware. In other words, awareness is by no means partial to faith [*Troen*], as if faith [*Troen*] proceeded as a simple consequence of awareness," he seems to be referring to the act of (successfully) having faith in contrast to being offended.[46] Does having *Tro qua* the organ or capacity for faith mean I necessarily 'fulfill' or 'actualize' this capacity, that I have successfully apprehended the salvific truth? When Climacus refers to the "faithful one" (*Troende*) or the "follower" (*Discipel*), does this only imply that someone has been offered the condition, or does it mean something more? Here it is not obvious that, if an individual has been offered the faith-condition, that individual also accepts it and wields it successfully to *be faithful* (to become Christian).

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[45] I describe *Tro* as a faculty of affirmation and/or apprehension because it seems to operate in both ways. The mode of affirmation reflects the commitment involved in *Tro* to the instantiation of something in history. The mode of apprehension reflects instances where Climacus suggests faith can only be perceived in the world in or through faith: "But the god gave the follower the condition to see it and opened for him the eyes of faith" (*PF* 65 / *SKS* 4, 266).

[46] *PF* 93 / *SKS* 4, 291. I have modified this translation by Hong and Hong. Here they translate the verb *tror* as "believes," which to me implies "*Tro* in the ordinary sense," not the actualized, "eminent sense" of *Tro* that the context suggests. (The Hongs are often hesitant to translate verbal forms of *Tro* as 'have faith in' and instead elect to use versions of 'believe,' which can create confusion. This decision is most pronounced in *Fragments*, *Fear and Trembling*, and other works whose prominent purposes include dissecting *Tro* and differentiating it from other forms of subjective engagement with God and the world.)

To be clear, these are more than terminological questions; I am spotting a deeper ambiguity in *Fragments* about how being offered, and acquiring, the faith-condition relates to being a "faithful one" or "follower," that is, to becoming Christian. Does being offered the faith-condition necessarily cause one to become Christian?[47] Which – for or in a given individual – implies the other? Being a follower presumably requires *Tro* in the sense of the faith-condition (in the way that any act presumes the capacity to perform that act). But is it possible to have the capacity for faith and *not* succeed in becoming a "faithful one"? Moreover: Is every act of faith simultaneously an act of belief, or are they distinct types of subjective operations? Is faith *qua* condition (*Tro* "in the wholly eminent sense") a faculty distinct from belief (*Tro* "in the ordinary sense"), or is the "new organ" simply a new attribute or capability of the old "organ for the historical"? These are not mere sophistical distinctions; how to answer these questions would determine and reflect Climacus' core anthropological, epistemic, and ontological commitments.

Here I address the matter of a possible separation between being offered the faith-condition and the act of becoming a "follower." (The connection between belief and faith will wait until Section D.) There are actually two issues here: Sometimes *Fragments* makes it seem as if the offer of the faith-condition by the god sufficiently causes the recipient to receive the condition. Also, it is unclear whether receipt of the condition (as a capacity), necessarily makes that individual into a follower. I believe Climacus is ultimately committed to a limited separability within each of these dynamics. The offering of the condition by means of some occasion is necessary but insufficient to receive the condition. It is more ambiguous whether having the condition means necessarily that one is a follower, though it is possible that the

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[47] To avoid unnecessary verbiage and confusion, I use the term "follower" (*Discipel*) instead of "faithful one" (*Troende*). Both refer (synonymously) to someone who (successfully) has faith. Hong and Hong use the term "believer" for the term *Troende*. Because *Troende* implies, not the ordinary epistemic posture of belief, but a successful faith-relationship, "faithful one" seems like a better translation.

subject can reject faith (and the condition) after receiving it. How to understand these dynamics has ramifications on Climacus' soteriology and account of human agency.

First, some passages seem to imply a form of *inseparability* between having the condition and being a follower: When introducing the god-teacher, Climacus writes, "Now, if the learner is to obtain the truth, the teacher [the God] must bring it to him, but not only that. Along with it, he must provide him with the condition for understanding it…"[48] Even though the condition is necessary for understanding the truth, the truth is framed in this passage as the teacher's primary gift. Immediately after, however, Climacus is sure to say, "the condition for understanding the truth is like being able to ask about it—the condition and the question contain the conditioned and the answer."[49] This remark demonstrates that the condition (the capacity or faculty for faith) has a logical priority (since it is the question that "contains" truth as an answer). Generating further ambiguity, Climacus refers to the receipt of the faith-condition as conversion (*Omvendelse*): "Inasmuch as he was untruth, he was continually in the process of departing from the truth; as a result of receiving the condition in the moment, his course took the opposite direction, or he was turned around. Let us call this change *conversion*."[50] Conversion *might* be understood as a dramatic *moment* in which the truth of Christianity overpowers the individual, who then becomes Christian, followed by *metanoia*. (The image of being on course, turned

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[48] *PF* 14 / *SKS* 4, 223. A similar phrasing of the issue occurs on *PF* 19 / *SKS* 4, 227: "Inasmuch as he was in untruth and now along with the condition receives the truth, a change takes place in him like the change from 'not to be' to 'to be.'"

[49] *PF* 14 / *SKS* 4, 223. I am unsure whether this relationship of containment (*at inholde*) is meant to apply only to the Socratic position. In any case, it may mean something different for the condition to contain the truth Socratically (when it is possessed *de facto* by the individual) than for it to contain the truth Christianly (when it must be given). In the first case, reason is clearly sufficient to move from question to answer, condition to truth; in the latter, this is not the case, even if the god may, after giving the condition, no longer be required.

[50] *PF* 18 / *SKS* 4, 227.

around, may allude to Philippians 3:14.[51]) On this understanding of conversion, it seems like Climacus is claiming that "receiving the condition" is sufficient to cause the individual, in a dramatic moment, to become a follower, to become Christian.

Continuing with such examples— Much later in the book, Climacus writes the following: "How, then, does the learner become a faithful one [*Troende*] or a follower [*Discipel*]? When the understanding is discharged and he receives the condition. When does he receive this? In the moment. This condition, what does it condition? His understanding of the eternal."[52] To *have faith* (to "become a faithful one or a follower") requires the conjunction of two things ("when the understanding is discharged *and* he receives the condition"); this passage could make it seem that both occur simultaneously in the moment, with the understanding's discharge mentioned first. Indeed, this passage even seems to suggest that in the moment, the incarnation does the work of discharging the understanding for the individual. This would be entirely to collapse the receipt of the faith-condition and the act of becoming a follower. Moreover, it suggests that the agency involved in discharging the understanding is that of the god-teacher, not the (prospective) follower. This challenges the role of human agency in salvation. If the god-teacher has ultimate agency over discharging the understanding (thus permitting the individual to avoid offense and become a follower), then Climacus must be committed to some variation of salvation through irresistible grace. (On such a reading – depending on how precisely the human being's agency operates in offense – Climacus' soteriology could involve thoroughgoing monergism or

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[51] In *NT-1819*, Phil 3:14 reads: "One thing I do: forgetting what there is behind, and reaching for that which is in front, I hasten toward the goal of [acquiring] the treasure that hears God's call above in Christ Jesus." In the Danish: "Men Eet gjør jeg: forglemmende, hvad der er bagved, og rækkende efter det, som er foran, iler jeg mod Maalet, til det Klenodie, som hører til Guds Kald herovenfra i Christo Jesu." (Phil 3:14 in *NT-1819* corresponds to Phil 3:13-14 in *NRSV*.)

[52] *PF* 64 / *SKS* 4, 265.

synergistic offense.) Through grace, the condition would be received through divine agency, which is equivalent to, or sufficient for, the individual to become a follower.

But despite passages such as these, there are other interpretive reasons to attribute to Climacus the position that becoming a follower is logically and ontologically conditional upon, *but neither reduced to nor guaranteed by*, receipt of faith *qua* condition. On this model, the gift of the condition seems to perform a regeneration of the subject that *enables* becoming a follower, without completing the act. For example, after Climacus first introduces the god-teacher, he remarks, "Even when the learner has most fully put on [*iført*] the condition and then, by doing so, has become immersed in the truth, he still can never forget that teacher…"[53] This seems to imply that it is possible for the learner to be given the condition but not to "*fully* put on the condition," for if the learner has not done so, then they are not yet "immersed in the truth." Left open is a space for the individual to have received the faith-condition (to be regenerated) but not yet become a follower, as if given a cloak not yet donned, or only partially put on. On this reading, justification would only occur when the condition is "fully put on."

In the following illuminating (but ambiguous passage), Climacus draws a limited comparison between the Socratic and the Christian accounts of the will:

> It is then seen easily…, that faith is not an act of will [*Villies-Akt*], for it is always the case that all human willing [*Villien*] is efficacious only within the condition. For example, if I have the courage to will [*ville*] it, I will understand the Socratic—that is, understand myself, because seen Socratically, I am in possession of the condition and

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[53] *PF* 18 / *SKS* 4, 226. The verb *at iføre* implies wearing clothing (*DDO*; *ODS*). This suggests to me an allusion to the justification imagery – often invoked for soteriologies *sola fide* – of, e.g., Isa 61:10, Rom 13:14, or Gal 3:27. The *GT-1740* version of the first reads: "I will greatly delight in the Lord, my soul shall rejoice in my God, for he put on me [*førde mig i*] salvation's [*Saligheds*] clothing, he clothed me with righteousness's cloak, as a bridegroom dresses [*ifører*] himself with priestly ornamentation, and as a bride ornaments herself with her adornments." In Danish: "Jeg vil glæde mig storligen i HERREN, min Siel skal fryde sig i min Gud, thi han førde mig i Saligheds Klæde, han klædde mig med Retfærdigheds Kappe, som en Brudgom ifører sig med præstelig Prydelse, og som en Bruud pryder sig med sit Tøi." The *NT-1819* version of the second and third read, respectively: "but put on [*ifører*] the Lord Jesus Christ, and mind not for the flesh to wake its desire," and, "For you [all], so many who were baptized into Christ have put on [*iført*] Christ." In Danish: "men ifører den Herre Jesum Christum, og pleier ikke Kiødet til at vække Begierlighed," and, "Thi I, saa Mange, som ere døbte til Christum, have iført Christum."

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now can will it. But if I am not in possession of the condition…, then all my willing is for nothing, even though, as soon as [*saasnart*] the condition is given, what was valid Socratically is valid again.[54]

A crucial difference between the Socratic and the Christian is that, according to the Socratic position, the will is "efficacious." This is because the condition is already universally present. But in the Christian position, where the condition has been given up, the will is ineffective with respect to learning the highest truth. (Note further that, even within the Christian position, it seems possible to *will* to "understand the Socratic" position; whatever defect is present in the will for the Christian does not diminish the Christian's ability to conceive the natural truths contained within the condition as Socratically understood.) The Christian position's will, however, is regenerated when the condition is given. Based on the comparison with the Socratic, this seems to hold the implication that – much as Socrates' interlocuters, despite being capable of doing so, refuse to interrogate their unreflective commitments to problematic ideas – a Christian with a regenerated will may wield it unsuccessfully. In other words, after they are "in possession of the condition" that resolves the defect in their will, they may still lack "the courage to will it," that is, to commit to the (Christian) truth.

Recognizing a distinction between receiving the condition and becoming a follower allows us to explain this passage. It may seem that Climacus is only differentiating between the Socratic position and the Christian position on the will's efficacy; on such a reading— for the Socratic (in which "I am in possession of the condition" already), "the courage to will" to acquire self-knowledge is all that is needed for happiness, while for the Christian, the will would not be efficacious since faith is a distinct domain of interaction, *entirely* (on this account) brought about through the agency of the god-teacher. However, from the Christian standpoint

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[54] *PF* 62-63 / *SKS* 4, 264. I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong. A similar construction occurs at *PF* 65 / *SKS* 4, 267.

there is a second, internal distinction to be made: First, an individual may have received the condition or not. I contend that when Climacus says, "It is easy to see… that faith is not an act of will," he is referring to the human being, formerly *absent the condition*, receiving the faith-condition. In other words, the human being cannot, through the will, generate the condition for understanding the truth and becoming a follower; nor can they will themselves to acquire a "new organ" for faith. This requires an act of the god-teacher. Second, when the condition has been given by the god-teacher already, the individual's will has been regenerated (for "as soon as the condition is given, what was valid Socratically" – including the will's efficacy – "is valid again"). The will must then act ("I must have the courage") in order to become Christian.

One could recall Kierkegaard's image in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* about the writing on a piece of paper. (Cf. p. 33 of the present work.) Whether on a blank page (for the 'pagan') or hidden under other text (for the citizen of Christendom), the writing represents an *occasion*. The mere presence of the writing never sufficiently causes someone to *become Christian*. First, the condition must be offered by means of the occasion, one which makes the individual aware. Second, if the condition has been offered (by the god-teacher), it must be fully worn or embraced. This is an act of *judgment*, a decision.

Climacus' claims in *Fragments* may be in tension with Kierkegaard's description in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. Recall this passage from *Fragments*, part of which I quoted several pages ago: "Whether one is offended or whether one has faith, the advantage is to become aware. In other words, awareness is by no means partial to faith, as if faith proceeded as a simple consequence of awareness. The advantage is that one enters into a state in which the decision manifests itself ever more clearly."[55] Such a passage could just as easily have been

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[55] *PF* 93 / *SKS* 4, 291. I have modified this translation by Hong and Hong.

written in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. In that work, Kierkegaard is clear that the only two steps to becoming Christian are, first, to become aware, and second, to judge. In *Fragments*, helping someone to become aware (of the incarnation) is, as might be expected, within the capacities available to someone outside the condition. (Though the story of the incarnation is not part of the Socratic position, passing awareness from one person to another is indeed Socratically possible). However, what is the next step? Is it to judge, or is it to receive the condition? Are they the same thing? If judgment is identical to acting through the regenerated will to learn the truth (within the condition), then there are more than two steps (for *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* does not mention the condition). Though I do not draw any firm conclusions about this tension, it is my suspicion that its presence indicates a degree of ambivalence about the role of human beings' (synergistic) assent to grace in *Fragments* that is less apparent, or perhaps absent, in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*.

Other passages in *Fragments* seem to suggest that time may pass between receiving the condition and becoming a follower. For instance, immediately after defining 'conversion,' Climacus mentions that conversion is not completed until one becomes conscious of, and sorrowful over, their own sin.[56] He dubs this form of sorrow 'repentance' (*Anger*), a posture which, channeling again the image from Philippians 3:13-14 of being on a path toward Christ, "does indeed look back, but nevertheless in such a way that precisely thereby it quickens its pace toward what lies ahead!"[57] It seems, then, that the dramatic conversion moment does not complete the process of becoming a follower but instead prepares the individual to move in the correct direction. The image of the road suggests that there is a distance left to travel, and time

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[56] *PF* 18-19 / *SKS* 4, 227.

[57] *PF* 19 / *SKS* 4, 227.

remaining to do so, perhaps reflecting the process of sanctification, but also perhaps the process of becoming a follower.

Now I will briefly address the distinct but closely related question pertaining to the separability of being offered the condition and receiving it. It is Climacus' prolonged discussion of offense which makes it clear that these are separable. It seems likely that any report of the incarnation could serve as an occasion for the god-teacher to dispense the condition. Perhaps in some cases, the first time an individual becomes aware of the idea of the incarnation, they receive the condition. But if offense is worth discussing – and Climacus certainly thinks it is – then this must not happen *necessarily*. As already mentioned, offense is a suffering resulting from an unhappy encounter between the understanding and the paradox, where the understanding flails unnecessarily, struggling to grasp the paradox. Offense "*comes into existence* with the paradox," implying that without the paradox, it is not possible. The implication is that one may have been offered the faith-condition through a paradoxical account of the incarnation but not (yet) be faithful (instead, be offended). A further implication is that it seems *possible* for an individual to exist – according to the Christian position – who is in sin but *not* in offense because they have not (yet) been granted the faith-condition. (Indeed, the individual Socrates – recall, only when viewed from the Christian standpoint – may be such an example.)

Let us now take stock of what I have claimed thus far about grace, faith, and the will. In order for the individual to receive the condition, the eternal must have entered time (incarnation) to transform or regenerate the individual (that is, grace, or to give the condition). The understanding encounters one aspect of this event in a confrontation with the paradoxical idea of incarnation (that is, in an occasion), which may prompt offense. In response to being offered the condition (by means of the paradoxical idea of incarnation, but by the power of the incarnation

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itself), my will can discharge the understanding (or allow the god to do so) so that I may receive the condition. In offense, I fail to allow the discharge of the understanding, deploying a merely human, merely intellectual faculty in an attempt to become certain about that which attempted to transform me, or simply by refusing to accept it in general. If successful, this transformation (the condition) either constitutes or enables faith (the "happy passion," the "new organ," or *Tro* in the "wholly eminent sense"). The regenerated capacity (faith) can or does apprehend the truth, the content of which is *that* the incarnation occurred, making me a follower (through which I find an "understanding between" the god and myself).

Thus, Climacus' soteriology may involve a form of enabling or prevenient grace. When the incarnate god gifts the condition, I, by grace, may be reshaped by the god's agency to be able to act on the revealed truth (the content of which is *that* the incarnation has occurred). If there is a second step, I then assent or do not (that is, do or do not become a follower). The agency behind this second movement is ambiguous in *Fragments*: perhaps grace steps in a second time to overpower my understanding, discharging it and performing the assent for me, perhaps I do it myself (with a regenerated will), or perhaps the receipt of the condition is definitive and does not need to be accepted or assented to.[58]

Through this assessment I have taken a key step toward clarifying Climacus' account of faith, wresting open a space – in terms of divine and human agency – between the (irresistible) receipt of the condition or capacity for faith and its (voluntary[59]) actualization by the individual to become a follower.

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[58] On the possibility of prevenient grace in Kierkegaard's thought, see Timothy P. Jackson, "Arminian edification: Kierkegaard on grace and free will" (1998) in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 237. Taylor has also forwarded an Arminian reading of Kierkegaard in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, 313f.

[59] I have not provided an account of what is involved in the will, that is, *volition*. It may indeed involve some form of choice (or *judgment*, in the language of *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*), but even if so, this choice does not need to be considered a radically free-floating *liberum arbitrium*.

C. On Learning about Christ (but not knowing where Christ is or when Christ was)

In the previous section, I established the ambiguous temporal and agential separability of being offered the condition, receiving the condition, and becoming a follower. Here I explore the chasm between the incarnation as a historical occurrence and the individual who receives the condition, always in the context of some occasion.

 On a first glance, this seems fundamentally like a historical gap in the sense that history implies a series of causes over time between the incarnation and the occasion by means of which I (subjectively) receive the condition; it seems that the god must, as it were, reach through history to dispense the condition by means of an occasion it effects and which refers to it. (Here, I mean 'history' and 'historical' in the sense of a chain of occurrences across space and time. I will deal with Climacus' more technical understanding of the *historical* shortly.) But regardless of when and where the incarnation occurs (perhaps as the historical person of Jesus), the facticity of the incarnation cannot present itself transparently to even a firsthand witness. There is no immediate experience of the incarnate god, or, as Climacus writes, "divinity is not an immediate qualification."[60]

This raises questions both about why historical distance from the incarnation could pose a special problem for the condition's dispensation, and also if and how a report, the contents of which approximate the details of an experience of the incarnate god *by firsthand witnesses*, constitutes a suitable vehicle (that is, occasion) for the condition. I argue that because the obstacles to encountering the incarnate god with human faculties apply equally to purported firsthand witnesses of the incarnation and those who come later, there can never be (epistemic) certainty about the occasion through which an individual subjectively receives the condition, or

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[60] *PF* 93 / *SKS* 4, 290.

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about the first occasion in the history of the world through which the condition was offered. This is the case even though the incarnate god (ontologically) begins the causal chain that ends with all reports that serve as proper occasions to dispense the condition. In other words— even though the incarnate god must get the historical-causal ball rolling, it is not possible for the understanding to trace the causal steps to find the origin point (subjectively as an occasion which delivered the condition, or historically to locate the occurrence of incarnation). This is because no description of an object's or occurrence's empirical features can guarantee the presence of the god as or in it. Historical proximity and empirical evidence (or empirical evidence from historical proximity) are not substitutes for the condition.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

It is only natural for readers of *Fragments* to presume that Climacus' articulation of faith is foremost an answer to the problem of the spatiotemporal gap between the life of Jesus and their own desire for happiness or salvation. Many aspects of the text suggest this: First, *Fragments* explicitly begins by asking how eternity and history may come together to achieve happiness or salvation (*Salighed*). Second, from references to Lessing in *Fragments* and in the *Postscript*, Climacus seems to be responding to, or even elaborating on the "broad and ugly ditch" of history described in "On the Proof of the Spirit and the Power." Third, the second half of *Fragments* is dedicated to exploring the differences – but more importantly, the fundamental similarity – between the followers (of the god-teacher) at first- and second-hand, exposing that, despite historical distance, both must be equally contemporary (in a soteriological sense) with the god-teacher. Fourth, *Fragments*' "Interlude" begins by presuming in jest that 1,843 years have passed since the incarnation occurred.[61] It then continues to discuss the problem of history,

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[61] *PF* 72 / *SKS* 4, 272. As a reminder to my reader, *Fragments* was first published in 1844.

historical causality, and belief in occurrences and the (historical) origins of objects. This suggests that the book has a major preoccupation with time, and how temporal distance (as well as series of causal connections, which become more difficult to verify the farther back in the causal chain occurrences go) poses a problem for faith, despite history being, on Climacus' articulation of the Christian position, the medium for faith.

It is undeniable that these issues are present in, even central to, the text. But insofar as *Fragments* endeavors to close the distance between the incarnate god and spatiotemporally distant individuals, it can only do so by drawing attention to the space between the incarnate god and firsthand witnesses. So when Climacus writes that "there is not and cannot be any question of a follower at second hand," this also destabilizes the category of the firsthand witness. The firsthand witness – a figure who can see and touch the god-teacher – no longer has a soteriologically privileged position. Climacus accomplishes this in part by denying the Origenist claim that prompts Lessing's inquiry, namely the claim that miracles or other empirical phenomena can attest to the truth of Christianity for witnesses. For, on Climacus' account, it is not the "medium" of history which "deprives [miracles] of all their force," but instead the inadequacy (in sin) of the human faculties of apprehension. But the space Climacus cleaves open runs deeper than this. It involves offering an account of the incarnation's hiddenness from the individual (even as incarnation is also the form and content of the incarnate god's teaching). This hiddenness (or incognito), which has both theological and epistemic dimensions, forms the basis of the 'distance' between the incarnate god and every human individual.

By its theological dimension, I mean that Climacus' account appeals to the god's desire for atonement (unity or "mutual understanding"), which the god achieves through incarnation. In order for the god to be satisfied with the atonement (cf. pp. 108-109), the god cannot reveal god-

self in a way that elevates the god over human beings. (This would be tantamount to one of the 'ascent' models of the atonement Climacus rejects.) Effectively, this hiddenness is in service to equality between the divine and human. Climacus communicates this point most clearly when discussing the humanity of the god-teacher; he imagines himself – anticipating the tribulations and death that would befall the incarnate god – pleading that the god *not* incarnate fully, or that the god wield divine power to avoid death.[62] The god's answer, Climacus claims, would be: "To think that you could become so unfaithful to me and grieve love in this way; so you love only the omnipotent one who performs miracles, not him who humbled himself in equality with you."[63] To take refuge in the god's elevation is framed as a temptation, a false promise of relief that does not achieve unity with the god. What the god wants is equality. (Here, we can recall Climacus' assertion that if the god were to uplift human beings rather than become a human being, the unity would be inadequate.) Miracles and other empirical displays of divinity would compromise the possibility of unity (or "mutual understanding"), which is the god's goal through incarnation.[64] Thus the incarnate god "did not set himself off from the human throng either by soft raiment [Lk 7:25] or by any other earthly advantage and was not distinguishable to other human beings, not even to the countless legions of angels he left behind when he humbled himself [Mt 26:53]."[65] Indeed, Climacus rejects any form of Docetism; the incarnation is utter, complete, and

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[62] The Temptation of Christ at Mt 4:1-11 and Lk 4:1-13 comes to mind (*NRSV*).

[63] *PF* 33 / *SKS* 4, 240.

[64] In the *Postscript*, Climacus makes a similar point to convey that the relationship between God and the human being cannot be "direct" or involve "direct communication" (*CUP1* 243 / *SKS* 7, 221). God must be "so unnoticeable, so hidden yet present in his work, that a person may very well live on… without ever receiving any impression…" (*CUP1* 244 / *SKS* 7, 222). Were God to directly communicate – such as by appearing as "a rare, enormously large green bird, with a red beak" – then everyone who sees it would become aware (*CUP1* 245 / *SKS* 7, 222), but the truth of Christianity would thereby be collapsed into "paganism," in which "God is related directly to a human being [*Mennesket*], as the remarkably striking to the amazed" (*CUP1* 245 / *SKS* 7, 223).

[65] *PF* 56 / *SKS* 4, 259.

thoroughly invisible: "But the servant form is not something put on but is actual, not a parastatic but an actual body, and the god, from the hour when by the omnipotent decision [*Beslutning*] of his omnipotent love he became a servant, he has himself become captive, so to speak, in his decision and is now obliged to continue (to go on talking loosely) whether he wants to or not. He cannot betray his identity…"[66]

The other dimension of this account is epistemological: Climacus posits that the unknown (*det Ubekjendte*) that the faculty of the understanding seeks to know, is the god.[67] (This claim appears within one of Climacus' critiques of *a priori* proofs of God's existence, but the epistemological features of the paradox that emerge in this part of *Fragments* are continuous with those that apply to the god-teacher.) There are at least two ambiguities here that are not explicitly resolved in *Fragments*. First, Climacus seems to stipulate that the god is unknown – "Therefore, let us call this unknown *the god*"[68] – but the term "unknown" seems to refer more precisely to that very thing which is unknow*able* (not only as-of-yet unknown) through the understanding. Thus, this is likely more than a stipulation; insofar as the god is paradoxical in a straightforward, conceptual sense, and the understanding thus cannot grasp the paradox, the god incarnate is essentially unknowable (again, through the understanding). The second ambiguity is the reason for this unknowability: *why* can the paradox not be grasped or known by the understanding? It could be because of a natural ontological gulf between the human understanding and the god (a mere negation), or it could be because of an ontological gulf resulting from sin (a privation). Climacus appears to answer this question explicitly: He remarks

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[66] *PF* 55 / *SKS* 4, 258. I have modified the translation by Hong and Hong.

[67] *PF* 39 / *SKS* 4, 244-245.

[68] *PF* 39 / *SKS* 4, 245.

that the barrier for the human understanding is that the god is "absolutely different" from the human.[69] But this absolute difference is not just ontological. He goes on to say, "What, then, is the difference? Indeed, what else but sin… the difference, the absolute difference, must have been caused by the individual himself."[70] If sin is the cause, an implication of this is that a prelapsarian or fully regenerated faculty of the understanding would be able to grasp the paradox. Would Climacus assent to this? Perhaps the gift of faith *qua* truth-condition *just is* such a regeneration, but Climacus' rhetoric, as I have shown, suggests that the understanding must be discharged to make room for faith, not that it is fully sanctified by grace.

Despite such ambiguities, it is clear that the divinity involved in the incarnation cannot be apprehended by the faculties available to the human being prior to receiving the condition. The god, let us recall, is the absolutely different (due to sin), "But," he writes, "it is the absolutely different in which there is no distinguishing mark [*Kjendetegn*]."[71] The absolutely different does not manifest to the understanding *as* different; it has no distinguishing mark (literally, *Kjendetegn*, a 'knowledge-sign'), so there is nothing to which the mechanism of the understanding can, as it were, latch. How would this look in the case of the god incarnate? Climacus imagines the encounter in this way:

> There exists, then, a certain person who looks just like any other human being, grows up as do other human beings, marries, has a job, takes tomorrow's livelihood into account as a man should. It may be very beautiful to want to live as the birds of the air live [Mt 6:26-27], but it is not permissible, and one can indeed end up in the saddest of plights, either dying of hunger—if one has the endurance for that—or living on the goods of others. This human being is also the god. How do I know that? Well, I cannot know it, for in that case I would have to know the god and the difference, and I do not know the difference, inasmuch as the understanding has made it like unto that from which it differs. Thus the

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[69] *PF* 46 / *SKS* 4, 251.

[70] *PF* 47 / *SKS* 4, 251.

[71] *PF* 44-45 / *SKS* 4, 249.

god has become the most terrible deceiver through the understanding's deception of itself. The understanding has the god as close as possible and yet just as far away.[72]

In this (counter-Gospel) account of the incarnate god, the god does not appear to engage in teaching, instead living a bourgeois life. Though in this passage Climacus transparently describes the human being as incapable of identifying the incarnate god (because the absolutely different cannot be known), it might be unclear whether this applies to the Christian position.

Benjamin Daise suggests that this passage does not directly inform Climacus' Christian position and that its epistemic claim applies specifically to the Socratic. In the Gospels, Daise argues, "We do not get God as the unknown and unknowable deciding to become man. That rendition was the product of Climacus's 'poetical venture' in chapter 2 [*PF* 23 / *SKS* 4, 230] to connect the Socratic or Greek perspective with the un-Socratic alternative. The connection, as it turns out, amounts to a collision."[73] Daise's interpretative move is to juxtapose Climacus' portrayal of the god incarnate as unknown with his Gospel-inspired presentation of the revealed god-teacher in *Fragments*' later chapters. The paradox emerges, according to Daise, in the clash of this incarnate yet unknown god with the fully *revealed* god of, for example, John's Gospel.[74] He concludes that the treatment of incarnation as *paradoxical* emerges only when we begin – as Climacus does – by reconstructing Christianity as an intellectual project (that is, "as the product of thought"), rather than through revealed dogma.[75] In this way, the paradox is a symptom of disingenuously remaining within the Socratic, even though it points to the Christian notion of revealed truth.

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[72] *PF* 45-46 / *SKS* 4, 250.

[73] Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1999), 55.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

While Daise is correct that the language of paradox essentially refers to the imperfection of an effort in *intellection* to apprehend revealed truth, I reject Daise's implication that a Gospel account of Christ does not involve, for Climacus (or Kierkegaard), the substance of paradox, and that the epistemic gap asserted by Climacus in this passage does not apply to Climacus' fuller account of Christianity.[76] Even though Climacus' counter-Gospel vignette of the incarnate god is limited, this is not because the epistemic gap is altogether absent from a proper, Gospel-inspired account of Christ; it is rather because, at this point in the text, Climacus is imagining an incarnate god abstracted from the gift of the condition and the role of the teacher, which I believe Daise presumes is entirely transferable through empirically observing the incarnate god. It is true that, for Climacus, the entire purpose of incarnation is for the god to reveal god-self (and dispense the condition) in the interest of the individual's happiness or salvation; if the god incarnates out of love, the god would, in doing so, not withhold the condition. The purpose of this passage is to signal that, without the condition (without the capacity for *faith*, to the extent we can adopt a view of incarnation while abstracting from it), the understanding cannot even entertain that the person before it might be the god. The condition must first be given by the god to modify the individual subject so that they may encounter something before them *as incarnation*.[77]

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[76] The term *Paradox* is mentioned commonly in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous, or so-called aesthetic works, but rarely in his so-called religious works. Hence I take Daise's claim as representative of the common contention by scholars that the concept of paradox has little or no role *within* Christian theology, but only outside of it. Edward Mooney makes a similar claim in the context of an interpretation of *Fear and Trembling*: "In Kierkegaard's directly religious works, the concepts of 'the paradox' or 'the absurd' appear hardly at all. Perhaps these terms describe faith only as it seems 'from the outside' to one *approaching* faith, to a merely aesthetic or dialectical author." Edward Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 56.

[77] Levine reflects on this confusing set of terms and conditions at Levine, "Why the Incarnation Is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard," 172n1: "The 'condition' is sometimes called 'Faith' by Kierkegaard…, but I don't see how faith can be the 'condition' since the 'condition' is sometimes described as a prerequisite of faith."

And the *way* that the understanding fails without the condition is quite significant for elucidating Climacus' Christology. What does the understanding do? It "has made it [the god] like unto that from which it differs." The understanding reshapes what is presented to it into forms with which it can work: either sensory data or necessary truths. The incarnation is not both but rather *neither of these* (it is non-necessary, and the presence of a divine nature is non-sensible), resulting in the "understanding's deception of itself." This is what Climacus is getting at when he writes, "The god… cannot be envisioned, and that was the very reason he was in the form of a servant. Yet the servant form was no deception…"[78]: in order to deliver the condition, the god incarnate must be the sort of thing that, for the human, resists becoming *certain* for any (merely human) faculty that attempts to apprehend it. The god is (in) an empirically detectable form, *but the god is not detectable empirically in that form*. We can better understand why the incarnation – even though incarnation is both the form and content of *revelation* – resists the grasp of the understanding from the "Interlude," where Climacus analyzes the various capacities of the human being, only some of which permit epistemic certainty.

In the "Interlude," Climacus mentions four different modes of apprehension that may be deployed by a subject. These include knowledge or cognition (in the Hongs' version, each is a translation of the word *Erkjendelse*), immediate sensation (*Sandsning*), belief ("*Tro* in the ordinary sense"), and faith ("*Tro*… in the wholly eminent sense"). Climacus distinguishes these modes of apprehension from one another in tandem with elucidating the ontology of the *historical*, which always involves something coming into existence (*at blive til*, or as a noun, *Tilblivelse*). (I will return to two of the four modes of apprehension after discussing coming into existence, and the final two in the next section.)

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[78] *PF* 63 / *SKS* 4, 265.

Though Climacus' discussion of *Tilblivelse* is notoriously difficult to parse, it is a category indicating a quality or activity in which all finite things participate, which do exist or have existed.[79] When something comes into existence, it acquires actuality ("The change of coming into existence is actuality"[80]); if it has not done so, it is merely possible. Climacus elaborates: "Nothing whatever exists because it is necessary, but the necessary exists because it is necessary or because the necessary is. The actual is no more necessary than the possible, for the necessary is absolutely different from both."[81] Crucial here is that coming into existence is impossible for both what is impossible and for what is necessary. To be impossible would by definition preclude its possibility and therefore its coming into existence. To be necessary implies a different type of existence than what contingently comes into existence; it would never be able to come into existence because it would *be* necessarily.

Climacus associates this form of non-necessity (or, contingency) with freedom: "All coming into existence occurs in freedom, not by way of necessity."[82] In a complicated passage that makes a comparatively simple claim about ontology, Climacus explains his reasoning, and elaborates on what he means by "freedom":

> Nothing coming into existence comes into existence by way of a ground [*Grund*], but everything by way of a cause [*Aarsag*]. Every cause ends in a freely acting cause. The intervening causes are misleading in that the coming into existence appears to be necessary; the truth about them is that they, as having themselves come into existence, *definitively* point back to a freely acting cause. As soon as coming into existence is definitively reflected upon, even an inference from natural law is not evidence of the necessity of any coming into existence. So also with manifestations of freedom, as soon

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[79] The category of "coming into existence" (*Tilblivelse*) may also apply to finite things which do not yet exist but will exist (that is, future existents).

[80] *PF* 75 / *SKS* 4, 275.

[81] *PF* 75 / *SKS* 4, 274.

[82] *PF* 75 / *SKS* 4, 275.

as one refuses to be deceived by its manifestations but reflects on its coming into existence.[83]

For Climacus, freedom implies a non-natural cause or reason (*Aarsag*), in contrast to necessity, which implies a "ground." (In one set of study notes Kierkegaard wrote while reading Hegel before authoring *Fragments*, he identifies "Essence" as the "Ground of Existence."[84] So, by "ground" Climacus likely means a necessary reason for something that does not depend on efficient causality or the conditions of time and space, perhaps some notion of formal causation.) Indeed, a firm distinction between contingency and necessity, and the presumption that anything that *is* must be one or the other, is the basis of Climacus' claims about history and freedom in the "Interlude." Here, freedom simply implies non-necessity.[85]

Some scholars have muddied this straightforward point by drawing in the question of human freedom.[86] Jacob Howland argues that Climacus' refutation of conflating necessity and past actuality is based on the actions of free human wills: "because the past is shot through with uncertainty – an uncertainty that arises in large measure from human freedom – the relationship between historical events, unlike the unvarying and intrinsically predictable relationships that the physicist observes in nature, is *not* genuinely causal. Food shortages do not cause riots in the same sense that an explosive blast causes shock waves…"[87] I believe this reading is mistaken, imputing to Climacus a conception of the human free will for which there is little textual

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[83] Ibid. Hong and Hong italicize "definitively," but there is no corresponding emphasis in Kierkegaard's Danish.

[84] *PF* 75n17 (301) / *SKS* 27, 271; papir 282 (1842–1843).

[85] This is fitting, given that one of the purposes of the "Interlude" is to demonstrate that the past is not necessary, and thus a fair arena for the engagement for the human being's capacity for *Tro*.

[86] A human, or cultural freedom is indeed mentioned in the "Interlude," but I do not believe it presents a *sui generis* category that dramatically complicates the meaning of coming into existence. See *PF* 76 / *SKS* 4, 276.

[87] Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 165.

evidence, whereby the will is capable of beginning contingent causal chains (like little miracles)

which exert *detectable* ("point back to a freely acting cause") forces on nature, other individuals,

and other occurrences.[88] But for Climacus (as I have demonstrated), freedom does not strictly

refer to decision-making by human individuals; it rather refers to any form of causation that is

not engendered by absolute necessity (possibly a free act of God, but this is not made explicit in

the "Interlude"). Climacus makes this clear when he remarks that a chain of efficient causality

("the intervening causes") might give the illusion of necessity (perhaps due to extending into the

distant past, or perhaps due to being guaranteed by "natural law"), but even in cases where

"natural law" dictates that a particular chain of causality would occur, *that* this chain of causation

exists and not some other implies some non-necessary (that is, free) cause. Hence, Climacus

writes, "What has happened has happened the way it happened; thus it is unchangeable. But is

this unchangeableness the unchangeableness of necessity? The unchangeableness of the past is

that its actual 'thus and so' [*Saaledes*] cannot become different…"[89] Hence, there is no reason to

turn to human agents as loci for uncertainty in a chain of necessary causes, for even a given

thoroughly deterministic account of history (its procession thereby or *Saaledes*) marked by

natural necessity would be commensurate with the conception of freedom Climacus advances

here.[90] Rather, Climacus' notion of free causation is baked into his commitment to a stark

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[88] Perhaps this could be described as a Scotian conception of human freedom. See, e.g., John Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on God as First Principle: A Latin text and English translation of the* De primo principio, 2nd edition, trans. and ed. Allan B. Wolter (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966), 82-85 (4.14-18).

[89] *PF* 77 / *SKS* 4, 276-277.

[90] In offering his interpretation, Howland demonstrates an interest in ascribing to Climacus or Kierkegaard accounts of a radical *liberum arbitrium* and of non-deterministic causal openness projected into the future. Both of these positions are often, even by scholars, presumed to be consistently advocated by Kierkegaard, yet both run contrary to the ontology advanced in the "Interlude."
　　　I am of the opinion that Climacus is committed to a form of natural necessity similar to Kant's, which, as I make clear, is to be distinguished from Climacus' understanding of necessity *simpliciter*. Though Climacus clearly argues that the past is no more necessary than the future, the necessity he refers to involves not natural necessity but rather a necessity to be distinguished from the actuality of coming into existence. By natural necessity, I mean

distinction between *contingency* – which includes natural necessity or other types of relative

necessity – and *necessity per se*, which stands above both. (Such a distinction points to a

metaphysics resembling that of Leibniz or perhaps even more closely what is outlined in

Avicenna's "Proof of the Truthful."[91]) Regardless of whether there is a necessary being that

caused a historical chain of things coming into existence (and the natural laws they obey), on

Climacus' account, such causation (and its corresponding history of causes) would be non-

necessary or only relatively necessary (thus, free).[92]

Invoking this schema, Climacus then defines the historical as the set of things that are

actual, that is, the set of things that have come into existence: "Everything that has come into

existence is *eo ipso* historical, for even if no further historical predicate can be applied to it, the

crucial predicate of the historical can still be predicated—namely, that it has come into

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something more like the "unchangeableness" of temporal occurrences (*Uforanderlighed*) he explicitly distinguishes from necessity (*PF* 76-77 / *SKS* 4, 276). On this issue, I disagree with readers of Kierkegaard such as Howland, who interpret him (and Climacus) as thoroughly committed to a form of free, unclosed causality with respect to future time in which human beings can produce new, previously undetermined causal chains. See, e.g., Chapter 8 of Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 157-172. For a serious philosophical engagement with this set of issues, see Shannon Nason, "Contingency, Necessity, and Causation in Kierkegaard's Theory of Change," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (Feb. 2012): 141-162, especially 154-162.

[91] See Ibn Sina, *Remarks & Admonitions* [Al-Ishārāt wal-Tanbīhāt]*: Physics & Metaphysics (An Analysis and Annotated Translation)*, trans. Shams Inati (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 121-131 (III.4.7-29). Avicenna's move in proving the existence of God *qua* necessary existent (*wājib al-wujūd*) is to identify an infinitely regressive chain of efficient causality as an aggregate of contingent things that exist over time. This aggregate is itself subject to the same rules as the contingent things, so must have been caused by something non-contingent (for, were its cause contingent, it would be within the aggregate). The method Avicenna deploys makes it clear that it is possible to conceive of a deterministic series governed by causal rules, but still be committed to the contingency of that series *as a whole*. I believe Climacus has something like this in mind, rendering his thesis in the "Interlude" about history's non-necessity commensurate with a deterministic account of natural causality (that is, natural necessity).

[92] On this point, my interpretation is similar to that of Green and Roberts. See Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 106-107: "Climacus is saying something like this: Even if we ascribed causal necessity to everything inside nature (including human history), we would only have the necessity of this or that event *relative to* other events inside nature… Even if everything that happens within the creation happens by causal necessity, still every event is non-necessary in the sense that God could have actualized other creations—other chains of events—than the one he did actualize." See also Ronald M. Green, "Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*: A Kantian Commentary," in *IKC,* vol. 7, 194-195.

existence."[93] *Everything that has come into existence is historical, and everything historical has come into existence.* For any such phenomenon – anything that *is* or *was* or *will be* but *is* not so necessarily – regardless of whether *any (empirical) details* "can still be predicated" of it, it is historical. This includes individuals, (presumably) political movements, natural phenomena, and even the incarnate god. (One recalls Pojman's and Ferreira's critiques of Climacus' account: what sort of historical occurrence could lack all other predicates besides its historicity?)

How is the historical apprehended by the human subject? (Here I return to the first two of the four modes of apprehension Climacus mentions.) The historical cannot be apprehended through knowledge or cognition (*Erkjendelse*), for this mode of apprehension is only fit for logical or essential relationships and other necessary truths (possibly only analytical truths). (As Climacus writes, "the matter of cognition… involves essence, not being,"[94] and, "What he [Socrates] knew [*vidste*] about the god he attained by recollection, and for him the existence of the god was by no means historical… the assumption that the god exists defines him [Socrates] eternally, not historically."[95]) With regard to the incarnation, it might be a "matter of cognition" to know that the incarnation is *essentially* historical (in the sense that it definitionally involves God entering *history*), but it is not for cognition to determine whether the incarnation happened. The matter of incarnation is removed from any *science* of world-history.

Neither can the incarnation be apprehended by immediate sensation (*umiddelbare Sandsning*). As Climacus writes twice, "Immediate sensation and cognition cannot deceive."[96] (He attributes this remark about sensation to Plato, Aristotle, the Greek Skeptics, and Descartes.)

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[93] *PF* 75 / *SKS* 4, 275. This language seems to suggest that, for Climacus, finite existence functions as a predicate.

[94] *PF* 85 / *SKS* 4, 284. I have slightly adjusted this translation by Hong and Hong.

[95] *PF* 87 / *SKS* 4, 286.

[96] *PF* 81, 82 / *SKS* 4, 280, 281. The same statement appears again with different syntax at *PF* 83n / *SKS* 4, 282n.

Effectively, one has complete certainty of one's own immediate sensations, and error enters only "from the conclusion I draw."[97] The indubitability of immediate sensation relies on a distinction between what is sensed and the claim one might make about that which causes the sensation. Only the latter has come into existence and can be believed or doubted. Hence, Climacus writes, "This alone indicates that the historical cannot become the object of sense perception or of immediate cognition, because the historical has in itself that very illusiveness that is the illusiveness of coming into existence."[98] Insofar as something is historical, its *historicity* resists apprehension through the senses: "Because the historical intrinsically has the *illusiveness* of coming into existence, it cannot be sensed directly and immediately."[99] Because what comes into existence (that is the historical) *also* cannot be the object of knowledge, there can never be any cognitive certainty about the historical. (Later, I will show that belief generates a type of quasi-certainty – more like *certitude* – but this is subjective and psychological.) The incarnation essentially involves history, but – more than this – it *must happen in history* (as a world-historical occurrence) for any individual (subjectively) to receive the condition in the moment. In being historical, the incarnate god must be the sort of being (a flesh and blood human) that can be observed (sensed) empirically, yet *that* the incarnate god *is* the god incarnate cannot be ascertained empirically. This is what Climacus is getting at when he writes concerning the incarnate god, "the external form (not its detail) is not inconsequential."[100] (Having an external form – that is, being historical, being empirically observable – is essential, but *which* empirical features apply to the incarnate god are not.) Therefore, *that* the incarnate god is the incarnate god

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[97] *PF* 82 / *SKS* 4, 281.

[98] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 280.

[99] Ibid.

[100] *PF* 65 / *SKS* 4, 266.

essentially cannot be perceived immediately through the senses. (The historical, including incarnation, can only be for *Tro*. How immediate sensation or perception relates to belief and faith I will turn to shortly.)

Thus – as I have shown in this section – for theological reasons pertaining to the "mutual understanding" the god seeks between god-self and human beings, because the nature of the incarnation in particular resists the understanding, and because the nature of historical occurrences (of which the incarnation is a species) resists immediate cognition and immediate sense perception, the incarnation cannot be encountered *as incarnation* through sensory or intellectual modes of apprehension. The incarnation is beyond understanding, and as such is paradoxical; and as the historical, that the god *is there* as a human being is beyond sense-certainty. As hinted, miracles would also fail to deliver certainty about incarnation (*a fortiori*); for if a miracle constitutes an attestation to the incarnation, the miracle would have to be just as paradoxical and historical as the incarnation.[101] Effectively, Climacus' theological and epistemological commitments are tantamount to a refusal of the Origenist basis for Lessing's inquiry into history, insofar as Origen thought sensory miracles could attest to the incarnation.

To return to the gap between the incarnation and the individual who receives the condition through some occasion, I can now ask: *Through what sort of occasion* can the individual receive the condition? The obvious historical gap between the incarnation and an individual who lives much later (and so may require or be subject to a report) equally applies to the individual who witnesses the incarnation firsthand. This is because both encounters are equally *historical* in the proper sense of the term, that is, they are non-necessary occurrences.

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[101] See *PF* 93 / *SKS* 4, 290-291: "…all talk about the immediate wondrousness of his acts (since the wonder [*Vidunderet*] *is* not immediately but is only for faith, inasmuch as the person who does not believe does not see the wonder)—all such talk is nonsense here and everywhere…"

This also means both individuals are equally (soteriologically) close to, and distant from the incarnate god. In other words, when Climacus claims that "there can be no question of a follower at second hand or, what in other words amounts to the same thing, all are essentially alike," he is also committed to there being no question of an *immediate* follower, insofar as temporal simultaneity and spatial proximity provide no advantage.[102]

This generates another puzzle for how the condition might first be dispensed to a supposed firsthand witness of incarnation. First, would the firsthand witness receive the condition simply by being touched by the god-teacher, or by hearing (audibly) the god-teacher's teachings? No— those are both sensory modes of apprehension. Climacus discusses the matter clearly in the following passage:

> If we wish to state in the briefest possible way the relation of a contemporary to someone who comes later—without, however, sacrificing correctness for brevity—then we can say: *By means of* the contemporary's report (the occasion), the person who comes later believes by virtue of [*i Kraft af*] the condition he himself receives from the god. —The contemporary's report is the occasion for the one who comes later, just as immediate contemporaneity is the occasion for the contemporary, and if the report is what it ought to be (a believer's report), it will then occasion the same ambiguity of awareness that he himself had, occasioned by immediate contemporaneity.[103]

"Immediate contemporaneity" – that is, being a firsthand witness – is simply another occasion, not distinct from reading a textual report. The idea of the incarnation can for the firsthand witness be communicated through speech, words, actions, and other empirical details of the god-teacher's form, which details – just as in a report – may serve as the occasion for the god to give the condition. In this sense, the empirical particulars corresponding to the incarnate god function like the paper and ink of a report (though I will complicate this rendering in the following section); in both cases, what one senses immediately does not constitute the facticity of the

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[102] *PF* 105 / *SKS* 4, 302.

[103] *PF* 104 / *SKS* 4, 300-301.

incarnation (which is never immediately sensed). Thus, misunderstandings and doubt are possible, and there is need for interpretive engagement with what is sensorily certain – in both the case of a report and "immediate contemporaneity" – in order to receive the condition. In many cases, the condition may be delivered through the occasion of a communicated idea, one which can be only indirectly communicated through intermediaries, and thus never imparted through the immediate sensory display of, for example, a supernatural miracle. But – and here is the rub – such an idea (of incarnation) must originate (even if indirectly) from the incarnate god (on the hypothesis of the Christian position), even if I cannot be certain through sense data or cognition that I am encountering (firsthand or through a report) the incarnate god. The puzzle is this: How am I to receive the condition from the incarnate god "by means of" an occasion – such as a report that communicates the paradox, or an idea of the incarnation – if I do not already possess the condition in order to enable my recognition that the occasion (or report) refers to the incarnation (or paradox)?

The solution is easy, and in supplying it, I can elucidate something about the focus of this section. The god simply exercises the god's power through the delivery of the condition. This results in no vicious circularity— *There is no reason that receiving the condition implies the recipient is certain about the occasion through which I have received it or why.* My human faculties may simply be encountered by the god, and then struggle with what to make of this encounter; any inquiry into which particular set of circumstances made this possible will be retrospective guesswork. Therefore, when I encounter the incarnate god and receive the condition, I do not necessarily recognize that this has happened by means of this or that occasion, only that it must have happened by means of some occasion. To have an idea of the incarnation must mean that I have been given the condition by means of some occasion whose historical-

causal origin must be the incarnate god, but it does not mean I know when that occasion occurred, where, or what it looked like. (For doing so would mean I can tell which arrangement of empirical phenomena correspond to the incarnation.) Indeed, I *cannot* be certain of the details (because the incarnation is *historical* and thus its facticity cannot be apprehended through means that involve certainty: immediate sensation and cognition). Perhaps I have a good guess how I first learned the idea (always from the god, by means of some finite occasion). Perhaps not. In any case, it would be uncertain and irrelevant.

Pojman is technically correct that, on Climacus' account, there must be some first time in which I have heard about the incarnation or paradox (that is, some *nota bene*); moreover, there must be some first time in which the human race heard about it (some first teaching or symbolic miracle by the incarnate god). But because no description is sufficient to deliver certainty about the facticity of incarnation, having received the condition does not provide any insight into the first time the condition was dispensed, or what precise empirical criteria an occasion must meet for it to be dispensed. Metaphysically, then, a report adequate to occasion the gift of the condition must be a result of a causal series originating in the incarnation to which it refers, much like how, according to apostolic succession, the teachings of Jesus transfer to the twelve apostles and propagate throughout history. But it does not need to *refer* to that occurrence through the same world-historical details in which it actually happened. (This is affirmed in Climacus' '*a priori* proof,' which I will turn at the conclusion of the next section.) However, the encounter with the incarnate god (for *everyone*, for one who comes later, *but also for those original twelve apostles*) resembles, in its temporal displacement, that of Paul *en route* to Damascus. In short, the causal chain must be there, but epistemically, there is no way to track the chain to its origin since there are no criteria – no matter how exhaustive – that can be met in any

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description to ascertain the presence of the incarnate god. Whenever one stumbles upon a potential origin point comprising a description of empirical details, one must always, as Climacus puts it, "Go to the next house."[104]

D. On Following Christ (but not knowing where Christ is or when Christ was)

This section will build from the previous one, interrogating the final conceptual relationship I have identified: the relationship between becoming faithful (that is, becoming a follower) and the object or reference of faith, namely *that* the incarnation has happened. In addition to my observations in the previous section, recall Climacus' admission of a lack of specificity about the details of the occurrence: "So we now have the god walking around in the city in which he made his appearance (which one is inconsequential)…"[105] So what does the follower do with this lack of specificity? What is the content of a follower's faith when the incarnate god could have been Jesus or maybe someone else instead? To have faith, must the follower ascribe any empirical details to what they have faith has occurred?

My elucidation of this relationship will be simple – I conclude that becoming a follower does not require that one commit to the reference between any particular set of empirical descriptions and the (actual) world-historical details of the incarnate god. But this conclusion will first demand a prolonged assessment of the difference between the two remaining powers of apprehension – belief and faith (that is, *Tro* in its direct or ordinary sense and its eminent sense) – and how they relate to coming into existence (*Tilblivelse*).

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[104] *PF* 22 / *SKS* 4, 230. This notion of an origin that is indefinitely pushed back (but not *a priori* determined in advance) reminds me of Kant's notion, articulated in the First Antinomy, of a spatiotemporal *regressus in indefinitum*. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 525-528 (*KrV* A517-523/B545-551).

[105] *PF* 57 / *SKS* 4, 260.

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To distinguish between faith and belief first requires an investigation of coming into existence (*Tilblivelse*), and the distinction between belief (ordinary *Tro*) and immediate sensation. Climacus' explanation of these relationships, however, occurs in a notoriously confounding part of the "Interlude." Here Climacus characterizes belief as a faculty of apprehension connected to the will; it is an "organ for the historical" which must muster (with help from the will) an artificial certainty (or certitude) that counteracts the uncertainty associated with coming into existence.[106] Let me disentangle this bramble of concepts.

1. *Tilblivelse* and *Gígnomai*

What does it mean for something to come into existence (*at blive til*), or for something to have coming-into-existence (*Tilblivelse*)? The term is tightly connected, in the "Interlude," to belief and historicity. If something is historical, it has come into existence, and vice versa. As I will show later, this is the sort of phenomenon that belief (ordinary *Tro*) refers to and affirms, in contrast to the power of sensation (which apprehends immediate sensations) and the understanding (which affirms, with knowledge or cognitions, necessary truths and things that necessarily *are*).

If something has come into existence, it is intuitive that this would imply that it formally was not, but now is. Imagine stumbling upon an ostrich nest; I do not see any adult ostriches or ostrich chicks, but I do see large white cracked eggshells scattered about. Based on these sensations, I believe that ostrich chicks have come into existence (that is, they *er blevet til*), and that they likely (assuming they are still wandering around outside my purview) have coming-

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[106] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 280.

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into-existence (*Tilblivelse*). On this framing of *Tilblivelse*, it means something about historical

origins; something has come into existence if it is or was an effect of some efficient cause. (The

state of affairs that included an ostrich nest, adult ostriches, ostrich eggs, adequate heat, etc., was

sufficient to cause a state of affairs that includes living, prancing baby ostriches.) Insofar as

belief is a power that believes that things have come into existence, belief refers to the historical

origins of things through efficient causality.

To begin fleshing out Climacus' notion of *Tilblivelse*, I will foreground an alternative

interpretation by drawing from the Platonic concept of becoming (*gígnomai*).[107] Then, with

reference to the "Interlude," I will defend this interpretation as what Climacus has in mind, as

well as defend its coherence (at least in a limited sense, that is, in the context of the "Interlude").

Since Kierkegaard was so engaged with Plato's thought (and Climacus explicitly so in

Fragments), there is *prima facie* reason to consider that Plato's *gígnomai* (of which *génesis* is the

verbal noun) is a plausible antecedent for the discussion of *Tilblivelse* in the "Interlude."[108]

While there is debate among historians of philosophy about exactly what Plato means by

becoming versus *being* and whether the terms' meanings shift throughout Plato's authorship, it is

generally agreed that the definitive statement of this major distinction is articulated by the title

character in the *Timaeus* (before his distinction is praised by Socrates as reasonable)[109]:

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[107] R. Zachary Manis also advances a Platonist reading of the "Interlude." See R. Zachary Manis, "Johannes Climacus on Coming into Existence: The Problem of Modality in Kierkegaard's *Fragments* and *Postscript*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2013): 107-129, especially 116-121. Manis is less interested in exegesis, and more interested (than I am here) to test the coherence and plausibility of Climacus' notion of coming-into-existence against the backdrop of Ancient Greek modal metaphysics, particularly possibility's relationship to actuality.

[108] The terms *gígnomai* and *génesis* are also important to Aristotle, but despite Aristotle's thought being alluded to in the "Interlude," it is unlikely that Kierkegaard had read much Aristotle prior to authoring *Fragments*. (Cf. 118n83 of the present work.) For this reason, I suspect it is Plato from whom Climacus most likely draws *Tilblivelse*.

[109] Robert Bolton, "Plato's Distinction Between Being and Becoming," *The Review of Metaphysics* 29, no. 1 (Sep. 1975), 67.

As I see it, then, we must begin by making the following distinction: What is *that which always is* [τὸ ὂν ἀεί ; id quod semper sit ; das, was immer *ist*] and has no becoming [γένεσιν ; habeat ortum ; *Werden*], and what is *that which becomes* [τὸ γιγνόμενον ; id quod gignatur ; das, was immer *wird*] but never is [ὂν ; sit ; *ist*]? The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account. It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception. It comes to be [γιγνόμενον ; gignatur ; wird] and passes away, but never really is [ὄν ; sit ; *ist*]. Now everything that comes to be [τὸ γιγνόμενον ; omne… quod gignatur ; Werdende] must of necessity come to be [γίγνεσθαι ; esse gigni ; werden] by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be [γένεσιν ; ortum habere ; ein Werden] without a cause.[110]

What are rendered in English as "becoming" or "coming to be," are different forms of the same Greek word: *gígnomai*. (In the German translation of the *Timaeus* Kierkegaard also owned, they are all translated as variations of *werden*, the verb that functions nearly identically to the Danish verb *at blive*, which is the root of the term *Tilblivelse*.[111]) While *gígnomai* does indeed imply having been caused by something else, it is foremost an ontological category that excludes all things that "really" are (that is, necessary beings). In this sense, *gígnomai* participates only partially in what necessarily is, and is fundamentally *formally caused* by what *is* necessarily.

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[110] Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 1234 (27d-28a). The Greek and Latin are from *Platonis quae exstant opera*, vol. 5 (1822) [*ASKB* 178, 1148], 134-137. For the German: [Plato], *Platon's Timæus und Kritias*, trans. Friedrich Wilhelm Wagner (Breslau: Georg Philipp Aderholz, 1841) [*ASKB* 1168], 20. Emphasis is present in the cited versions. (I am grateful to James Gillard for his assistance with reading, and reasoning through, this passage.) Kierkegaard could have plausibly consulted, and would have likely been familiar with, the Greek, Latin, and German versions of this passage, which has historically been considered fundamental for understanding Plato's ontology. (While Kierkegaard would have more likely consulted a Danish translation, or failing that, Schleiermacher's German translation of a Platonic dialogue, Schleiermacher never completed a translation of the *Timaeus*, and Heise would not complete his Danish translation of the *Timaeus* until shortly before Kierkegaard's death in 1855.)

The German "das, was immer *wird*" includes a word ("immer") which corresponds to an instance of "ἀεί" from received versions of the Greek that some translators choose to omit. It is, for instance, omitted in the English edition I quote, whose editors draw attention to this omission in a footnote (Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Zeyl, 1234n7).

[111] Both *Tilblivelse* ('coming into existence') and *Tilværelse* ('existence') contain the prefix 'til' (a common Danish preposition meaning 'to' or 'for'). (*Tilværelse*, unlike *Tilblivelse*, is a common Danish term meaning 'existence.') *At blive* means 'to become,' and is a common verb used in passive constructions (much like *werden* in German), while *at være* is the Danish verb meaning 'to be' (*DDO*). *Blivelse* (the abstract noun corresponding to 'becoming') does not appear to have been used during Kierkegaard's time, makes (only rare) appearances in pre-18th-century Danish, and seems to mean a 'remaining' or 'stay' (*KO*; *GDO*). The term *Væren* ('being') is a common philosophical term. Though I am not altogether certain, the 'til' in *at blive til* and *at være til* appear to function how the 'da' ('there') functions in the German word *Dasein*; for both words, the existence involved is a specific, delimited existence.

Gígnomai includes the set of things that can be encountered (empirically) in day-to-day life, as well as anything else that is not self-caused. (Earthly, finite things fall within this category, even things that do not have an easily sensed origin, such as mountains or stars.) As with Climacus' notion of *Tilblivelse*, *gígnomai* cannot be "grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account," but only by "opinion" through the initial medium of "sense perception." (Here, "opinion" is a technical epistemological term, including inferences made based on sense data and second-order inferences based on those inferences.) And crucially – like what I ascribe to Climacus' notion of *Tilblivelse* – *gígnomai* does not only refer to a thing's sufficient temporal causation (its origin), but rather to it being the *sort of thing* that depends on *being* not contained within itself. (What is caused depends on what is real and uncaused.) As Donald Zeyl and John Cooper write concerning this passage, "'Becoming' and 'coming to be' here [in this passage of *Timaeus*] as elsewhere translate the same Greek word, *genesis*, and its cognates; the Greek word does not say, as English 'comes to be' does, that once a thing has come to be, it now *is* or has *being*."[112] Of course, if something is said to *become* (*gígnomai*; at blive til) in this way, this indeed means this something has some cause (likely but not necessarily a temporal cause[113]), but should someone – on Climacus' account – inquire about whether some sensation refers to something that *has become*, they would be asking about *whether it is such a thing that had a causal origin relating to eternal being*, not necessarily about the temporal origin itself. On this interpretation of coming-into-existence, it would still apply to the hatched ostrich chicks, but not *primarily* because they are the results of efficient, spatiotemporal causes (even though they

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[112] Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Zeyl, 1234n8.

[113] The entire aggregated series of 'thus and so' (*Saaledes*) may not, for Climacus, have a temporal cause, but it could still be said to *come to exist* (bliver til) because it would be the contingent effect of some other, atemporal cause. For example, if God chooses to create one world and not another, the world as created would *være blevet til*.

indeed are). In other words, Climacus treats *Tilblivelse* not primarily as referring to efficient-causal origins in history, but rather a thing's being caused through some more general causal relationship to what eternally *is*.

If I am correct that *Tilblivelse* means 'coming-to-exist' or 'becoming' in the sense of *gígnomai*, then one should expect Climacus somewhere to capture the idea of formal causation, which is more fundamental than efficient causation for explaining the relationship of what *becomes* to what *is*. Climacus indeed does so when first defining *Tilblivelse* in the "Interlude," associating the term with the actualization of a plan.[114] (A plan itself would not be sufficient to cause the planned result in the manner of efficient causality; it is a simile for formal causality.) The discussion is not framed around the efficient-causal conditions through which a thing might be said to come into existence.[115] Rather, Climacus is interested in the abstract relationship between possibility and actuality through which a thing might be said to exist finitely, that is (on my interpretation), to *come into existence*.[116] If I am correct, then when Climacus provides examples of other things that have come into existence, such as a star (I turn to this example shortly), he is talking about a finite form of quasi-being like Plato's *gígnomai*. In this case, the star has *Tilblivelse* (has 'coming-into-existence' or 'becoming') or *er blivet til* ('has come into existence') in a way that implies contingent existence independent of the subject's sense

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[114] *PF* 73 / *SKS* 4, 273.

[115] Later, Climacus writes about belief and coming into existence in this way: "…I cannot immediately sense or know that what I immediately sense or know is an effect, for immediately it simply is. That it is an effect is something I believe, because in order to predicate that it is an effect, I must already have made it dubious in the uncertainty of coming into existence" (*PF* 84 / *SKS* 4, 283). Such a passage might seem to contradict the interpretation of *Tilblivelse* as *gígnomai* I am forwarding, since the language of cause and effect could appear temporal, that is, about the origin of something whose *Tilblivelse* is in question. But I believe the language of cause and effect in this passage refers to formal causality, not efficient causality.

[116] *PF* 74 / *SKS* 4, 274.

perception (it *happens to exist*, it *is contingently*), but to whose independent existence the sense perception also refers.

2. Immediate Sensation, Belief, and Volition

Recall that immediate sensation apprehends without the risk of deception. (Error is only made when a false conclusion is *believed* – through a "decision" – based on immediate sensations.[117]) Climacus seems to attribute this decision to the will: Describing doubt, in relation to belief, he writes, "This implies that doubt can be terminated only in freedom, by an act of will, something every Greek skeptic would understand…"[118] On the following page, he states the relation of will and belief explicitly: "In contrast [to immediate sensation and cognition], it is now readily apparent that belief is not a knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of will."[119] In the case of error (wrong belief), my will is what commits the mistake, not the immediate sensation. Climacus cites the classic examples of a "round object that close at hand is seen to be square" or "a stick that looks broken in the water although it is straight when taken out"; in either case, "sensation has not deceived me, but I am deceived only when I conclude something about that stick and that object."[120] This remark suggests that the will, for Climacus, has an expansive scope, which includes powers such as conceptual judgment. (However, it should at least be noted that what "freedom, …an act of will" actually means is unclear; volition

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[117] Climacus writes, "Belief's conclusion [*Slutning*] is no conclusion [*Slutning*] but a decision [*Beslutning*]" (*PF* 84 / *SKS* 4, 283; my translation).

[118] *PF* 82 / *SKS* 4, 281. In a footnote, he ascribes a compatible position to Descartes, a position to which Climacus also seems to subscribe: "Later, Descartes says, just as the Greek skeptics did, that error comes from the will, which is in too great a hurry to draw conclusions. This casts light on belief also. When belief resolves to believe, it runs the risk that it was an error, but nevertheless it wills to believe" (*PF* 83n / *SKS* 4, 282n).

[119] *PF* 83 / *SKS* 4, 282.

[120] *PF* 82-83 / *SKS* 4, 282.

in this context *may* imply responsibility of the will, but not necessarily a radical power of free choice. On the other hand, Climacus may be advancing an unusual position in which many ordinary conceptual judgments are under the power of free choice.)

According to Climacus, when I draw conclusions about something I sense, I do so in a register distinct from the sensation. In other words, the belief that a stick in water is broken abstracts the stick *qua* object (objective, roughly) from the stick *qua* sensation (subjective, roughly). Such a conclusion (that is, one that extrapolates from immediate sensation) involves the decision (through the will's engagement with belief) that the object has certain empirical features, that is, that it is historical in one way (*Saaledes*; 'thus and so') and not other possible ways (*Hvorledes*; 'how'). (Recall that coming-into-existence – that is, the mark of all historical things – refers primarily to its ontological status as caused by some eternal being. This is why the case of the stick involves historicity even though the appearance of the stick as bent does not an involve an interrogation of, for example, how the stick got there.) Because "The immediate impression of a natural phenomenon or of an event is not the impression of the historical, for the *coming into existence* cannot be sensed immediately—but only the presence [*Nærværende*]," it requires some kind of leap to reach a conclusion about the perception corresponding to, or being caused by, something that has come into existence.[121] This leap is one from the presence of the sense perception, which is indubitable, to some kind of uncertain objective claim about coming into existence: "In relation to the immediate, coming into existence is an illusiveness whereby that which is most firm is made dubious."[122]

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[121] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 280. *Nærværende* could mean 'being nearby' or 'being (temporally) now,' but as a technical philosophical term, it may also mean the presence of a thought or representation before consciousness (*ODS*).

[122] Ibid.

Yet the very objective uncertainty – that is, the historicity or having-come-into-existence my sensation refers to – is what becomes the object for "the organ for the historical," that is, belief (*Tro* in the "ordinary sense"). Climacus describes the activity of the faculty of belief in a counterintuitive way:

> [T]he organ for the historical… must have within itself the corresponding something by which in its certitude it continually annuls the incertitude that corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence—a double uncertainty: the nothingness of non-being and the annihilated possibility, which is the annihilation of every other possibility. This is precisely the nature of belief [*Tro*], for continually present as the nullified in the certitude of belief is the incertitude that in every way corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence.[123]

Insofar as something *other than* what can be known through cognition or represented immediately by sensation – that is, that which comes into existence – resists certainty, the faculty of belief must generate an opposing force (certitude) in order to generate a belief. Beliefs involve, then, a form of subjective certitude that counteracts the uncertainty inherent in coming into existence. The uncertainty it must overcome with subjective certitude is a "double uncertainty" because it includes both the non-being that ontologically marks all finite things that do not enjoy necessary existence ("the nothingness of non-being") and the negative determination of the content of the belief, that is, the negation of all possible objects of belief that must not be the case if the belief in question is held ("the annihilated possibility, which is the annihilation of every other possibility"). In order for a belief to be held, this vast array of negative objective elements must be bundled together and overcome subjectively by a "corresponding something."

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[123] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 281.

What is the corresponding something? "[D]oubt can only be terminated," Climacus writes, "by an act of will…"[124] Thus, in a passage I already quoted in part, "[I]t is now readily apparent that belief is not a knowledge [*en Erkjendelse*] but an act of freedom, an expression of will. It believes the coming into existence and has annulled in itself the incertitude that corresponds to the nothingness of that which is not."[125] Belief must 'catch' or 'latch on' to all the reasons for doubting that something has come into existence – that is, the objective uncertainty – and annuls the understanding's corresponding subjective uncertainty through a volitional act, which overcomes it and generates a subjective certitude.

This is quite a dramatic way to frame an operation that, at least in most cases, seems to happen easily and spontaneously for the human being. Though I am not interested to defend the plausibility of Climacus' account, a brief recapitulation (in different) will be helpful: Belief is confronted at every moment with every possible spatio-temporal configuration of things in the world. Climacus refers to these possible configurations as the "the multiple possible 'how'" (*mangfoldige mulige Hvorledes*).[126] The things within these possible configurations, as I have shown with reference to Plato's concept of becoming, are perhaps best understood as possible manifestations or modes of whatever eternally *is*. Though Climacus is not clear about these operations, when the organ of belief believes, the will – presumably in coordination with other beliefs the subject holds, as well as what is available through immediate sensation – selects a possible configuration for belief to believe *is the actual configuration of things*. This possible configuration (which belief believes is actual) remains among the set of all possible

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[124] *PF* 82 / *SKS* 4, 281.

[125] *PF* 83 / *SKS* 4, 282. *En Erkjendelse* could also be translated as 'a cognition.'

[126] *PF* 82 / *SKS* 4, 281.

configurations, or, "the actual thus-and-so's possible 'how'" (*det virkelige Saaledes's mulige Hvorledes*).[127] Effectively, belief surveys the set of possible worlds, selecting one to believe and pushing away all others (doubt).

3. Immediate Sensation and the Historical (i.e., that which comes into existence)

Yet, with all this said, it is still unclear exactly what to make of the terms 'historical' (*historiske*) and 'coming into existence' (*Tilblivelse*) both ontologically and epistemologically. How do they relate to what I immediately sense? Can I know how they relate? Does that which comes into existence (purportedly) *cause* a sense perception in me *of it*? If something has 'coming into existence,' is this simply a fundamental part of its ontology, or does it indicate something about its origin or temporality (that is, its history)?

In a serious consideration of the philosophy of the "Interlude," Roberts has proposed two possible interpretations of "immediate sensation" and its connection to coming into existence, in conjunction with several examples Climacus offers. The first he labels "object-noncommittal sense presentation."[128] He dismisses it rather quickly, both as inapplicable to the human experience and as exegetically incommensurable with Climacus' examples of how belief apprehends what comes into existence. The second, a "commonsensical" account of immediate sensation, Roberts hesitantly ascribes to Climacus.[129] In the case of both interpretations, Roberts argues that Climacus' claims about immediate sensation's inability to deceive are highly problematic and likely need to be jettisoned. To the contrary, I think that what Climacus means

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[127] *PF* 85 / *SKS* 4, 284. I have slightly adjusted the Hongs' translation.

[128] Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 111ff.

[129] Ibid., 114ff.

by "immediate sensation" falls somewhere in between the two options Roberts offers, and moreover, that Roberts' assessment of Climacus' examples of how belief operates (as opposed to the certainty of sense), depends on his misunderstanding of the meaning of the term "coming into existence" and thus also the related term "historical." (He does not recognize coming into existence is like *gígnomai*.)

By "object-noncommittal sense perception," Roberts means an experience that does not commit to anything about the content of what is perceived.[130] He imagines himself in the Rocky Mountains watching and hearing a stream wash over rocks. For the associated set of representations to count as immediate sensation interpreted as object-noncommittal sense perception, it is necessary to abstract from one's knowledge about the material constitution of water (H_2O), the ideas implied in the notion of "flowing" (for example, gravity), and even the almost-unconscious methods for distinguishing between objects such as rocks and water.[131] If such an experience is even possible for human beings, it involves so much effort to abstract from object-commitments as to seem like an unnatural practice, and thus inapplicable to Climacus' usage. This is made especially clear, Roberts thinks, in conjunction with one of the major examples Climacus invokes for explaining the operations of sensation and belief, that of seeing a star and believing that the star has come into existence.[132] When Climacus writes, "Thus, belief believes [*Troen troer*] what it does not see; it does not believe that the star exists, for that it sees, but it believes that the star has come into existence,"[133] Roberts interprets Climacus as contradicting an object-noncommittal interpretation of sense perception, for "To see a star is to

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[130] Ibid., 111.

[131] Ibid., 111-112.

[132] Ibid., 112. The example of the star is introduced on *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 280.

[133] *PF* 81 / *SKS* 4, 281.

make use of the concept of a star, a concept that is different from others that might be used, such as a planet or satellite or hole in the canopy."[134] Moreover, Roberts suggests that it seems to contradict the thesis about the certainty of immediate sensation, for "One can think one sees a star when in fact one is seeing a planet."[135] Despite a perception of a star, it is not a star. For Roberts, this contradicts Climacus' claims about the indubitability of sense perceptions.

On the other hand, by a "commonsensical" understanding of immediate sensation, Roberts means "roughly… what the common person means when he says, 'I saw it with my own eyes.' Here knowing by direct perception would be in contrast with knowing something by inference, or on authority, by hearsay, or by some interpretation."[136] Roberts suggests that this rendering of sensation coheres better with a commonsense understanding of a report by a firsthand witness of an event (such as the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth).[137] (And on Roberts' reading, the causal connection of such a report to the described event, the plausibility of which is considered by someone who comes later, is a primary interest of the "Interlude.") However, on this interpretation of immediate sensation, it seems even harder to save Climacus' assertions about its inability to deceive, for the content of such firsthand experiences can clearly be contradicted by future experiences or disputed by other individuals' accounts.

I believe that the inability of either rendering to preserve Climacus' attribution of certainty to perception is a death blow to Roberts' interpretation. Throughout the "Interlude," Climacus is so insistent about this feature of sense perception that, on exegetical grounds, it is irresponsible to excise this feature of his account. I propose a different interpretation of

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[134] Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 112.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 114.

[137] Ibid., 118-119.

Climacus' immediate sensation and its certainty, which will allow me to preserve this aspect of Climacus' epistemology. (Then I will 'try on' this interpretation with reference to several passages from the "Interlude": the example of the star, the example of the stick in the water, and an analogy between witnessing something and encountering a report of it.) My proposal is that by *immediate sensation*, Climacus means the content of a sensory experience *as it is represented* in a subject. This *excludes* any objective commitment to the independent existence of any element of the experience (that is, that a representation was caused by some object outside my perception, a thing-in-itself, to which it refers). In this way, my account is similar to Roberts' notion of object-noncommittal sense perceptions, except it admits of whatever implicit concepts, prejudices, and organizational activities of subjectivity operate to generate a subjectively certain experience, independent of the judgment *that a separate something corresponding to* my representation exists and has caused the perception. My account is distinct from Roberts' "commonsensical" version of immediate sensation insofar as it would not admit of a witness who "saw it with [their] own eyes" to have delivered to them through the perception the content *that* what they saw *was there* (that is, somewhere in front of those eyes) objectively.[138]

While it is possible to interrogate *ad infinitum* the plausibility of a proposal such as mine for explaining human experience in general, I posit that at least I have offered an intuitive account of immediate sensation: On my reading, when Roberts imagines himself sitting in a valley in the Rocky Mountains, watching water flow over rocks, he could very well be said to

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[138] On this point, I believe my interpretation of the "Interlude" is similar to Green's, who compares Climacus' notion of the historical to Kant's notions of *appearance* (Erscheinung) and *phenomenon*. What Kant would label an appearance or a phenomenon is similar to Climacus' *historical*. On this set of issues, Kant's epistemology and ontology are complex; something only becomes a thing or object (*Gegenstand*) when it takes on objective reality as an appearance through a robust experience. I suspect that Climacus' conception of an immediate sense perception would track, for Kant, to some stage in the process of developing an experience, while once an appearance is rendered a *Gegenstand*, it tracks to Climacus' notion of the historical, or *Tilblivelse*. Kant eschews the major volitional element that Climacus assigns the faculty of belief for apprehending such an object. See Green, "Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*: A Kantian Commentary," 177-178.

have an immediate sensation *of water flowing over rocks*, for the sense impressions are

represented to him immediately *as water flowing over rocks*, presumably not as a hazier, less-

determined manifold of colorful qualia. And yet such a sensory experience, I contend, does not

by itself imply (for Climacus) a commitment to any objective existent or set of existents to which

his experience refers (even if, admittedly, a subject often can and in fact rapidly does reach

judgments about the existence of such things). Similarly, when I look out my window during

daylight, I see trees (green, with leaves and branches blowing in the wind). At night, they do not

always at first appear to be trees, but look murky and indistinct; I see (*immediately*, on my

reading of the term) shadowy, amorphous forms. My judgments that both are experiences *of the*

same thing (the selfsame trees) and *that* the trees are *really* there, are distinct from the sensations

themselves. And I do not *need* to make these judgments based on either sensation (or both). This

is attested because the sensations are indeed different from one another (and of varying degrees

of ambiguity), though I can still readily conclude that the same set of trees is there.

The Star

So let us test Climacus' examples, analogies, and arguments for the plausibility of this

interpretation. This will also enable further determination of the key concept *Tilblivelse* (coming

into existence). The first example is the star, from a passage I have already quoted in part:

> In relation to the immediate, coming into existence [*Tilblivelse*] is an illusiveness
> whereby that which is most firm is made dubious. For example, when the perceiver sees a
> star, the star becomes dubious for him the moment he seeks to become aware that it has
> come into existence [*er bleven til*]. It is just as if reflection removed the star from his
> senses… Thus, belief believes [*Troen troer*] what it does not see; it does not believe that
> the star exists [*er til*], for that it sees, but it believes that the star has come into existence
> [*er bleven til*]. The same is true of an event. The occurrence [*Skeete*] can be known
> immediately but not that it has occurred [*at det er skeet*], not even that it is in the process
> of occurring [*at det skeer*], even though it is taking place [*skeer*], as they say, right in
> front of one's nose. The occurrence's [*Skeetes*] illusiveness is that it has occurred [*at det*

er skeet], and therein lies the transition from nothing, from non-being, and from the multiple possible "how" [*Hvorledes*].[139]

There is much to say about this passage, and to render it coherent requires some counterintuitive exegetical steps. This is because Climacus has not been careful when he remarks about the star's *existence*. Recall that Roberts believes the example of the star contradicts the object-noncommittal interpretation of immediate sensation, for Climacus identifies it *as a star* before abstracting from the sensation to the question of whether it has come into existence. On my interpretation of immediate sensation and *Tilblivelse*, this is not a problem. The thing in question simply is represented by the observer *as a star*, which is, from the perspective of such an observer, a point of light in the sky. To this extent, it is reasonable to say, as Climacus does, that one "sees" "that the star exists [*er til*]" (with sense certainty) because Climacus is implicitly stipulating the existing star to be a point of light, that is, an immediate sensation of a bright pinpoint on his visual field. What the observer *believes*, namely that the star "has come into existence" (*er bleven til*), is that a corresponding thing outside myself is there (that is, the star *qua* something to which my sensation is *believed* to refer), which is itself an effect of some *real* eternal thing with being. In other words, by the phrase "the star exists," Climacus is actually referring to the star *as represented* (in sensation), while by the star's *Tilblivelse* (its coming-into-existence or that it has come into existence), Climacus means the star as an finite object to which

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[139] *PF* 81-82 / *SKS* 4, 280-281. I have slightly modified this translation for ease of reading, leaving the Hongs' diction choices intact. The verb *at ske* (which appears here in the present conjugation, as a past participle, and as the substantive *Skeete*) means to occur or happen. The verb *er til* is the present conjugation of *at være til*, meaning 'to exist.' (*At være* means 'to be.') The term *Hvorledes* is a non-traditional substantialization of *hvorledes*, which, as with the English 'how,' can function as an adverb that opens a question, or as a conjunction meaning approximately, 'in the way that…' In the "Interlude," Climacus also uses the term *Saaledes* (translated by the Hongs as "thus and so"), which is a substantialization of a conjunction meaning, roughly, 'therefore,' 'thusly,' or 'and so.' (For more, see *ODS*, *DDO*.) Climacus deploys the former to mean every possible way that a coming-into-existence *could have been*, while the latter refers to the actual way it has come into existence, i.e., the *what* that has become.

my representation refers (when belief believes, something which might intuitively be called an existing thing.

The temptation here – and I should acknowledge that such a reading is quite tempting – is to think of the star's *Tilblivelse* as referring to the *origin* of some separate object (an existing star) as an effect by some other efficient, temporal cause. It is especially tempting because Climacus sometimes deploys the perfect aspect (*er blevet til*), which suggests (but does not guarantee) the completion of the act of coming into existence. Indeed, this is what both Roberts and Howland presume throughout their discussions of the star example. As an example Roberts invokes a newly constructed gymnasium; when someone sees a completed gym, even if they have witnessed the construction, this involves belief (because, in being in the past, the moment of completion has become historically dubious).[140] Unlike my interpretation, both Roberts and Howland take immediate sense perception to unproblematically involve an external object that presently exists in a commonsense way – even though Roberts thinks Climacus' attachment of certainty to this form of perception is ludicrous – and *Tilblivelse* to be a story or explanation about the object as an effect of other causes in time, that is, an account of its origin. On such an rendering, something *comes into existence* at the point when it has been efficiently caused (such as when the final brick is added to the gymnasium, or when a star coalesces from a cloud of gas in a nebula, or alternatively, is evoked by God during the fourth day[141]). Thereafter it *exists* (er til). The interpretation I have proposed for *Tilblivelse* (as *gígnomai*) cuts against this reading.

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[140] See Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 113. Howland takes a similar turn: "The star exists, but how did it come into existence? Was it formed by physical processes that originated in the Big Bang? This is one possible 'thus and so.' Or was the star formed by God, in the manner reported in scripture (Genesis 1:14-6)? This is another possible 'thus and so'" (Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 168.)

[141] Gen 1:14-19 (*NRSV*).

Because this is a complex exegetical issue, I support this interpretation in two further ways. First and more importantly, let us attend to Climacus' discussion of an event or "occurrence," appended to his discussion of the star: "The occurrence [*Skeete*] can be known immediately but not that it has occurred [*at det er skeet*], not even that it is in the process of occurring [*at det skeer*], even though it is taking place [*skeer*]… right in front of one's nose." The grammatical difference here is clear: I can sense (immediately) an "occurrence" (like the star's "existence"), but "not that it has occurred, not even that it is in the process of occurring" (its *Tilblivelse*). The "that it has" and "that it is" involve an abstraction from the perception (the "occurrence" which "can be known immediately") that indicates something is objective, a thing beyond my mere sensation. Someone else could reasonably disagree with claims I make about it in this register. Yet at the same time, there must be some reference between the immediate awareness of the occurrence and the fact "that it is" and "has" occurred; otherwise it would be a different thing (what Climacus labels earlier "a transition from one genus to another"[142]). Moreover, the simultaneity of the immediate sensation ("in front of one's nose") and the occurring of the occurrence ("that it is taking place [occurring; *skeer*]") fits more tightly with my picture than that of Roberts and Howland, who each instead associate the *belief*'s content (that is, the *Tilblivelse*) with an initial (origin) point vis-à-vis a string of causes *over time*.

Second, I believe I can evince that Roberts and Howland have misread the star example because they are too quick to presume a particular scope and context for the star's *Tilblivelse*, which scope and context do not fit Climacus' discussion. In Howland's case this is especially clear, for each of his two causal stories (two possible 'how's'; two *Hvorledes*) invoke the creation narrative in Genesis 1 or imply the natural process of stellar formation and evolution,

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[142] *PF* 73 / *SKS* 4, 273. Climacus uses the Greek: "μετάβασις εἰς ἀλλὸ γένος."

treating the star, whose existence and *Tilblivelse* are in question, as the sort of astronomical object with which modern readers are undoubtedly familiar. Yet even though Kierkegaard would have been aware of spectroscopic observations of stars made by astronomers, it is unlikely that Climacus (or Kierkegaard) would have understood a star primarily to be, for example, an extremely distant, massive ball of plasma in the vacuum of outer space. In other words, when Climacus writes, "it does not believe that the star exists [*er til*], for that it sees," he does not imply that one *sees* that the star exists as a gaseous body in space, invoking any astrophysical model. Thus, when he says that "belief… believes that the star has come into existence," Climacus is unlikely to be interrogating the conditions of efficient causality that could bring such an object about. (It is on this faulty ground that Roberts seems to doubt the coherence of Climacus' notion of *Tilblivelse*.)

To corroborate my position on Climacus' astronomical presumptions, I appeal to two likely textual influences. One is the inaugural edition of J. L. Heiberg's astronomy-themed yearbook *Urania*, a part-almanac, part-journal published near the end of 1843. The volume includes a nonfiction prose piece by Heiberg himself, which weaves together elements of philosophy, theology, and scientific astronomy to contend that depression might be ameliorated by observation and contemplation of the natural rhythms of heavenly bodies.[143] It is known that Kierkegaard purchased this book in December of 1843,[144] and that he read it before or during the

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[143] Johan Ludvig Heiberg, "Det astronomiske Aar [*The Astronomical Year*]," *Urania. Aarbog for 1844*, ed. Heiberg (Copenhagen: H.I. Bing & Sön, 1843) [*ASKB* U57], 77-169. (I am grateful to Troy Wellington Smith for directing me to this source.) Heiberg was a literary critic, poet, playwright, and intellectual whom Kierkegaard appreciated, but with whom later he conflicted over Heiberg's interest to unite Hegelianism and Christianity. *Urania* also contains a theological piece by Martensen, a pastoral by Wilster (translator of Homer and Greek tragedians into Danish), and *Castor og Pollux*, a novella anonymously composed by the author (and Heiberg's mother) Thomasine Gyllembourg.

[144] *ACKL*, 138.

composition of *Fragments*.[145] (He was likely especially interested in the book because in it, Heiberg criticizes his pseudonymous author Constantin Constantius' concept of repetition.[146]) What is important is that Heiberg's astronomical observations treat the heavenly bodies largely as distant points on a firmament, not as common objects with extension. If Kierkegaard had this notion of stars in mind, it makes sense that Climacus would conflate a star's *existence* with the sensation that would refer to its coming-into-existence. This would explain Climacus' imprecise remark – belief "does not believe that the star exists [*er til*], for that it sees – and provide additional ground to diverge from the presumptions about a star's existence I ascribe to Howland's and Roberts' interpretations.

The other possible source is Matthew 2, in which the Christmas Star is introduced: "Where is the king of the Jews, who has been born? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him."[147] While there is no ancillary textual evidence that Climacus was considering this passage, *Fragments*' consistent engagement with the topic of incarnation lends itself to nativity allusions, and I believe it is safe to recognize the star's inclusion in the "Interlude" as a *double entendre*. The star is, from the perspective of the three wise men, a new

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[145] In the first footnote at *PF* 10n / *SKS* 4, 219n, Climacus mocks the idea that after death, one might be born "on another planet," in which "the individual will be better situated." According to *SKS* K4, 210-211 (219,24), this almost certainly alludes to a passage in *Urania* where Heiberg validates the idea that other planets are populated by alien lifeforms through an appeal to "the many dreamings that are posited in connection with it, for example, that after death the human being shall get another body on another globe" (Heiberg, "Det astronomiske Aar," 130; my translation). The Danish reads: "…isaer naar man tillige betragter de mange Drömmerier, som sættes i Forbindelse dermed, f. Ex. at Mennesket efter Döden skulde faae et andet Legeme paa en anden Klode…"

[146] "…[T]he author [Constantin Constantius] has not distinguished between the essentially different meaning that repetition has in the natural and spiritual spheres. Thereby he has been taken with the delusion that repetition shall, in a forthcoming philosophy, play the same role as 'what one erroneously has called *mediation*' [*R* 148 / *SKS* 4, 25] plays in the present" (Heiberg, "Det astronomiske Aar," 97; my translation). Shortly thereafter Heiberg excerpts lengthy passages of *Repetition* before criticizing them (ibid., 98-100). Later, Kierkegaard (under the pseudonym Nicolaus Notabene) would publish a short polemical rebuke, targeting Heiberg's application of astronomy to theology, in his 1844 *Prefaces* (*P* 23-26 / *SKS* 4, 486-488).

[147] Mt 2:2 (*NT-1819*). In Danish, "Hvor er den Jødernes Konge, som er fød? thi vi have seet hans Stierne i Øster, og ere komne at tilbede ham." The star (*Stiernen*) appears again at Mt 2:7, 9, and 10.

point of light in the sky which had not been there before. But their *belief* about its origin is more

than of historical interest, for it implies that "the king of the Jews… has been born." In other

words, even though Climacus' discussion of belief ("direct" or "ordinary" *Tro*) has thus far

referred to ordinary occurrences of history, the star example points to an extraordinary

("eminent") power of *Tro* (faith), a topic which Climacus re-introduces shortly thereafter (much

like how the star in Matthew 2 promises an extraordinary birth).[148]

The Stick in the Water

The example of the stick in the water occurs in conjunction with Climacus' initial

discussion of the inherent correctness of immediate sense perception: "If, for example, sensation

shows me… a stick that looks broken in the water although it is straight when taken out,

sensation has not deceived me, but I am deceived only when I conclude about that stick…"[149]

Though Climacus never explicitly articulates to what element of this example *Tilblivelse*

pertains, it seems clear that to reach a conclusion ("only when I conclude about that stick")

involves holding a belief, and – because beliefs involve *Tilblivelse* – the corresponding

Tilblivelse (that is, the thing which has come into existence) would be the stick to which such a

conclusion refers, that is, an existing object determinable through empirical observation.

Presuming a relationship in this example (between sensation and belief) analogous to that

of the star, it would be peculiar to inquire into the *origin* of the stick. On a reading such as

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[148] There is further evidence that Climacus was considering the three wise men from Matthew. The motto of *Fragments* is a paraphrase of a line from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The performance of the play staged at Copenhagen's Royal Theatre was titled *Hellig Tree Kongers Aften, eller: Hvad man vil* (Holy Three Kings' Eve, or: What you will), a clear allusion to the wise men. See William Shakespeare, *Hellig Tree Kongers Aften, eller: Hvad man vil*, trans. Adolphe Engelbert Boye (Copenhagen: 1829), in *Det Kongelige Theaters Repertoire*, vol. 1 of 6 (Copenhagen: 1828–1842), no. 22.

[149] *PF* 82-83 / *SKS* 4, 282.

Roberts', the case of the star involves my (purportedly undeceiving) sensation of an object that exists and then a belief that this object has had an origin in time. In the case of the stick, one would expect Roberts to say something similar: the immediately sensed object is the stick existing in the water before me (whether it appears bent or not), and the question of belief is about whether the stick had a temporal origin. But this would fail to account for the discontinuity between the immediate perception of the stick (through refracted light) and the stick independent of that perception, which is Climacus' rationale for the example in the first place. (Climacus offers the example to show why such a discontinuity does not imply a deception to immediate sensation). A reading such as mine captures this example better, wherein the analogy involves a relationship between, on the one hand, an immediate perception and *Tilblivelse*, and on the other hand, the immediately sensed stick-as-bent and the stick as it exists independently of my sensation but which is referred to in some way by that sensation. Therefore, the stick's coming-into-existence – or, that the stick has come into existence – refers to it being a distinct object independent of my sensation, but to which the sensation refers.

The Report

In another passage in the "Interlude," Climacus offers a complex but underdetermined comparison to explain the operation of belief to apprehend that something has occurred through a report about such an occurrence. (Though Climacus will move on to discuss reports attesting to the incarnation of god, this is not required by this passage, which equally pertains to ordinary occurrences.) I will quote the passage at length:

> The one who is not contemporary with the historical, he has, instead of sensation's and cognition's immediacy (which, however, cannot apprehend the historical), the contemporaries' report, to which he relates in the same way as the contemporaries to the immediacy; for even if what is told [*det Fortalte*] in the report [*Efterretningen*] has also

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undergone change [*Forandringen*], he cannot treat it [*den*] in such a way [*saaledes*] that he does not himself give it [*den*] assent and make it [*den*] historical without [*uden at*] transforming it [*den*] into the unhistorical [*Uhistoriske*] for himself. The report's immediacy, that is, that the report is there, is the immediate present [*Nærværende*], but what is historical about the present is that it has come into existence [*at det er blevet til*], and about the past is that it was a present by having come into existence [*at være blivet til*]. As soon as one who comes later [*den Senere*] believes the past (not its truth, for that is a matter of cognition, which involves essence and not being, but believes that it was something present by having come into existence [*at være blivet til*]), then coming-into-existence's [*Tilblivelsens*] uncertainty is in it, and this coming-into-existence's [*Tilblivelsens*] uncertainty (the nothingness of that which is not—the actual thus and so's [*Saaledes's*] possible how [*Hvorledes*]) must be for him the same as for the contemporary; his mind must be *in suspenso* just as the contemporary's. Then he no longer faces any immediacy, nor any necessity of coming into existence [*Tilblivelsens Nødvendighed*], but only the **thus and so** of *coming into existence* [Tilblivelsens **Saaledes**]. The one who comes later does indeed believe by virtue of [*i Kraft af*] the contemporary's declaration, but only in the same sense as the contemporary believes by virtue of immediate sensation and cognition, but the contemporary cannot believe by virtue of that, and thus the one who comes later cannot believe by virtue of the report.[150]

The fundamental relation in this passage is between, on the one hand, a contemporary witness's immediate sensation of an occurrence, and their belief that it has happened (the latter of which involves the occurrence's *Tilblivelse*, its historicity); and, on the other hand, the encounter of someone who comes later with a report about this supposed occurrence, and their belief that it has happened. At first glance, this appears to be an extremely confused analogy, whereby the report – though immediately sensing it would presumably result in a perception of, for example, ink in the shape of words on paper – is treated as immediately apprehended in the same way that the immediate sensations of a firsthand witness are immediate. Quite reasonably, Roberts denies the plausibility of such an analogy's structure based on the dissimilarity between believing something sensed and believing something based on another's report; in addition to a stark

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[150] *PF* 85 / *SKS* 4, 283-284. I have modified this translation by Hong and Hong. Note that *Nærværende*, which appears four times in this passage, is translated by the Hongs to reflect what is temporally "present." It can also mean a "presence," that is, what is present before consciousness. (Cf. p. 182n121 of the present work.)

difference between apprehending through sense and reading a report, there are fundamentally

different questions one asks about the reliability of such different kinds of evidence.[151]

But I contend that Climacus is not deploying an analogy *per se*. Rather, this passage

describes a relationship of containment or inclusion: the encounter with the occurrence vis-à-vis

the medium of a report at the same time *includes* a relationship like the one between the firsthand

witness and the immediate sensations of the occurrence. Put differently: it is not quite that the

one who comes later encounters a report through immediate sensation (such a person does, in a

sense, when their eyes move across the paper and ink of the page, but this is not what is at stake

here); it is rather that the report occasions an uncoerced sensation (that is, a sensation mediated

by what is described in the report) that itself serves as the occasion for believing that the

occurrence corresponding to what is described in the report has come into existence. How am I

finding this in the passage? The line reading "he has, instead of sensation's and cognition's

immediacy… the contemporaries' report, to which he relates in the same way as the

contemporaries to the immediacy" is suggestive of an analogy— contemporary : sensory

immediacy :: later one (*Senere*) : report. However, the next sentence is critical. (Beginning with

"for" (*thi*) after a semicolon – absent in the Hongs' translation – it is an explanatory qualification

of what comes before.) It starts with a clause hypothesizing that the account (*det Fortalte*) of the

report (*Efterretningen*) might include alteration (*Forandringen*) that separates the contents of the

report from the occurrence as it was experienced by firsthand witnesses— In effect, it asks, what

if the report is wrong, or if not false *per se*, includes or excludes details that do not reflect how it

was sensed immediately by those who were there? But even if there are alterations or corruptions

in the report, what does it mean for sensation, belief, and the historical?

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[151] Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 122.

The sentence is difficult to parse, containing three negative particles ('not,' 'not,' and 'without'), ambiguous pronouns, and the term 'unhistorical' (*Uhistoriske*), which appears nowhere else in the book. First, note that the pronoun that appears repeatedly (*den*) is of the *common* grammatical gender; it can refer to 'the report' (*Efterretningen*) or 'the change' (*Forandringen*) in the report, but not 'what is said' or 'told' (*det Fortalte*) in the report, which is of the *neuter* gender. Though it is not conclusive, it is more natural for each instance of *den* to have the same antecedent, and in this case, I suspect that *den* refers to 'the change,' which is the most proximate agreeable noun. Second, what sense can be made of *Uhistoriske*? The term (*uhistorisk*) appears only rarely in Kierkegaard's corpus. Here, I believe it implies a negated way of being historical, that is, a *not*-'thus and so.'[152] (Climacus writes earlier, "At the moment belief believes that it [an occurrence] has come into existence, that it has occurred, it makes dubious what has occurred and what has come into existence in the coming into existence and its 'thus and so' [*Saaledes*] in the possible how [*Hvorledes*] of coming into existence."[153] The "unhistorical" would correspond to "what has occurred" that is believed *not* to have occurred; what is "unhistorical" is the set of possible how's that are not among the actual 'thus and so,' the latter of which corresponds to the way what has come into existence has in fact done so.) In this sense, for something to be unhistorical, it is believed to be historically *counterfactual*. To "transform" something "into the unhistorical for oneself" would thus be to exercise belief that that thing is only among the *possible how* but not within history's actual 'thus and so.' Third, the negations— Though the sentence can be parsed in multiple ways, I read the clause beginning

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[152] Its greatest frequency is in the second part of *Either / Or*, where it appears as an adjective (*uhistorisk* or *uhistoriske*) five times in Wilhelm's first letter to A about the aesthetic validity of marriage. Each time it describes – in contrast to *historisk* – something infinitely *present* or perhaps *atemporal*, connoting the time-stopping grip of, for instance, one's first romantic love. See *EO2* 47, 94, 104, 106, 153 / *SKS* 3, 53, 97, 106, 107, 150. This is different from how I believe the term is deployed in *Fragments*.

[153] *PF* 84 / *SKS* 4, 282-283.

with 'without' as qualifying the clause governed by the verb 'treat' rather than the clause governed by the verbs 'give' and 'make.' In other words, I believe the sentence should read like this— "…he cannot treat it [the change] in such a way" – which 'in such a way' (*saaledes*) implies *not* giving "assent to it" and *not* "mak[ing] it historical" – "without" *first* "transforming it into the unhistorical [i.e., counterfactual]" *himself*.

From the above, I surmise that the purpose of the sentence is to emphasize the responsibility ("for himself") of the individual to exercise the power of ordinary belief to affirm something as historical by doubting (as "unhistorical") what has been incorrectly reported. (Keep in mind, this is just about a report of a historical occurrence *in general*, not only about the incarnation.) Which individual?: the one who encounters a report containing incomplete details or empirical contents that run contrary to the immediate sense perceptions of the occurrence's firsthand witness. (Indeed, this makes sense given Climacus' earlier insistence in the "Interlude" that some occurrence having happened, as articulated in the report, does not bestow upon it anything except *illusory* necessity; only a believer can bestow it with certitude volitionally.) What is within a report – even incorrect details, 'the change' (*Forandringen*) – must be actively assented to or doubted by the one who encounters the report. Critically, what is further implied is that the one who comes later must represent through a mediated sensation (which serves as an occasion for them to *believe* or *doubt*) that empirical elements of that sensation reflect a corresponding *Tilblivelse*. So when Climacus writes, "The report's immediacy, that is, that the report is there, is the immediate present," the notion "that the report is there" it is not to be understood as sensation, for example, of a document with writing on the desk before me, but rather that the report is occasioning another sensory immediacy (through some hermeneutical process of reading a report which, in *Fragments*, goes uninterrogated). When Climacus

continues, writing, "what is historical about the present is that it has come into existence, and about the past is that it was a present by having come into existence," this means that the sensation (based on the report) is itself present to the reader in the way (not accounting for any 'change,' which would have to be willfully believed or not) a firsthand witnessing of the occurrence involves immediate sensory presence. Climacus emphasizes this common element (for both the firsthand witness and the one who comes later) by aligning the *presence* (or representation) corresponding to what is presently historical with the *presence* (again, the representation) that was present for the past. In both cases (whether prompted by reading a report, or by being in the right place at the right time), there is contact with a sensation that provides an occasion for a willful leap to attain belief. (Climacus foreshadows this move in his example of the star: "For example, when the perceiver sees a star, the star becomes dubious for him the moment he seeks to become aware that it has come into existence. It is just as if *reflection removed the star from his senses*…") Therefore – and indeed, this is quite a bold claim by Climacus – both a firsthand witness and one who comes later have the same epistemic proximity (and distance) to *any occurrence* in question: "coming-into-existence's uncertainty… must be for him the same as for the contemporary; his mind must be *in suspenso* just as the contemporary's." And finally the conclusion, that no one believes "by virtue of" (*i Kraft af*) any report for the very reason that it is equivalent to having an immediate sensation, which also does not generate belief. Belief is instead generated, as I have already argued, volitionally.

To return to the task at hand— the example of the report does not render problematic the interpretation I have offered of sensation, its certainty, and its relationship to the historical or *Tilblivelse*. To believe that something has become, is becoming, or has come into existence

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always involves assent to the contingent existence of some thing outside me, or some independently existing series of things, to which my immediate sensation refers.

4. *Tro* as Belief, *Tro* as Faith

Now that we have a thorough understanding of what belief means, we are in a position to break open Climacus' next central distinction: belief versus faith. This distinction is made explicit in the appendix to the "Interlude." As I have mentioned, both belief and faith are signified by the word *Tro* (in the "ordinary" sense, in the "eminent" sense), and both involve apprehension of the historical, or *Tilblivelse*. Faith proves to be a power that functions similarly to belief, but which involves an enlargement of belief's scope to include the incarnation and presumably related spiritual things (for example, love for the neighbor).

At the beginning of the appendix (*Tillæg*) of the "Interlude," Climacus signals a transition from discussing *Tro* as it pertains to ordinary historical events, which in English is called 'belief,' and *Tro* in its Christian meaning (in English, 'faith'). In Danish, these are both signified by the single word *Tro* (and as a verb, *at tro*); hence Climacus' remark— he wants to be sure to distinguish the two. He writes, "What has been said here [thus far, about belief, the star, and the report] applies to the directly historical, whose contradiction [*Modsigelse*] is only that it has come into existence, whose contradiction is only that of coming into existence…"[154] The "directly historical" refers to ordinary facts and occurrences, for example, that Spinoza crafted lenses or that there is a cup of coffee on my desk. By the "contradiction… that it has come into existence," Climacus means to emphasize that the ontology of *Tilblivelse* involves incomplete participation (as an effect) in eternity (as a cause). That is, it requires a collision, or contradiction

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[154] *PF* 86 / *SKS* 4, 285.

(a 'speaking against' or *Modsigelse*) between the possible and the actual, in which it gains actuality through a cause that has being *in se*. Ordinary *Tro* (belief), perhaps surprisingly, is also described as a passion (*Lidenskab*): "Belief and doubt are… opposite passions."[155]

Climacus then signals his turn to discuss *Tro* as a specifically Christian concept: "We shall now return to our poem [about the god-teacher] and to our assumption that the god *has* been."[156] In contrast to the directly historical, the object of *Tro* in this "wholly eminent sense" (faith) is a special "historical fact (the content of our poem)."[157] This object "has a unique quality in that it is not a direct historical fact but a fact based upon a self-contradiction."[158] What is "a fact based upon a self-contradiction"? Direct historical facts are those things or occurrences that *could* receive a historical, empirical description (either by means of immediate sensation from my sense organs – such as the cup of coffee I sense before me – or a mediated perception occasioned by, for example, a biography I have read about Spinoza). But with regard to the latter – a fact based on a self-contradiction – Climacus is referring to the incarnation or paradox: the fact *that the god came into time*. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, it cannot be attested to in any empirical description. The self-contradiction resides in the idea of the god-in-time, and the presence of this idea signifies that the faith-condition has been offered to the individual through some occasion, even if they remain in offense.

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[155] *PF* 84 / *SKS* 4, 283. Also, in a footnote referring to Hegel's notion of contradiction, Climacus writes, "when something has come into existence, contradiction is once again present as the *nisus* [impulse] of wonder in the passion [*Lidenskab*] that reproduces the coming into existence (*PF* 86n / *SKS* 4, 285n). By the reproduction of coming into existence, Climacus is referring to ordinary *Tro* (belief) as a capacity of the subject to annul the unrealized possibilities that would negate the actual coming-into-existence in a historical belief.

[156] *PF* 86-87 / *SKS* 4, 285.

[157] *PF* 87 / *SKS* 4, 285.

[158] Ibid.

Common beliefs are empirical judgments about whether – and how – sensations and inferences based on those sensations reflect anything historical. Though faith also refers to something historical, it is neither an empirical judgment nor an inference based on one. Faith is an operation that grasps something contingent but non-empirical, namely *that incarnation has happened*, which involves the unexpected and incongruous temporality of an eternal being (thus, a contradiction in the idea itself, at least for merely human understanding).[159] Therefore, *Tro qua* faith is a power that works similarly to *Tro qua* belief, insofar as both passionately[160] recruit the will to eschew doubt about something historical, that is, something which has come into existence. But as I have shown, Climacus is also sure to distinguish the two. Though at the end of the book, Climacus calls it a "new organ," I propose from his description in the "Interlude," faith might plausibly be considered an enhancement of the capacity for belief, or a widening of its purview to include spiritual things, such as the incarnate God and love of neighbor.

Before continuing, it is worth flagging that the *Tilblivelse* corresponding to ordinary, finite things is somewhat different than the *Tilblivelse* that corresponds to the incarnate god. I have argued that in the case of ordinary things, *Tilblivelse* seems quite like Plato's conception of *gígnomai*; this reflects that ordinary things, even as they 'exist' in an ordinary sense, only do so in virtue of some higher cause. In other words, the temporal origin (through efficient causality) of ordinary things is coincident with their transition from possibility to actuality. But in the case of the incarnate god, there is no clear relationship of efficient causality or formal causality. To this extent, Climacus equivocates when he discusses the coming-into-existence of ordinary things, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the incarnate god. But there *is* something

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[159] See *PF* 87 / *SKS* 4, 285-286.

[160] Though as an "infinite passion," the passion of faith is infinitely greater than the passion of any ordinary belief. See, e.g., *CUP1* 326 / *SKS* 7, 297.

common to how both come into existence, which is critical to what I have argued about the relationship between *Tro* (belief and faith) and what is historical (that is, what has *come into existence*). Namely, in both cases, an origin in time is implied, but it speaks primarily to their accidental, non-necessary *presence* in history. With respect to faith (which is the more significant of the two), what is important about the point that the god entered time (that is, the world-historical origin of Christianity), is that it indicates the non-necessity of the god's salvific act. In this sense, Climacus' prolonged discussion of how the god has *come into existence* does refer to a temporal origin (though not to its details or particulars), but what is more crucial than the origin itself is that the for the subject, the world is presently, and non-necessarily, one in which god has entered time.

What of the anthropological or psychological dimension of *Tro*? Indeed, this is of critical importance— *what* is the follower supposed to *believe*, if anything, about direct historical facts when they have *faith* that the incarnation has occurred? Climacus has distinguished the two powers, yet the commonality of the single term *Tro* suggests they may not be easily separable. Climacus provides hints about this when describing the "fact based on a self-contradiction," that is, the object of *Tro* in its eminent sense (faith): "Yet it is a historical fact, and only for *Tro*. Here *Tro* is first taken in its direct and ordinary meaning [belief] as the relationship to the historical; but secondly, *Tro* must be taken in the wholly eminent sense [faith], such that this word can appear but once, that is, many times but in only one relationship."[161] Since the incarnation is historical, it must necessarily be grasped *at least* by *Tro* in the direct and ordinary sense (as belief). This implies that, for Christian *Tro* (faith), there must be some belief about a particular occurrence, even if this belief might be vague, indeterminate, or even counterfactual— Some

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[161] *PF* 87 / *SKS* 4, 285. I have deviated from the Hong edition, by leaving instances of *Tro* untranslated.

particular *thing* or *occurrence happened*. Insofar as this occurrence is believable (in the ordinary sense), I must be able to represent it to myself. But insofar as the individual is a follower, it is possible to grasp the referent of the belief as coordinated with the incarnation of the god, the latter of which I cannot represent to myself. This latter operation (by *Tro* in the eminent sense) can occur (or even recur) on top of ordinary beliefs as a kind of spiritual appendix (*Tillæg*); *Tro* in the eminent sense (faith) refers to "one relationship," but can do so multifariously atop referents of *Tro* in the ordinary sense (beliefs). Hence, every operation of *Tro* that would constitute faith at the same time involves an ordinary operation of *Tro* (belief); ordinary instances of *Tro* can happen without the eminent one – to this extent, *Tro qua* faith and *Tro qua* belief are distinct – but faith requires some belief to which it must laid atop (as a *Tillæg*).

> Shortly thereafter, Climacus develops this line of thought:

> So, then, that historical fact [that god has come into existence] remains. It has no immediate contemporary, because it is historical to the first power [*Potens*] (*Troen* in the ordinary sense [belief]); it has no immediate contemporary to the second power, since it is based on a contradiction (*Troen* in the eminent sense [faith]). But for those who are very different with respect to time, this latter equality absorbs the differences among those who are temporally different in the first sense. Every time the *Troende* [faithful one] makes this fact the object of *Troen*, makes it historical for himself, he repeats the dialectical qualifications of coming into existence.[162]

With respect to becoming a follower (or faithful one; *Troende*), there are two movements *Tro* must make: it assents to the historicity of an occurrence ("to the first power") and affirms ("to the second power") that that occurrence involves the incarnate god. This aligns completely with the passage I assessed previously. Climacus' purpose in this passage, though, is to remind his reader that the incarnation "has no immediate contemporary" for either sense of the word *Tro*. As with ordinary facts of history, the incarnation involves coming into existence and thus cannot be

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[162] *PF* 88 / *SKS* 4, 286. I have slightly modified the translation by Hong and Hong and also not translated the word *Tro*. The word *Potens* implies an exponential operator in mathematics (*ODS*).

immediately perceived or cognized. (One perceives what has come into existence, but never the transition or causation that makes it so.) But this is even more the case (*exponentially* so), given that it is based on a contradiction. "[T]his latter equality," that is, historicity to the "second power," "absorbs" all the differences of historicity in the "first sense." In other words, to have faith that the incarnation has occurred is an all-important, soteriologically salient feature of regenerated *Tro* (as faith) that overshadows the differences in belief that pertain to it as a historical occurrence "to the first power"— faith *that* incarnation has occurred trumps whether I believe, for example, Jesus of Nazareth really lived and taught precisely how my preferred version of the Gospels says (recall Climacus' remark: "So now we have the god walking around in the city in which he made his appearance (which one is inconsequential)"). It is in this moment that – even though Climacus requires that faith involves the god entering time as an empirically observable *particular* – the empirical particularities of incarnation are revealed to be soteriologically superfluous (and, as with all *becomings*, unperceivable).

But *how* unnecessary are the particular details? How much vagueness can be entertained in an ordinary operation of *Tro* (a belief) in which I have faith (*jeg troer*) that the incarnation has occurred? It seems that Climacus has argued that for *Tro*, any operation of faith must be concomitant with some belief: if I have faith that incarnation occurred, I cannot have this faith altogether abstractly, and thus I must at the same time imbue some ordinary historical occurrence with the non-sensory descriptor of incarnation. If so, then faith that incarnation occurred demands that I believe some descriptive determination (for example, that the god was Jesus) that applies to a human being who exists or existed, who is or was also the incarnate god. Tracing out this line of reasoning, *Tro* would perform three operations: On the assumption that Jesus was the incarnate god— I would have faith *that* incarnation is or was a historical fact, I would have an

ordinary empirical belief that Jesus lived (or maybe lives), and *Tro* would coordinate these two operations to affirm *that* the incarnate god *is* and *was* Jesus. The last of these three would involve assigning the particular, empirically descriptive content of the *belief* (that Jesus, who was such and such a human being, existed) to the incarnation; since doing so involves the "self-contradiction" of incarnation, I imagine that it is a task only *Tro*, regenerated by the condition, performs.

But Climacus never explicitly argues that for eminent *Tro*, *any particular* operation by ordinary *Tro* (belief) is required. He does, however, make quite clear that the incarnate god must have been a *human teacher*, however, and this does imply that there are some limitations on what ordinary *Tro* can affirm for eminent *Tro*. (Later, in the thesis's conclusion, I ask what it might mean for Kierkegaard's conception of faith if we recognize these limitations as *ad hoc*, based on non-essential, inherited elements of Christian tradition.) In other words, it may indeed be possible for an individual to become a follower while having no particular ordinary beliefs that assign empirical descriptions (when, where, or how) to the occurrence of incarnation, except that it was *some human teacher*. If this is the case, then coordinating some particular belief attaching historical descriptions of the empirical details of the incarnation (even that it was Jesus) to faith that incarnation has happened, is a possible way of becoming a follower. But there can be no certainty, as I have shown, that the incarnation really coincided with the empirical assertions so described; moreover, it is inessential for salvation that incarnation coincide with one particular description and not others. Put bluntly: Climacus' Christianity does not require believing that Jesus was the Christ, or that Jesus even existed, or that any other particular candidate human being was the Christ (though it does require that *some* particular human being was the Christ, even if only vaguely determined). The incarnation is indeed necessarily particular, necessarily

historical, but this historicity *cannot be* thoroughly determined in the way other historical

occurrences are (that is, empirically), and *need not be* described with regard to those particulars

at all. A follower beholds a particular thing, but not necessarily any of the particular particulars

that were (actual) accidents of that thing. (The Christ does need to be described functionally,

however, with regard to their soteriological role.) I have demonstrated that, for belief (ordinary

Tro), a sensation serves as the basis on which one *believes* (or not) that a corresponding thing has

come into existence. But this basis is unnecessary for *faith* (eminent *Tro*); instead, what is

necessary for faith is the *condition*, which involves the paradox.[163] This is the sole criterion, and

faith (eminent *Tro*) does not *depend on* any empirical data. In the case of an individual

encountering a report, what occasions belief that the occurrences depicted in the report (with

more, or with less accuracy) transpired is some sensation mediated by what is depicted in the

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[163] As a further thought-experiment, it could be investigated whether, on Climacus' account, a non-sensory being – without the capacity to apprehend or imagine *any* sensory details or descriptors – could have faith (*Tro*, eminently) that the incarnation has happened. (This is in the spirit of Climacus' "algebraic[]" project, wherein the limits and essential aspects of phenomena are highlighted for their pedagogical usefulness. See *PF* 91 / *SKS* 4, 288.) If such a being had been granted the condition through some means, it strikes me as possible for them to become a follower. Assuming they can consider, even partially, the idea of the incarnation, the paradox gestured to by this idea could be sufficient to serve as the occasion. Or on the other hand, could a regular human being in the far future – at which point the idea of the incarnation is common but with no remaining references to the personage of Jesus, the history of Christianity's foundation, or even any lingering notions of traditional Christian practice or dogma – have faith? Based on Climacus' account, I see no reason why not.

An objection to my interpretation is this: Are there not some broad and general, seemingly ordinary *beliefs* which are necessary prerequisites for eminent *Tro* (faith)? For example: believing that human beings exist or believing that the world exists. How can I have faith that God incarnated if I do not believe that at least one human being exists? I suspect that, were this question put to Climacus, his answer would be to appeal to the structure of the thought-experiment: "as soon as we assume the moment, everything goes by itself" (*PF* 51 / *SKS* 4, 255). In other words, on the hypothesis that the human subject desires salvation (*Salighed*) through and despite time, several existence claims readily follow by virtue of necessitated background theories, including that at least one human being exists, and that there are preconditions (including the world) of that human being's existence. To the extent that these are part of the Christian hypothesis, they are all attached to the faith commitment about the incarnation, much as beliefs about God and the soul are attached as practical postulates to Kant's resolution of the antinomy of practical reason. (See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 246ff / AA 5:132ff.) One might also locate a plausible response in the theology of Karl Barth, who insists that no common-sense or empirically generated notion of even the existence of the world can contribute to faith in, for example, the content of Gen 1. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.1: The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, & H. Knight, eds. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 8-10 (§40).

report, to which one may assent (believe) or not. But to the extent that the report is a matter for faith, none of these details are relevant, as long as the condition is delivered by means of it.

E. Toward a Resolution to the Faith/History Problem

It is now time to muster the developments of the last three sections to respond to Climacus' critics. The three developments are: first, that the offer of the condition and the decision to become a follower do not necessarily happen all at once; second, that the dispensation of the condition does not imply that an occasion corresponding to its first subjective or world-historical encounter can be identified and empirically described; and third, that becoming a follower does not require accurately coordinating the incarnation with any specific, required beliefs beyond the paradox itself. When considering these developments, we can immediately dismiss some of the concerns of Climacus' critics about the faith/history problem. Given my observations from earlier in this chapter, I also want to return to elements of Levine's and Ferreira's interpretations that each of them had dismissed as irreconcilable with Climacus' agenda. These elements are Levine's suspicion that only the *idea* of incarnation, not the incarnation itself, is necessary for faith, and Ferreira's assertion of a so-called '*a priori* proof' of incarnation in *Fragments*. In this section, it will become clear how the tension between faith and history in *Fragments* can find some resolution, though a fuller explanation and defense of my use of the 'proof' will wait until the next chapter.

As I noted earlier, Pojman has a dual concern about the evidence requirement. (The evidence requirement is that faith should be possible independently of all historical evidence that the incarnation has occurred. The event requirement, on the other hand, is that the god has actually incarnated.) When considering a report containing a description presumed to correspond

to the incarnation, Pojman asks whether a bare report such as Climacus' "world-historical *nota bene*" could contain sufficient conceptual content to communicate the paradox involved in incarnation ("What does the name 'God' stand for here?"). He also asks whether a disproof of the historical report's contents ("a proof that Jesus never lived") would not also compromise the possibility of faith.[164] In the first case, Pojman's criticism is that by taking the evidence requirement seriously, Climacus allows insufficiently reliable reports (such as the *nota bene*) to be viable for occasioning the delivery of the condition. If such reports fail to communicate that *paradox* is involved in the occurrence that initiated a causal sequence leading to the authorship of the report, then the condition may not be delivered. In the second case, Pojman's concern is that a failure of the report to *refer* accurately to a description of the empirical particulars corresponding to the occurrence that caused the report would defeat belief that it occurred.

To the first of Pojman's concerns— On my interpretation the individual does not need to be able to point to the *nota bene*, for indeed no report could through the details it recounts (or the sensory manifold it prompts) show with certainty that the incarnation happened, no matter how thorough the description. Climacus does not require that any occasion for the condition's delivery be recognizable *as that occasion* by the individual. It seems Pojman treats a report as though it is an occasion for the god to communicate the condition *because* of the report's reference (through a description) to the empirical details of a human being who was also (invisibly) the god. But even the firsthand experience of such a human being, in all of its glory

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[164] Another line of defense for Climacus against Pojman, which I do not pursue further, would be to remind Pojman that any historical proof that Jesus never lived would also require assent by the will (in the exercise of belief). (Here I invoke my interpretation of the discussion of the report in the "Interlude.") In other words, a belief that Jesus existed and a belief in the facticity of some historical scenario that precludes Jesus' existence are each a matter of probability; there is no such thing as a *proof*, which could deliver certainty, that some non-self-contradictory occurrence *never happened*. All *beliefs* are on the same playing field, and none is sufficient for guaranteeing or precluding faith. If, in such a scenario, Jesus is presumed to be the *only* candidate Christ, this would also involve the doubter's *offense*.

before a firsthand witness, was itself only ever at best an occasion and never the condition

itself— in short, Jesus *qua* Jesus could never be the condition, only an occasion for the fact of

incarnation. This means that should a report not contain appropriate detail to communicate the

paradox to a reader, then it simply was not the occasion by means of which an individual

receives the condition. That is, it would not be the moment. And to the second— Climacus never

requires of faith (*Tro*, eminently) that the individual believe the incarnation occurred in or as the

correct historical particulars in which it actually occurred (such as, for example, in the person of

Jesus), nor is it certain even whether Climacus thinks it is subjectively necessary for the

individual to believe that *any thoroughly determined description* corresponds to the incarnation.

So, says Climacus, let the reports be found wrong![165]

My response to claims by Evans and Ferreira aligns with my rejoinder to Pojman. Evans'

piece repeatedly presumes that Climacus' conception of faith (*Tro*, eminently) requires that one

"believe that Jesus Christ lived and died for me as the Son of God," and that this faith emerges as

the result of a "firsthand encounter with Jesus Christ."[166] When Evans mentions a "firsthand

encounter" with the incarnation, he is right to recognize that the receipt of the condition always

requires the individual – by means of some occasion – to be directly transformed by the incarnate

god (Christ). However, by identifying the encounter as one with "*Jesus* Christ," and by loading

into faith the content about "*Jesus* Christ" living and dying, Evans fails to recognize how

Climacus has defamiliarized the doctrinal Christian description of Christ in or as Jesus. As with

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[165] Hence, Climacus writes, "It is at once apparent here that the historical in the more concrete sense is inconsequential; we can let ignorance step in here, let ignorance, so to speak, destroy one fact after the other, let it historically demolish the historical—if only the moment still remains as the point of departure for the eternal, the paradox is still present" (*PF* 59 / *SKS* 4, 262).

[166] Pojman acknowledges that for Climacus, Jesus may not be the incarnate god, but he implies that the report must refer to whomever was the incarnate god: "It need not be Jesus of Nazareth that one believes in. All that is needed to get faith off the ground is for some group of people to assert that they have believed that one of their contemporaries is God and to leave a testimony for others to believe" (Pojman, "Kierkegaard on Faith and History," 59).

Pojman, Evans treats the incarnation as an occurrence with a particular empirical description (one involving the person Jesus of Nazareth) that seems to be essential to communicating an occasion adequate for the dispensation of the condition, and hence is required to be *believed* alongside the commitment of faith.[167]

In Ferreira's case, the remark that "the possibility of faith requires a characterizable historical event" contains the whole of what I have attempted to refute about Climacus' account of faith and incarnation. Faith (eminent *Tro*) indeed requires a historical occurrence insofar as the incarnation is a coming-into-existence, but it does not require that I make a (or *the*) empirical aspects of the historical occurrence the substance of faith, nor that I thoroughly differentiate the occurrence from others by descriptions of its empirical particulars.[168] Faith (*Tro*, eminently) must coordinate with some belief (ordinary *Tro*), but no amount of accuracy, or precise determination (beyond the incarnate god being a human teacher) is necessary for this coordination. (The incarnation *must*, however, be thoroughly distinguished *non-empirically* from occurrences that do not involve divine incarnation or paradox. But this would be what Climacus calls "a matter for cognition, which involves essence," like, for example, distinguishing *a priori* the idea of a bachelor from that of a married man, or perhaps a more pertinent comparison, a round circle from a round square. It is not what Ferreira has in mind by characterization of a historical event, and no degree of thoroughness for an empirical description can deliver certainty about whether the occurrence is or is not the incarnation.)

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[167] Roberts demonstrates this tendency as well, titling a section of his chapter about the "Interlude," "Recognizing Jesus" (Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 123f). He goes on to frame the "grammar of 'faith'" as "the historical judgment that the man Jesus, from Nazareth, is the son of God and the lamb of God" (ibid., 124).

[168] Ferreira's conception of historical belief – that it requires the believer to be able to differentiate the referent of that belief from other candidates, by means of empirical descriptions – is more limited than Climacus'.

Levine, on the other hand, is not focused on the evidence requirement but rather the event requirement. Arguing that the incarnation is posited (as the event requirement) *ad hoc*, Levine thinks Climacus should have entirely jettisoned the incarnation's facticity from *Fragments*, relying instead merely on the *idea* of incarnation (which sufficiently implies paradox). Insofar as the event requirement is excised and the idea of incarnation is alone necessary and sufficient, Pojman's, Evans', and Ferreira's concerns about how a report might refer (or not) to a historical occurrence with a particular empirical description (and thus occasion the condition originally delivered in that occurrence) immediately dissolve, since the condition is already *in mente*. On this point, I believe Levine is *almost* correct about how Climacus wants his project to be understood, except he makes crucial errors when presuming the sufficiency of the idea as such, and when claiming, "Certainly the appearance of the God is not necessary for the appearance of the proposition [that the god has incarnated]." Climacus, however, explicitly suggests the contrary, for – as Ferreira highlights with reference to Climacus' '*a priori* proof' of the incarnation – he claims at least three times in *Fragments* that the idea of the incarnation ("the proposition") could *not* "arise in the human heart." (Recall also that Ferreira dismisses this 'proof' as antithetical to Climacus' and Kierkegaard's broader refusal to admit cognitive proofs as sufficient for, or productive of faith.) While Levine's remark about the logical non-necessity of the incarnation in the occurrence of the idea has an intuitive plausibility – that is, it certainly seems that, unaided, I could invent the idea of the god's incarnation and so provide *all by myself* an occasion through which to encounter the condition[169] – such an intuition (channeled by Levine) could already be shaped by the condition. As I have shown, there is no way to identify with certainty the occasion through which an individual subjectively received the condition, nor

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[169] Moreover, a deeper awareness of non-Christian religious traditions (than Kierkegaard had) shows quite handily that ideas of this sort are not uncommon.

is it possible to determine they have *not* received it. Thus, Levine cannot prove that his ability to invent the idea of incarnation is not already aided by God.

This is a crucial juncture. As I have foreshadowed, the solution to the faith/history problem lies, on the one hand, in embracing Climacus' '*a priori* proof' to anchor the event requirement. (On Ferreira's articulation of it, the 'proof' argues: the idea of the incarnation must have come from the incarnate god; you and I have an idea of the incarnation; therefore the god incarnated.) The next chapter will dig into why this is a fitting exegetical and argumentative move for Climacus. On the other hand, observation of the various disjunctions in the movement of faith, which I have drawn attention to throughout this chapter, renders the evidence requirement commensurable with the event requirement. These disjunctions accomplish this, first, by demonstrating that the chains of causality and reference supposedly required of a report (an occasion by means of which the condition is delivered) are even thinner than Climacus' critics presume. That is to say, even Climacus' discussion of the meager "world-historical *nota bene*," – "We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died" – contains, by way of his use of it as a figurative example, content that is *thicker* and *more specific* than Climacus needs. (The relevant point of the *nota bene* is simply that the paradoxical idea of incarnation must have been introduced into the world by the world-historical incarnation at whatever time it occurred, and must have been encountered by the individual subject by means of some occasion, however that happened.[170]) And second, the insight that faith (eminent *Tro*) does not need to involve belief (ordinary *Tro*) that the incarnation coincides with specific empirical details, makes clear that faith pays no heed to the missing details of a report, even to their falsity.

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[170] See again *PF* 104 / *SKS* 4, 301: "*By means of* [formedelst] the contemporary's report (the occasion), the person who comes later believes by virtue of [*i Kraft af*] the condition he himself receives from the god."

My answer to Climacus' critics can thus be summarized in this way: Levine's claim that only the *idea* of incarnation is important, not the occurrence itself, pushes in the right direction—but with the caveat that Climacus' '*a priori* proof' really is a serious attempt to establish the incarnation's facticity as an ontological precondition of *having the idea* of incarnation. This means that, if I have the idea of the incarnation, the world-historical precondition for my subjective encounter with the god-teacher has been met. Soteriologically, the ability (or inability, as Climacus' critics worry) to tell a story about the characterizable historical details corresponding to the incarnation or *how* they occasioned the delivery of the condition to me, does not matter; the origin of the idea of incarnation (the paradox) in history is impossible to ascertain, and guessing is not a requirement for becoming a disciple. It is fair to say that, on this interpretation, I *concede* to Pojman and Ferreira that it remains dubious to connect any description in a report (even one as thin as the *nota bene*) to any historical occurrence (even the incarnation abstracted from its empirical details). But if the incarnation is sufficient for faith (and the idea of the incarnation attests to the incarnation), then the so-called pragmatic contradiction of the faith/history problem has been obviated.

The error each has made perhaps resides in an anxiety about determining what sort of empirical description of incarnation would suffice as an occasion to deliver the condition. What sort of empirical features of an occurrence could properly prompt the delivery of the condition without those details being the basis? And hence also, what sort of shape – what description in empirical details or in inferences from these details – constitutes something I can worship? These are fundamentally not Climacus' questions, and the faith/history problem thus finds resolution for Climacus in a combination of intentional vagueness and the 'a priori proof.'

CHAPTER IV.
"THE WONDER": WHOSE HEART IS THE HUMAN HEART?

> But we have the mind of Christ.[1]

The supposed '*a priori* proof' is the central issue of this chapter. In the first section, my goal is to explain, and provide context for, the passages from which Ferreira draws out the 'proof.' What I conclude is that the 'proof' is – far from being a mere oddity of Climacus' reasoning, as Ferreira suggests – a keystone for understanding Kierkegaard's objectives in *Fragments*. But the purpose of the 'proof' is not precisely to demonstrate to the reader that incarnation of the god-person has occurred as an objective fact. Instead, in the context of *Fragments*, it is to convince the reader that by entertaining the book's thought-experiment, they demonstrate to themselves that they are a certain type of subject, namely a citizen of Christendom who has encountered the paradox, rather than pre-Christian 'pagan' or Socratic. Because, on my reading, Climacus does not invoke the 'proof' to *prove* anything, we should follow Climacus in referring to it as the "Wonder" (*Vidunder*).[2] The *wonder* does not aim to compel a reader to any intellectual or empirical conclusion about the incarnation, but rather reframes the most significant parts of Climacus' Christology to show how understanding them implies a non-necessary anthropological truth, that the human being has certain capacities that go beyond what would be expected if they were a 'pagan' subject in a world ordered according to 'Paganism.' In the terminology of my thesis— the *wonder* reveals *Fragments*' thought-experiment to deploy the structure of the mechane.

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[1] 1 Cor 2:16 (*NRSV* / *NT*-1819).

[2] *PF* 36 / *SKS* 4, 242. The Hongs translate *Vidunder* and its variations into their English cognate 'wonder,' but it could also be translated as 'miracle.' Elsewhere in *Fragments*, Climacus uses a different phrase – *gjør Miraklet* ('make miracles') – in a way that discounts miracles as unworthy of the incarnate god (*PF* 33 / *SKS* 4, 239). And elsewhere in his corpus, Kierkegaard seems to use the term *Vidunder* also to connote 'miracle' (e.g., *FT* 18-19 / *SKS* 4, 115). I believe that *Vidunder*, for Kierkegaard, signifies a non-sensory miracle worthy of the incarnate god.

In the second section, I untangle the implications of my observations about *Fragments* for the two Kierkegaardian threads I identified in the thesis' introduction: the structure of the mechane, which can now be more thoroughly determined, and the axiom hanging the goodness of a person's life solely on their own (*individual*) responsibility. I close by showing how these elements relate to one another, and I locate evidence that Kierkegaard remained consistently committed to the mechane and the axiom throughout his authorship.

A. "It could not have arisen in the human heart"

> Anselm says, 'I will prove God's existence. To this end, I bid God to strengthen and help me'—But this is, of course, a much better proof for God's existence: that it is so evident that one must have God help prove it; if one could, without God's help, prove His existence, it would be, as it were, less evident that He exists.[3]

> [I]t is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?'[4]

Can the way a thinking being is organized determine what sorts of ideas it can and cannot have? Can it determine what sorts of ideas it can *invent*? What would it even mean to *invent* an idea? Has anyone ever invented *any* idea? Or have we all simply cobbled together the scraps, crumbs, and fragments of non-ideas to form more complex non-ideas that only resemble new ideas?

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[3] From an 1851 journal entry by Kierkegaard titled "Anselm – Modernity." *KJN* 8, 302 / *SKS* 24, 301; NB23:203 (my translation). Kierkegaard's paraphrase does not quite capture Anselm's project in the *Proslogion*, but for my purposes, this does not matter. Kierkegaard also abbreviates "Anselm" as "A.," which I have not expressed above.

[4] D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [1971]), 17.

Finally, can analysis of an idea permit a determination of what sort of being could invent it, and what sort of being could not?

These questions are at the heart of Climacus' description of the *wonder*. There are three major passages where it occurs in *Fragments*, which, for context, I will quote at length. The first comes at the end of the book's first chapter. Climacus has just imagined an interlocutor who accuses him of plagiarism in his construction of the (as yet unnamed) Christian position.[5] In response, Climacus does not claim sole ownership of his project, but says instead,

> Now I am going to be so courteous as to assume that you are the one who has invented [*opfundet*] my project—more courtesy you cannot expect. Or, if you deny this, will you then also deny that anyone [*Nogen*] has invented it, that is, any [*noget*] human being [*Menneske*]? In that case, I am just as close to having invented it as any other human being [*Menneske*]. Therefore you are not angry with me because I falsely attribute to myself something that belongs to another human being, but you are angry with me because I falsely attribute to myself something that belongs to no human being, and you are just as angry when I mendaciously want to attribute the invention to you. Is it not curious that something like this exists, about which everyone who knows [*veed*] it also knows that he has not invented it, and that this 'Go to the next house [*Huus-forbi*]' does not halt and cannot be halted, even if one were to go to every human being [*alle Mennesker*]? Yet this oddity enthralls me exceedingly, for it tests the hypothesis' correctness [*Rigtighed*] and demonstrates [or, proves; *beviser*] it.[6]

The second passage occurs at the end of the second chapter, where Climacus responds to an imagined interlocutor charging him with plagiarism. He proposes that, should he ask each human being whether they have themselves invented his (Christian) project – only to find that not one of them could claim credit – it would imply that all people are equidistant from having invented it, yet none of them has done so.[7] Perhaps it is not a *human* (*menneskeligt*) invention. This is where Climacus dubs this facet of the idea of the incarnation the "wonder" (*Vidunder*).

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[5] *PF* 21 / *SKS* 4, 229.

[6] *PF* 21-22 / *SKS* 4, 230. I have slightly modified the Hongs' version, translating *Nogen* and *noget* as 'anyone' and 'any' rather than 'someone' and 'some.' The verb *at bevise* can mean 'to demonstrate' or 'to prove.'

[7] *PF* 35 / *SKS* 4, 241.

Presumably it could occur to the human being [*falde Mennesket ind*] to poetize [*digte*] himself in the likeness of the god or the god in the likeness of himself, but not to poetize that the god poetized himself in the likeness of the human being [*Mennesket*], for if the god gave no indication [*thi dersom Guden Intet lod sig mærke med*], how could it occur to a human being [*Mennesket*] that the blessed god could need him? This would indeed be the worst of thoughts or, rather, so bad a thought that it could not arise [*opkomme*] in him [1 Cor 2:9], even though, when the god has confided it to him, he adoringly says: This thought did not arise [*opkom*] in my heart [1 Cor 2:9] —and finds it to be the most wondrously beautiful [*vidunderlig-skjønneste*] thought. Is not the whole thing wondrous, does not this word come to my lips as a felicitously foreshadowing word, for do we not, as I in fact said and you yourself involuntarily say, stand here before *the wonder* [Vidunderet]. And since we both are now standing before this wonder, whose solemn silence cannot be disturbed by human wrangling about what is mine and what is yours, whose awe-inspiring words infinitely drown out human quarreling about mine and thine, forgive me my curious mistaken notion of having composed it myself. It was a mistaken notion, and the poem [*Digtet*] was so different from every human [*menneskeligt*] poem that it was no poem at all but *the wonder* [Vidunderet].[8]

The final passage is near the very end of *Fragments*. It is part of a long, concluding conversation

with the same imagined interlocutor:

> As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that despite the historical—indeed, precisely by means of the historical—has wanted to be, for the single individual, point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than merely historically, has wanted to base his happiness [*Salighed*] on his relation to something historical. No philosophy (for it is only for thought), no mythology (for it is only for the imagination), no historical knowledge [*Viden*] (which is for memory) has ever had this idea [*Indfald*]—of which in this connection one can say with all multiple meanings that it did not arise in any human heart [1 Cor 2:9]. To a certain extent, however, I have wanted to forget this, and, employing the unrestricted judgment of a hypothesis, I have assumed that the whole thing was a whimsical idea [*Indfald*] of my own, one that I did not wish to abandon before I had thought it through.[9]

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[8] *PF* 36 / *SKS* 4, 241-242. I have modified the Hongs' translation slightly. They translate the first two instances of *Mennesket* in this passage as "a human being," rather than "the human being." The verb *at digte*, which the Hongs translate as 'poeticize,' also means to create, narrate, orate, or generate a colorful account of something. I find the term 'poetize' awkward, but I have no preferable alternative to suggest. As a noun (*Digt*), it indeed means 'poem,' but could also refer to other genres of creative linguistic production.

[9] *PF* 109 / *SKS* 4, 305. I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation.

In each of these passages, the scaffolding of the Christian position (including the moment, incarnation, the god's selfless love, and faith) is stated as involving ideas that are incompatible with an origin in the human mind, or "human heart."[10]

In the first of the three, Climacus frames the problem as one of locating a first human author of the paradox, or paradoxical ideas. Effectively, this is a mini-thought-experiment, where the answer is presumed to be that no such originator could be found ("Go to the next house") because everyone encountered already has the idea yet knows they received it from elsewhere. This is not because simply no one happens to know who the author is, nor is it because historical evidence of the author has been lost; it is because (presumably) there is no ultimate human inventor of the idea. And if there is no human inventor, the inventor must be divine; God has revealed a divine idea through the dispensation of the condition for salvation. Assuming

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[10] Formulations similar to those in these three passages, which also allude to the *NT-1819* translation of 1 Cor 2:9, occur in several locations in Kierkegaard's draft manuscripts of *Fragments*. At least one was to appear in the first chapter, at approximately *PF* 21-22 / *SKS* 4, 230, where in the published version there is no allusion to 1 Cor 2:9: "…[It] did not arise [*opkommet*] in any human [*Mskes*] heart—for it is still too much to demand of a human being [*Msk.*] that he must discover that he does not exist—and did not occur before year 1" (*PF*, "Supplement," 188 / *Pap.* V B 3:14, 58; *PS* ms.4).

    Within *Fragments*, I have also identified two other passages that reflect similar themes and contain similar rhetoric. The first is in a standalone paragraph that precedes the first of the three major passages above. In it, Climacus analogizes the Christian position to the ideas of being born, and being reborn:

> But is what has been elaborated here [that is, the Christian position] thinkable? […] Before we answer, we shall ask who ought to answer the question. The matter of being born—is it thinkable? Well, why not? But who is supposed to think it—one who is born or one who is not born? The latter, of course, is unreasonable and cannot occur [*heller ei kan være falden… ind*] to anyone, for this notion certainly cannot occur [*ikke faae… Indfald*] to one who is born. When one who is born thinks of himself as born, he of course is thinking of this transition from "not to be" to "to be." The situation must be the same with rebirth. […] But who, then, is supposed to think this? It must, of course, be one who is reborn, for it would be unreasonable to think that one who is not reborn should do it, and would it not be ludicrous if this were to occur [*faae dette Indfald*] to one who is not reborn?" (*PF* 20 / *SKS* 4, 228)

In the second passage, Climacus writes, "Someone may now be saying, 'I know full well that you are a capricemonger, but you certainly do not believe that it would occur to me [*skulde falde mig ind*] to be concerned about a caprice so curious or so ludicrous that it probably has never occurred [*er falden… ind*] to anyone and, above all, is so unreasonable that I would have to lock everything out of my consciousness in order to come up with it [*hitte derpaa*]'" (*PF* 46 / *SKS* 4, 251; I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation). Both passages reinforce – as I will discuss in the body – the theme of an idea or notion (an *Indfald*) occurring to someone (that is, *at falde ind*).

someone really does have the divine idea, this "tests the correctness of the [Christian] hypothesis and demonstrates [or, proves; *beviser*] it."

In the second passage, Climacus examines the *content* of the idea, which takes the shape of one of his paradoxical formulations of Christianity's core message: the idea "that the blessed god could need" the human being. Climacus imagines a poem (*Digt*), which – by narrating some account of the incarnation – is differentiable from any possible (merely) human poem.[11] The presence or absence of the idea would attest to the poem's source, for there is a chasm between the nature of the human being and the conditions from which the idea of incarnation could originate. Such a poem could not "occur" (*falde… ind*) to the human being. Not remarked on by Ferreira, Climacus alludes to the *NT-1819* translation of 1 Cor 2:9, establishing an association between this verse and the purposes of the *wonder*.[12]

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[11] Here, one begins to ask whether a 'report' about a historical incarnation was ever the best type of occasion to dispense the condition— more significant is the presence of the *idea* of incarnation, or divine love, in any work, something presumably assessable better through literary criticism than through historical Biblical criticism. It is probably for these reasons, not the mere inclusion of Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, that Climacus would credit the New Testament with its significance.

[12] Kierkegaard refers to this passage throughout his authorship, almost always to signal the structure (of the mechane) which I characterize in this chapter. For just a few examples, see *CUP1* 104, 580 / *SKS* 7, 102, 527; *EUD* 97, 263 / 5, 102, 259; *SLW* 201 / *SKS* 6, 189; *WL* 25, 27 / *SKS* 9, 32, 34; *SUD* 84 / *SKS* 11, 197; and *PC* 51 / *SKS* 12, 64. In the context of *Works of Love*, this will be touched on again in Chapter VI. The pericope in its entirety comprises 1 Cor 2:6-16. As it appears in *NT-1819*, it reads:

> But we speak wisdom among those who are complete; though not this world's wisdom, nor that of this world's rulers, which shall be put to shame; but we speak God's wisdom – secretive, that which was hidden – which God arranged before the foundation of the world, for our glory; which none of the world's rulers know; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the glorious Lord; but, as is written— what no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and which has not arisen in any human's heart, God has prepared for those who love Him. But God revealed this to us by means of God's spirit; for the spirit searches through all things, including God's depths. Which human being knows what is inside the human being, without the human being's spirit, which is in him? So also no one knows what is in God without God's Spirit. And we have not received the world's spirit, but the spirit, which is of God, on which basis we can know what has been bestowed on us by God; these things we also speak, not with words that human wisdom teaches, but with words that the Holy Spirit teaches, in that we interpret spiritual things with spiritual words. But the sensuous human being does not grasp these things, which belong to God's spirit, for they are to him a deficiency, and he cannot know them, for they are judged spiritually. But the spiritual one indeed judges all things, yet he is judged by no one— For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he could instruct him?— but we have the mind of Christ. [Men Viisdom tale vi iblandt de Fuldkomne; dog ikke denne Verdens Viisdom, ikke heller denne Verdens Øversters, hvilke skulle beskæmmes; men vi tale Guds

In the third passage, Climacus combines the modes of argument from the two preceding passages. He flags the content of the idea (*Indfald*) with a reference to 1 Cor 2:9 (as in the second of the three passages), while at the same time placing several candidates – philosophy, mythology, history – within the mini-thought-experiment he posed in the first passage. One imagines knocking on each door but being yelled at from inside, 'Go to the next house.' Here, however, one arrives at a final destination: Christianity. Christianity – as a historical tradition – certainly seems, as Climacus hints, to look quite a bit like the Christian position developed in *Fragments*. This position was defined as the scaffolding that enables the moment, a *necessarily* historical (thus non-necessary) point of departure for eternal happiness, which requires the delivery of the condition (and so also the key network of Christian ideas) by the god.

Viisdom, den hemmelighedsfulde, den, som var skiult, hvilken Gud haver forud beskikket før Verdens Begyndelse, til vor Herlighed; hvilken Ingen af denne Verdens Øverster kiendte; thi havde de kiendt den, havde de ikke korsfæstet Herlighedens Herre; men, som skrevet er, hvad intet Øie har seet, og intet Øre har hørt, og ikke er opkommet i noget Menneskes Hierte, hvad Gud haver beredt dem, som ham elske. Men os aabenbarede Gud det formedelst sin Aand; thi Aanden randsager alle Ting, ogsaa Guds Dybheder. Hvilket Menneske veed det, der er i Mennesket, uden Menneskets Aand, som er i ham? Saa veed og Ingen det, som er i Gud, uden Guds Aand. Og vi have ikke annammet Verdens Aand, men den Aand, som er af Gud, paa det vi kunne kiende, hvad der er os skienket af Gud. hvilket vi og tale, ikke med Ord, som menneskelig Viisdom lærer, men med Ord, som den Hellig Aand lærer, i det vi tolke aandelige Ting med aandelige Ord. Men det sandselige Menneske fatter ikke de Ting, som høre Guds Aand til, thi de ere ham en Daarlighed, og han kan ikke kiende dem, thi de dømmes aandeligen. Men den Aandelige dømmer vel alle Ting, selv derimod dømmes han af Ingen. Thi hvo haver kiendt Herrens Sind, at han kunde undervise ham? men vi have Christi Sind.]

The quote by Paul paraphrased by Climacus – "what no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and which has not arisen in any human's heart, God has prepared for those who love Him" – itself has an ambiguous origin. The interline notes in *NT-1819* suggest Isa 64:3 in *GT-1740*, which corresponds to Isa 64:4 in *NRSV*. There has always been doubt about Paul's source; Origen, Ambrosiaster, and Euthalius all suggest the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Elijah* (*NRSV*, 2039n), but presumably this part of the text has been lost. The *GT-1740* version of Isa 63:19-64:3 reads as follows: "Would that you sunder the heavens! [Would that] you come down! that the mountains could quake at your face. Just as fire ignites kindling, just as fire brings water to boil, in order to let your enemies know your name; and thereby let the nations tremble at your face. You did wonderful things, which we did not expect; you descended, mountains quaked for your face. And since old times, they did not hear this, they did not grasp it with their ears; no eye has seen one besides You – O God! – that He shall work through the one, who waits for Him" (redactions in *GT-1740*). In Danish: "…gid du vilde sønderrive Himlene! [gid] du vilde fare ned! at Biergene kunde bortflyde for dit Ansigt. Ligesom Ild optænder det, der smeltes, [ligesom] Ild kommer Vand til at syde, for at lade dine Fiender kiende dit Navn; lad [saaledes] Hedningerne bæve for dit Ansigt. Du giorde underlige Ting, hvilke vi ikke forventede; du nedfoer, Bierge bortfløde for dit Ansigt. Og de hørde det ikke af gammel [Tiid,] de fattede det ikke med Øren; intet Øie haver seet det, uden du, o Gud! det han skal giøre ved den, som bier efter ham."

The *wonder* combines parts of ontological and cosmological proofs for the existence of God, redirecting them to the question of incarnation. But it does not exhibit all the elements of either. Like an ontological proof, the *wonder* involves the analysis of an idea. In this case, it is a set of related ideas, including the idea of the god-human, the idea that the god could need the human being (or desire the human's well-being), and the idea of a "historical phenomenon" that "has wanted to base [the single individual's] happiness on his relation to something historical." Also, as in ontological proofs, a synthetic conclusion is drawn based on this analysis. But unlike in the case of Anselm or Spinoza, the analysis does not result straightaway in a conclusion about some *other* being. Rather, the analysis produces an awareness that one's own mind (a human mind) is incompatible with originating the representation of the idea (that is, incarnation and its relata). This is not a question of unlikelihood, but impossibility. It is a matter of probability whether a lifetime of random scribbles could result in something that duplicates the works of Shakespeare. But – according to Climacus – even though a human mind *can* represent the idea of the incarnation, in an at least partially determined way, it could *not invent it*. (To return to the analogy of writing on a sheet of paper from *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*— it must be writing no human being could compose.) In short, when considering Christ – if indeed I am considering Christ – I know that it cannot be my own fancy. No concepts could be rationally rearranged in such a configuration. Thus, I must turn elsewhere to find the *cause* of this idea.

At this point begins the similarity to cosmological proofs: Though Climacus does not spell out formulaically the structure of the argument, the next step starts by investigating what could *cause* this idea, since it is not myself. How could the idea (*Indfald*) occur to someone (*falde Nogen ind*)? Implicit here is that no merely human, nor natural cause could be responsible; something higher is required. So begins the 'Go to the next house' door-knocking spree, but the

only plausible candidate causes of this idea are those which are non-natural, not within time, thus eternal. Unless I already had this sort of idea within me, despite not inventing it (cf. Meno's Paradox), I could not acquire it otherwise than as a gift from eternity. But such a gift would require some activity of eternity in history (that is, to give the condition) in a way that matches the human being's faculties. This activity would *be* the incarnation. Thus, the incarnation has happened.

Aside from Ferreira, the only commentators I am aware of who have focused attention on the *wonder* are Murray Rae and G. P. Marcar. Both locate historical antecedents for the *wonder* in Rationalist 'trademark' arguments for the existence of God. Rae writes, "The argument is reminiscent of Descartes' first proof for the existence of God in his Third Meditation. Because Descartes cannot find within his own intellectual resources, sufficient cause for the idea of God, it follows (allegedly) that there must be an external cause having objective reality sufficient unto the end of producing the idea of God."[13] I think Rae's framing of Descartes is roughly correct. Rae then dismisses the argument as implausible (with which I agree, to the extent *the wonder* should be interpreted as an argument), before acknowledging that its inclusion in *Fragments* is likely due to how *unconvincing* it is; on Rae's interpretation, it is such a bad argument that it teaches readers the proofs cannot draw the individual closer to God.[14] As with Roberts (cf. pp. 128-129 of the present work), I believe this is too easy a way to classify arguments in *Fragments* that fail to compel assent by the reader.

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[13] Murray A. Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation: By Faith Transformed* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 33. For Descartes' argument, see Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *CSM II*, 31f (45f).

[14] Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, 34: "That Climacus' proof is so readily refuted simply accentuates what he has been pleading all along; apprehension of the servant form of God is a matter of faith and cannot be proved. If Climacus' readers who had been fond of assessing all things objectively are obliged to admit the weakness of proofs then they have also to admit that one's relation with God rests not upon the resources of intellect but upon the gift of faith."

Marcar locates a closer parallel to Climacus' *wonder* in Spinoza's writings on Descartes. Contra Ferreira (but following Spinoza), he labels it an *a posteriori* (cosmological) argument for God's existence, and traces it to Spinoza's *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (1663).[15] Against Rae, Marcar argues that Climacus did not intend the argument to be unconvincing, and that it genuinely forms the basis of an "Ethico-Existentialist Argument" for the incarnation of god that may be rationally compelling for someone who is already Christian, and which circumvents refutations of Spinoza's original formulation.[16] It is for the person of faith who seeks understanding. Marcar concludes: "It may therefore be suggested that while Climacus accepts Spinoza's rationale against proving God's existence through external signs or causes, he retains an exception to this critique: 'the wonder' of God's self-revelation in time."[17]

To Rae, I affirm that the *wonder* was never supposed to *prove* that the incarnation has happened, but I disagree with his claim that Climacus *intended* it to be unconvincing. I disagree with Marcar's assertion that Climacus "retains an exception" to critiques of proofs of God but agree that the position of the reader is crucial for receiving the *wonder*. The *wonder* is – decisively – *for the Christian* (or at least a citizen of Christendom). Rather than engage either scholar at further length, I offer my own account below.

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Is the *wonder* supposed to prove anything to me? No, for Climacus, it is not— not if such a demonstration is supposed to appeal to the understanding alone. I *do* think Climacus (as with

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[15] Marcar, "Climacus' Miracle," 61. For Spinoza's argument, see Spinoza, *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy,"* in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 247 (IP6, I/159) / *Benedicti de Spinoza opera philosophical omnia*, 12.

[16] Marcar, "Climacus' Miracle," 80-83.

[17] Ibid., 83.

Kierkegaard) believes that such an idea could only be *caused* to arise in my mind by God.[18]

However, he would deny the possibility of being compelled to Christianity through such

argumentation, for at best it could force awareness. Moreover, Climacus would recognize as

impossible any attempt to confirm the conditional contained in the premise (*that* I really have the

idea – *Indfald* – in question), which is itself a matter of probability, not certainly. Consider

Climacus' argument about proving the truth of Christianity from the consequences of a paradox:

> If that fact [the incarnation] came into the world as the absolute paradox, all that comes
> later would be of no help, because this remains for all eternity the consequences of a
> paradox and thus just as definitively improbable as the paradox, unless it is assumed that
> the consequences (which, after all, are derived) gained retroactive power to transform the
> paradox, which would be just as acceptable as the assumption that a son received
> retroactive power to transform his father… To have the consequences in front of one's
> nose, then, is just as dubious an advantage as to have immediate certainty, and someone
> who takes the consequences immediately and directly is just as deceived as someone who
> takes immediate certainty for faith.[19]

If the idea (*Indfald*) that occurs (*falder… ind*) to me is sufficiently paradoxical to require that the

paradoxical incarnation has brought it into the world, then my certainty in evaluating this idea is

just as illusory as the false certainty of confidently identifying the god-teacher in the world

through an empirical description of the god-teacher's miraculous works.

Instead, the *wonder* prompts a form of reflection about what sorts of ideas are available to

me, and from that reflection, asks me to consider what sort of being – what sort of human being

– I am. 'An idea is *in* me, but it seems not to be *of* me. I could not configure my other ideas to

assemble it. It cannot be I who invented it, but something else in me, who brought it to me.' Why

should I believe this? How can I be certain when assessing even my own ideas? Perhaps my

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[18] This is attested to by the frequency with which he alludes to 1 Cor 2:9 in this context throughout his corpus (cf. p. 222n12 of the present work). I believe – but cannot yet thoroughly argue – that these passages obliquely allude to the structure of the *wonder*, and also the structure of the *mechane*.

[19] *PF* 94-95 / *SKS* 4, 292. The language of a "son" "transform[ing] his father" is provocative. It resonates with an image from *Fear and Trembling*: "the one who will work gives birth to his own father" (*FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123). There, it represents an edifying contrast to the refusal to perform the labor of faith, which only "gives birth to wind" (ibid.).

representation of the incarnation is not sufficiently determined to exhaust the idea.[20] Climacus does not offer a thorough enough definition of what it means to "invent" ideas, what it means for an idea to "arise" in me or my heart, or what it means for an idea to "occur" to me. Here, Ferreira's voice resounds: Why should Climacus turn to shoddy argumentation in the midst of critiquing them? And Levine's voice emerges, as well: Why should I countenance for a single moment that no human being could "poetize that the god poetized himself in the likeness of the human being"? To agree with Climacus' notion that the idea could not arise in the human heart involves a deeply pessimistic view of the human imagination.

But it is precisely in these questions that the role of the *wonder* becomes clear: What is a human being? Who is a human being? What is the human heart? After all, Socrates is a human being, as is Paul— yet, to Climacus and Kierkegaard, they are so different. (Even God is – for Paul, not for Socrates – a human being!) Here, a further note by Levine – posed as a *reductio ad absurdum* – is instructive: "If the paradox is to be regarded as a necessary condition of eternal happiness, then Kierkegaard would have to maintain that no matter how 'in the truth' [*PF* 18 / *SKS* 4, 226, etc.] a pagan is he cannot become fully subjective and thus achieve eternal happiness unless he accepts the paradox."[21] This is, for Climacus, not an absurd conclusion, but precisely *the* conclusion he wants his reader to draw.

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[20] Kant levels such a charge at the ontological proof: "In all ages one has talked about the **absolutely necessary** being, but has taken trouble not so much to understand whether and how one could so much as think of a thing of this kind as rather to prove its existence. Now a nominal definition of this concept is quite easy… but through this one becomes no wiser in regard to the conditions that make it necessary to regard the non-being of a thing as absolutely unthinkable, and… whether or not through this concept we are thinking anything at all" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 564 (*KrV* A592-593/B621-622)). Unlike the absolutely necessary being, the incarnation is, crucially, *not necessary*, but the point Kant makes here would apply to Climacus' 'proof' as well. The maximal determination of a concept does not immediately fall out of its minimal definition, laid bare to consciousness. In the case of the ontological proof for God's existence, it is claimed that God is *not* being conceived when necessary existence is *not* predicated of the concept; with Climacus' 'proof,' the claim would be that the incarnation is not being conceived if, as an idea, it could originate in a human being. In both cases, Kant would ask what reason anyone has to believe that they are even conceiving the concept that was nominally defined. (Climacus, indeed, would accept this critique.)

[21] Levine, "Why the Incarnation Is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard," 173.

But for Climacus (and Kierkegaard), the word 'pagan' and indeed the word 'Christian' are ambiguous.[22] It is necessary to get clear about what possible human beings there are, and what possible conceptions (including self-conceptions) there are for those human beings as subjects in relation to truth and the possibility of happiness. (As I continue, I will thicken each description.) Here, I attempt to think – as Climacus claims he does – *algebraically*,[23] that is, with archetypes and limit-cases.

For Climacus, there appear to be only two possible schemes for how the world is structured and the human being is organized. (It would be easy to dispute his simple bifurcation, but I will set that aside for now.) Either the world and the human being are 'pagan,' in the sense that Socrates (on Climacus' interpretation) conceives the world and the human being, or the world and the human being are organized according to a scheme that involves the incarnate God (which includes the reality of sin). These are two *positions* (or perspectives) on how the human interfaces with the world, and what options the world provides the human being; barring any synthetic claim about which world *is* the actual world, each position corresponds to one of two *possible worlds*, or possible configurations of the world.

If the Socratic position is true, then all human beings are – at their highest – Socratic 'pagans.' That is to say, if 'Paganism' is true, then there are no Christians, and there is no sin,

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[22] Though I commented briefly on this matter in the introduction to this thesis, it bears repeating here. The terms 'pagan' (*hedensk*) and 'Paganism' (*Hedenskab*) are technical terms within Kierkegaard's thought that mark the borders of any essentially historical soteriological scheme. Such soteriological schemes are collectively given the name 'Christianity' (*Christendom*). To this extent, the terms do not refer to particular peoples, cultures, or religious groups. But – as is quite apparent – the terms are deployed to channel the historical and cultural connotations of peoples, cultures, and religious groups in a way that blatantly dismisses or devalues those who have historically been labeled 'pagan,' as well as those religious complexes outside of Christianity that also advance an essentially historical soteriology. I use these terms because Kierkegaard does so, and for now, my task is largely exegetical. But should a constructive theological or philosophical project be developed on the basis of Kierkegaard's thinking, it would do well to transcend these terms and associations.

[23] *PF* 91 / *SKS* 4, 288.

and no reason to suppose another possible world. The Socratic position in *Fragments* presents

'Paganism' as an (imagined, for Climacus) 'pagan' self-conception; it is a conception of the

human being in general that draws no distinction in between 'pagan' and non-'pagan.' *If the*

Christian position is true, then (prior to the incarnation) all human beings are absent the

condition because they have surrendered it (in sin). Thus, human beings *all* have sin.[24] For the

Christian position, there are three possible arrangements of the human subject: any human being

may be (1) *pre-Christian 'pagan,'* that is, an individual who has not been offered the condition

by means of any occasion (such as an account of paradoxical *Indfald* of the incarnation), and

may self-conceive according to the Socratic articulation of 'Paganism' while actually – from the

vantage point of the Christian position – being in sin (unknowingly); or (2) *post-Christian*

'pagan,' that is, a citizen of Christendom, who, in offense at the paradox, lives their life calling

themselves Christian but only according to aesthetic or 'pagan' categories;[25] or (3) *a genuine*

Christian, that is, someone who, aware of Christianity's claims, becomes Christian and is

justified through faith, beginning a lifelong process of sanctification. A pre-Christian 'pagan,'

upon encountering the paradox, becomes either a post-Christian 'pagan' (in offense) or a genuine

Christian.

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[24] Here I ignore the possibility that Climacus takes the account of the Fall in Genesis to literally reflect history, or the possibility of other exceptions to sin. Adam and Eve, for instance, might not – in this limit case – at first be in sin. Perhaps also Mary is not in sin. Climacus makes a cryptic comment about Mary in *Fragments*: "But let us not forget that in regard to the birth of the god he [a firsthand witness] will be in the very same situation as the follower at second hand, and if we insist upon absolutely exact historical knowledge, only one human being would be completely informed, namely, the woman by whom he let himself be born" (*PF* 59 / *SKS* 4, 261). This passage seems to suggest that Mary was aware she was birthing the god-teacher, even though any affirmation that her son was the god would have to be mediated by sensation and history. In other words, it is odd that anyone, even Mary, should have "exact historical knowledge," despite her proximity to the incarnate god and the ascription to her of virginity. Yet I actually think this case is an exception that proves the rule (about sin). What I think Climacus is alluding to here is the doctrine of the immaculate conception; by a special divine act, Mary is not afflicted by sin, so the epistemic limitations associated with sin that other human beings experience do not apply to her. She can, perhaps uniquely, have historical insight into who is the incarnate god.

[25] See *PV* 43 / *SKS* 16, 25; and *WL* 24 / *SKS* 9, 32.

A pre-Christian 'pagan,' even the most honest, courageous, insightful one – the character Socrates – could *not* achieve eternal happiness, at least *not in and through their life*, from the standpoint of Christianity.[26] But from the Socratic standpoint, a 'pagan' such as Socrates, by definition (or at least by stipulation of the Socratic position), already possesses the truth.[27] This means that, from the perspective of a 'pagan' subject, there would be no need for god to incarnate – out of love – to dispense the truth and the condition for understanding it (for it is already possessed). With no motivation for doing so, the idea is a non-starter, and at best something self-contradictory. A 'pagan' individual with the idea of the incarnation, one that they can reckon with, is no longer a pre-Christian 'pagan'; they have entered Christendom. The question the *wonder* thence puts to you, Climacus' reader, is whether you are pre-Christian 'pagan': *Do you – can you – have the idea of an incarnate god?* Of course, there is no certainty that you have been offered the condition (and there *cannot be*). But if the idea of incarnation seems present in the mind, then the answer is likely, *no, I am not strictly pre-Christian 'pagan,' for I have been offered the condition.* (Even though I may not genuinely be a Christian.)

The point is not that *Fragments*' extraordinary story – with the twists and turns of Climacus' thought-experiment, culminating in a god descending out of impossible love – is extraordinarily rare. In fact, it is that this extraordinary story is, for Climacus' presumed reader, exceedingly common, even banal. People in 19th-century Copenhagen, and indeed billions of people worldwide today, are literate in Christian narratives. The defamiliarization of Christianity through the thought-experiment attests to the dramatic mismatch between its alleged

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[26] I have largely left this claim (and related claims) untested in the present work. I am alluding to Socrates as a character (for Kierkegaard) whose honesty is exhausted in negative irony. Socrates participates in truth while living only negatively. At death (according to the *Phaedo*, which I take Kierkegaard to interpret in this way), Socrates may find some eternal happiness, but this is incommensurable with the highest form of living available to him (*negativity*). And yet— perhaps he will be born again into the thresher.

[27] *PF* 12-13 / *SKS* 4, 221.

metaphysical peculiarity and the ease with which the human being can entertain it as a possibility, despite its slipperiness. To Climacus, this means that you, his (dear) reader, are *almost* certainly *not* pre-Christian 'pagan.' Climacus' modern reader *is* a Christian reader, or more properly (because it is so rare for someone to *become Christian*), is a reader within Christendom. You have been touched by the paradox and could now (God willing!) have faith. The *human heart* of 1 Corinthians 2:9 refers to the *merely* human heart, that is, the pre-Christian *'pagan' heart*; this bears the powerful implication that – if it seems that the crucial Christian idea, even if indistinct, is present to your consciousness – God has already provided you with an occasion to become a (faithful) follower: Pull out the idea (of incarnation, of love, of faith) and meditate on it under the fig tree: "*tolle lege*."[28] Perhaps inside, the god-teacher will meet you. If you can do so, then you are not only yourself, and your heart is no longer simply a *human heart*; it is a heart, and a mind, that attest to the incarnation. And – short of immersion in the Lethe – there is no going back.

The purpose of the 'proof' (the *wonder*) is not to prove that the incarnation happened. Climacus is unconcerned with establishing what sort of empirical criteria could be a vessel through which Christ encounters an individual. (He is only interested in demolishing any temple built to do so.) Instead, the aim of the *wonder* is to put the individual on the spot, in the present, to account for their relation to ideas they already (may) have, and to demonstrate how unusual, frightening, and demanding they actually are— assuming that the individual really does view their life as a stage on which eternal happiness can be sought, and on which it might be attained.

The *wonder* functions to these ends despite the fact that it proves nothing. As with Kierkegaard, Climacus is no fan of any proof designed to convince an unconvinced intellect such

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[28] Augustine, *Confessions*, 159 (VIII.12.29) / 101.

that it could compel the will into a position it lacked the courage to take itself. After all, Kierkegaard – and Climacus – had drunk up Kant's critiques of proofs of God.[29] In his 1851 journal entry on Anselm's ontological proof, Kierkegaard remarks that it is the invocation of God's assistance in generating the proof that really does the work a proof should do: "if one could, without God's help, prove His existence, it would be, as it were, less evident that He exists." For Climacus, the *wonder* is almost a negative image of the ontological proof. He concedes Kant's observation that there is no contradiction in annulling both the subject and predicate in a proposition such as, *God has necessary existence*.[30] Instead, Climacus transforms the proposition into a conditional. Yet it is not God, but incarnation's historicity that is at stake, which *excludes* necessity. Climacus' *wonder* is thus best framed as a single conditional proposition: *If I am not-'pagan', then the god is actual (but non-necessary).* What is significant is to establish the connection between being not-'pagan' and the historical incarnation— There are only two modal categories that can apply to the incarnation if I am inquiring into it: it is either impossible, or it is actual. If it were necessary, then it is not incarnation (for incarnation is essentially historical, a coming-into-existence that is by definition non-necessary). It could indeed be impossible, but then I am necessarily 'pagan,' the Socratic position is true, and I am not genuinely inquiring into it (or if I think I am doing so, I am doing so only illusorily). So if I determine that the incarnation is impossible – and am really considering the idea of the incarnation – then I must be in offense. Yet for Climacus, if I can reckon with a robust idea of it, then its referent must have already happened, for otherwise I could not reckon with the idea (and

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[29] Green documents that Climacus frequently channels Kant's critique of the ontological proof. See Green, "Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*: A Kantian Commentary," 165. Kierkegaard demonstrates significant attention to Kant's Transcendental Dialectic (and particularly Kant's critiques of proofs of God) in his 1837 notes from a lecture series on speculative dogmatics by Martensen. See *KJN* 3, 138-139 / *SKS* 19, 138-140; Not4:10-11.

[30] See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 565 (A594-595/B622-623).

we go back to Levine's position). In this way, the incarnation is indeed not a thing or occurrence like others (for example, a lost island of riches), which are possible until they are actual; for any subject considering it, *the incarnation is only ever historically actual unless it is forever impossible.* Or: *the incarnation can never be possible without already having become actual.*

This is a strange remark, but it is strange because, for Climacus, the incarnate god transforms the faculties of the person apprehending the incarnation (with the condition): For Climacus, there is no possible coherent individual who could reckon with the possibility of the incarnation without this mental or spiritual activity already, in its presence to consciousness, evincing its own actuality.[31] (This is what Climacus is getting at when he refers to the paradox as *index* and *judex sui et falsi*.) But for Kierkegaard, many reside in this very tension because they are *not* unified, coherent, single-minded individuals; they do so in offense, or, what is largely beyond the scope of this thesis, despair (*Fortvivlelse*), a term which implies double-mindedness, doubt, and ambiguity, as well as an imprint by the paradox. To be lacking faith, within Christendom, is to be double-minded in this way; it is, as in the words of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, to be one of "those who although they call themselves Christians, actually live within pagan conceptions."[32] Though the remaining chapters of this thesis will unpack some implications thereof, to become a faithful follower (to *become Christian*) requires, for Climacus, for Kierkegaard, an affirmation that one's selfhood is not bound by the limits of a merely human heart. (For the human heart is, by itself, too limited to suffer as Christendom does, and *you* are in Christendom.) For Kierkegaard, faith is to affirm (in hope, in love) that *you* already have, only because of god's non-necessary love, "the mind of Christ" (*Christi Sind*; 1 Cor 2:16).

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[31] See Kant's postulates of practical reason, especially as they pertain to the objective reality of God as a practical postulate: Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 236-258 / AA 5:119-148.

[32] *WL* 24 / *SKS* 9, 32.

Within this disjunction – between the Socratic or 'pagan' religious stage (Religiousness A) and the Christian religious stage (Religiousness B) – the two possibilities are not symmetrically balanced. If the world is 'pagan,' if you are 'pagan,' then you do not really engage the paradox of the incarnation. In your world, Christian claims are impossible, lunacy, a type of offense to the intellect, because at best, "self-knowledge is God-knowledge."[33] In such a world, the individual's constitution already immanently, essentially, is understood to possess all that is true. To access it, one needs simply, following Socrates, to recollect, train oneself to die, ascend to great heights,[34] sacrifice a life,[35] and await – not quite resurrection or rebirth – but a reincarnation through which the possessed truth is forgotten once more. But here is the crucial asymmetry. (With it, we will transition back to the mechane.) If the world is Christian, the Socratic ('pagan') position is *not* impossible. In fact, it *must be possible*, or at least *have been possible*. The thought-experiment, which presents itself as an analytic project, smuggles in – and intentionally so – a synthetic claim.

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[33] *PF* 11 / *SKS* 4, 220.

[34] See Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 493-494 (210a-212c).

[35] See Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Grube, 100 (118a) / trans. Heise, vol. 1, 124-125 / trans. and ed. Ast, vol. 1, 618-619: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget."

B. The Thought-Experiment and the Mechane
(or, How my heart is the pivot point of everything)

Better well hanged than ill wed.[36]

Am I a subject of a 'pagan' world or a Christian one? The question folds in on itself: if the Socratic position is true, the answer is easy; I am a 'pagan' and there is no Christianity. The distinction between the two positions is introduced *only with Christianity*. If the Christian position is true, the answer is hard— because I could be 'pagan' (yet untouched by the idea of incarnation) or could have been 'pagan.' And if I am not 'pagan,' then I must still decide to *become Christian*, that is, have faith (eminent *Tro*) that Christ made it possible to do so. For Kierkegaard, it is too easy (not only sinful, but an *offense*, *despair*) to be within Christendom but believe that I am 'pagan,' or to believe that Christendom is 'Paganism.' That is to say, it is easy not to become Christian, easy not to embrace to the task (*Opgave*) and gift (*Gave*) of becoming Christian.

Why have I said that, for Kierkegaard, the 'pagan' position must be *possible*, if the Christian position is true? The short answer, which will require some explanation, is this: *If the Christian position is necessarily true, then it is no longer the Christian position, because it collapses into the Socratic or 'pagan' position.* It is true only when it is *historically* actual. If it is historically actual, it has come into existence, so it is not necessary; this means also that its alternative (the 'pagan' position) is possible. (This does not mean the 'pagan' or Socratic

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[36] *PF* 3 / *SKS* 4, 214. This paraphrase of a remark by Feste to Maria in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is placed after the title page as *Fragments*' motto. According to the Hongs, Kierkegaard likely encountered Shakespeare through a written German translation, though the play was also performed in Copenhagen (in Danish) during Kierkegaard's lifetime (*PF*, "Notes," 274). See William Shakespeare, *Was ihr wollt* [What you will], in *Shakspeare's dramatische Werke*, Vol. 5 of 12, trans. August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1839–1841) [*ASKB* 1887], 116 (I.5): "Gut gehängt ist besser als schlecht verheirathet"; and Shakespeare, *Hellig Tree Kongers Aften, eller: Hvad man vil*, 5: "At blive godt hængt, er mangen Gang bedre end at blive slet givt." The modern English reads, "Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage…" William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night; or What You Will*, ed. Rory Loughnane, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*, eds. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan, vol. 2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1837 (1.5.16).

position was true before, for there is no sin from that standpoint. Instead, sinful pre-Christian 'pagans' preceded Christianity; otherwise the condition would never need to be given.)

Let me begin again— Climacus establishes that it is possible for a given human being to be 'pagan' even if the incarnation has happened. This can be inferred from a conjunction of the *wonder* and passages, such as the "world-historical *nota bene*," that require a causal connection between the absolute historical fact of incarnation and the god's offer of the condition to one who comes later. Put simply, if the god revealed god-self, someone – imagine a pre-Columbian person living in Mesoamerica, or to push it much further, perhaps a human community transported through a quantum event to a planet outside the light-cone centered on Palestine at the moment of incarnation – may not (yet) have received the good news. This means that it is *possible* for the subjectivity of a human being to be organized in such a way that, following Climacus' reasoning, the idea of an incarnate god is not available to it (because they have not been offered the condition). That is, this human being or these human beings would be, on Climacus' understanding, pre-Christian 'pagan.' At their highest (from their point of view, i.e., the Socratic position), they would be living according to a Socratic model of religiosity.[37] From their perspective, there would be no reason to suppose that they lacked the condition for a possible happiness or salvation, because there is no reason to think that they had given it up in sin. From their perspective, there is no Christian position (though if one attempted to explain it, it might make a good occasion for the god to offer the condition). But from the Christian perspective, they are living in sin (not offense, whereby they reject or contort the graciously offered condition) but a form of noetic and moral entrapment for which they bear a quiet but simmering responsibility. Yet within the context of Christian reasoning, the position of the

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[37] Again, Kierkegaard (also Climacus) does not often consider models of immanent religiosity outside of Classical Greek and Roman thought.

'pagan' is based, not on a necessary criterion, but on a historically contingent one. They have not been offered the condition, or they would not be pre-Christian 'pagan.' Accordingly, from the Christian position, it is completely a question of history – *not necessity* – that a citizen of Christendom is not 'pagan.' And that the 'pagan' is not within Christendom.

Within this bramble, Christianity needs 'Paganism' in a dual sense. In the first sense, for Christianity, 'Paganism' is always a boundary that can never be ultimately converted. Geographically there may always be borders to the holdfast of Christendom, but more importantly, for each human being, they are not born into Christendom but are only brought into to it by being offered (from the god) the condition, and then refusing it. In this sense, 'pagans' are, from the vantage point of the Christian position, born sinful, that is, responsible for the limited horizon of their imagination, which cannot invent the condition, nor the idea that eternity became finite out of love (incarnation). Once such a person is offered the condition by means of an occasion, they then can be in offense, rejecting the truth of the incarnation outright or attempting, in relation to the paradox, to subordinate faith to understanding. Even in this sense, it is not possible to ascertain completely who is pre-Christian 'pagan' and who is within Christendom. To wield certain words, to find membership in some church— these may give hints, but they are not definitive.

In this first sense of pre-Christian 'paganism,' it is the state of humanity always 'prior' to the advent of Christendom, on a personal level, and on a cultural level. In this sense of 'Paganism,' Christianity needs 'pagans' as the raw material to convert. In this sense of 'Paganism,' the 'pagan' subject desires the good, but there are invisible (to the 'pagan') bars on all their windows. Their reach is only so long. They cannot ever clasp the hand of another, or at least not in the way that would satisfy a Christian. If a citizen of Christendom asks, are there

'pagans' elsewhere in this world, or was I 'pagan' earlier in life?— it is the pre-Christian sense of 'Paganism' they are inquiring into. If there are no such 'pagans' (because all have become Christian), this would be a happy circumstance for Christianity, for its work would be done until, a moment later, a new 'pagan' is born. According to Climacus (and Kierkegaard) this sense of 'Paganism' was there (first) as a faulty foundation, before Christianity descended to mend and restore it.

In the second sense— 'Paganism' is, according to Kierkegaard, a model for human subjectivity (presumably a model that can be ascribed to so-called 'pagans' in the first sense) that *possibly* is true. But because Christianity is (hypothetically) actual, the 'pagan' position is (on this hypothesis) not correct. Here, Christianity needs 'Paganism' in an *essential* way; it is still a border, but a border or limit to a set of ideas. The absence of such a limit would permit these ideas' salvific power to desiccate (like fruit without a rind). This is the structure of subjectivity captured by the Socratic position in *Fragments*' thought-experiment. Within 'Paganism,' one may, indeed, ethically err out of finitude, fragility, or in the wake of the general tragedy of the cosmos, but there is no sin proper— one is not responsible for one's own constitutional limitations as a human being with a merely human heart. This sense of 'Paganism' is a worldview, in the sense that it captures a possible organizational model of the human subject but also a model of the entire cosmos. In this way, 'Paganism' is also a *possible world*, a counterpart to the world God elected to save through incarnation.[38] From within, this world is (would be) impossible to exit, for negating it seems only to result in contradictions and absurdity.

Exactly how is 'Paganism,' in this sense, *essential* to Christianity? A subject may, as *Fragments* demonstrates, ask whether the Christian position is the case, or the Socratic. That is to

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[38] During 1842 to 1843, Kierkegaard thought a great deal about Leibniz' metaphysics in relation to his own conception of Christianity. See *KJN* 3, 388-392 / *SKS* 19, 390-394; Not13:23-24. Cf. p119n88 of the present work.

say, they may ask whether the world is a 'pagan' world or a world in which Christianity *has come into existence*. Indeed, the thought-experiment aims to nudge the reader into becoming conscious that they are already – in their thoughts, ideas, hopes – shaped by Christianity, or on the verge of being so shaped, as they trace Climacus' reasoning. (After all, the "Moral" of *Fragments* states: "This project indisputably goes beyond the Socratic, as is apparent at every point."[39] That is to say, it is Christian.) But the thought-experiment cannot *prove* this to them; it *cannot* (and *must not*) lead someone to cognize *a priori* the truth of Christianity. (Hence, in the next sentence of the "Moral," Climacus writes, "Whether it is therefore more true than the Socratic is an altogether different question, one that cannot be decided in the same breath…"[40]) It *cannot* prove this to the reader because the facticity of the incarnation is historical, and the presence of the god in time non-empirical. These are not avenues through which to deliver knowledge. But for Climacus it *must not* be provable because, if Christianity is necessarily true, then it is no longer Christianity, but Socratic 'Paganism.' Why? Here, I am extrapolating from Climacus' reasoning to fill in the blanks. An essential element of Christianity is *history*, which involves, for Climacus, non-necessity (and freedom). If the absolute fact of the incarnation is *necessarily true*, then it means that the condition is *necessarily* available to the individual. If the individual has a necessary connection to the condition, even if accessing it is difficult (as it is for many of Socrates' conversation partners), then there is no *moment*. And if there is no moment, then eternal happiness is not available in and through life.

This bears attention, so I will state it differently: The *wonder* of the incarnation shows that it is possible (even if it is not contingently *so*) for a human being to be organized such that

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[39] *PF* 111 / *SKS* 4, 306.

[40] Ibid.

the idea of a god who incarnated (out of selfless love) is *not* available to it. That is, organized as a 'pagan' subject in a 'pagan' world. Without the (modal) possibility that the Socratic position is true, the loving sacrifice of God ceases to be a loving *act*, but becomes instead a fact of nature. Thus, faith (*Tro*, eminently) – a free, willful assent to a free act of divine love – is extruded from any such soteriology. In that case, the incarnation would not be a historical fact, but just another word to describe the "God-*knowledge*" necessary within each subject: the subject is *'pagan' again*. In such a case, life would be simply an arena to stumble upon a truth already there.

Herein is also another explanation for why attempts to prove the truth of Christianity are signs of *offense*. Offense is an intellectual rejection of the paradox. But any attempt to prove the incarnation, prove the paradox, at the same time relies on *necessity* and prioritizes the rules of the understanding; this is the modal grammar of cognitive proofs. In so doing, attempting a proof is to try to subsume Christianity under the fundamental paradigm of 'Paganism': that the truth is already (necessarily) available. This means that one in offense has a practical commitment to the world being, at its root, a 'pagan' world, revealing a rejection of the essential feature of Christianity.

In this second sense of 'Paganism,' the atom of the Kierkegaardian dialectic is never really an atom, but emerges always entangled in the dipole I have described. In its asymmetry, Christianity comes into existence already in a dance with 'Paganism.' Indeed, Christianity will lead the dance, but its partner has not been waiting around for its arrival; they enter the stage of ideas and praxis at the same time. 'Paganism' is an exiled part, a false memory of a mythic past, which – in these roles – forms the thinnest rind on the revealed fruit of blessedness. Without it, Christianity's salvific project simply *is*, so salvation ceases to save *history*; hence it would not be – on Climacus' definition, perhaps on Kierkegaard's – Christianity.

1. The Mechane: Views of Possible Worlds

> Either we have no dreams or our dreams are interesting. We should learn to arrange our waking life the same way: nothing or interesting.[41]

This structure I have been describing, with reference to *Fragments*, is the *mechane*: Being lifted up by Christian faith requires an ordered and tense connection to 'Paganism.' In *Fragments*, it has been possible for me to dig deeply enough to unearth this device, versions of which – though I have located it here in the thought of Climacus – can be found in Kierkegaard's other works. (I will turn to two such works in the remaining chapters.)

To recall my description of this device from the introduction (cf. p. 44f)— The mechane is a crane supported by a rope, which is fastened to the ground. This rope connects to a hoist and pulley system by which an actor is suspended above the stage. The image and operation of the mechane captures both the dependence and asymmetry that mark the relationship between Christianity and 'Paganism.' The hoist, attached to the actor, can only bear their weight if the tension force is sufficient, and this can only be achieved by using the ground as a counterweight. Faith, in Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity, can likewise only draw the individual toward unity with God if the 'pagan' view of the world could have been possible. If it were not possible, Christianity – the only alternative (on Climacus' rendering) – would cease to be historical, and would thus collapse into 'Paganism.' The mechane shows that for Climacus, for Kierkegaard, there cannot be an Archimedean *point* on which to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. (Again, if it were possible to live a life on the rule of a necessary proof, the world would be 'Pagan,' not Christian.) There is no *solitary* keystone on which to erect Christianity as an intellectual or social enterprise, no first *single* principle (no *one* place to begin) from which one can discursively

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[41] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 212 (eKGWB *FW*-232).

reason through the entire truth. Christianity only functions if, as with the mechane, the individual is attached to a (divinely delivered) hoist, which is itself supported through a tension force anchored to the ground. But as we see for Kierkegaard, this does not mean there is no purpose or *origin* to Christianity.

This origin is *twofold*, in a sense, but *single* in another. There is a keystone, but it is always already split (an Archimedean 'dyad'). The first position, the ground or floor, is 'Paganism,' though in another sense the Christian is first, in a more important way: for it includes the hoist (the organ for faith) that acts as the fulcrum between the individual and the ground. The Christian position is thus first in the sense that to consider the operation of the Christian mechane, even to occupy a supposedly neutral stance to observe it at a distance, presumes already the truth of Christianity. As Climacus' *wonder* reveals, there is no neutral position from which one can weigh Christianity against its alternative ('Paganism'); anyone who believes themselves to be deliberating between them is almost certainly in offense, and thus has been touched by the Christian paradox. But *if* the world were a 'pagan' world and if I were a 'pagan' in it, then my view would be limited— just like how an actor planted on the stage might not see beyond the amphitheater. And my options would be limited, too: flight is impossible, and I am left with what nature gives me. As with Socrates, one may be happy – quite unlike Odysseus, or, as I shall show, Agamemnon, who are not so fortunate as to be happy, or rather, are happy only insofar as they are fortunate – but such happiness must always be poised *against* the finite conditions of life and whatever the limits of fate demand. So which world am I in? It depends, for Kierkegaard, on whether my heart and mind are merely human, or whether they are of Christ.

When an actor is suspended on the mechane, the rope that anchors the hoist (and actor) to the ground is hidden backstage, for the audience should not be burdened by the sight of stagecraft. Likewise, the possibility of the 'pagan' world is contravened by the actuality (but never necessity) of the Christian incarnation. When God enters the world, so also comes the announcement that the world corresponding to the Socratic, 'pagan' position never existed— it had always been a world of *sin*. In this sense, when Christianity comes into existence, it transforms the past which came before it into a defective version of itself; Christendom does not only spread throughout the world as the Gospel is communicated, but it also digs its roots temporally backward. It is not possible or valuable to ascertain a first temporal *moment* of Christianity, that is, an empirically describable, spatiotemporally delimited point of incarnation. (It was my contention throughout Chapters II and III that Climacus intentionally founders any such attempt.) To do so would be like offering a spatiotemporal description of the moment before the Big Bang. Once God introduced the paradox, it had always been there, hidden since the world's foundation; there is no way to become certain that Christ had not come earlier than Jesus, earlier than Socrates, earlier, earlier, earlier still.

Kierkegaard alludes to this in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, suggesting that even Socrates, the acme of 'Paganism' and namesake of *Fragments*' null hypothesis, could be(come) Christian: "True, he was no Christian, that I know, although I also definitely remain convinced that he has become one."[42] Here, Kierkegaard is referring to Socrates, not as a

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[42] *PV* 54 / *SKS* 16, 36. A very different interpretation of this cryptic line is forwarded in Michael A. Cantrell, "Was Socrates a Christian Before Christ? Kierkegaard and the Problem of Christian Uniqueness," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 31, no. 2 (Apr. 2014): 123-142. Cantrell writes, "While it is hard to know exactly how to interpret this statement, it seems at least to indicate Kierkegaard's 'definite . . . convi[ction]' that Socrates achieved salvation at some time subsequent to his physical death. This is naturally interpreted as a belief in postmortem evangelization, the view that a person who was not evangelized before death enjoys an opportunity to respond to the Christian gospel subsequent to his or her death" (130). Kierkegaard never directly refutes this metaphysical picture, but there is also no serious evidence in any of his works that he subscribes to such

character and the archetype of 'pagan' religiosity (which is how *Fragments* treats him), but as a historical figure, a human being who lived (so one would think) before the incarnation and hence could not access Christian salvation. But as Climacus has argued, once the incarnation has happened, there is no point that can be definitively identified as *before incarnation*. For Kierkegaard, as for Climacus, Christianity is the *index* and *judex sui et falsi*; once its floodlight is cast on a historical figure, place, or time, that thing may be in the historical *wake* of Christ (whoever Christ was) rather than before Christ. And insofar as whether one has *become Christian* bears no external mark (even though it does, as I touch upon in Chapter VI, require the *expression* of love), there is no way to know for sure.

2. The Axiom: Each According to their Struggle, Which Is Precisely What Each Needs

But the question not yet clearly answered is: Why has Climacus constructed the mechane? (Or why has he uncovered it?) In addition to the mechane, I have in the preceding chapters pointed to an axiom that shapes Kierkegaard's theology: for life to be worth living, one must ultimately be individually responsible for one's own happiness or salvation. Here I will show how the structure of the mechane, as it appears in *Fragments*, reveals the text's articulation of faith (eminent *Tro*) to express this axiom.

In *Fragments*, Christianity is presented as an anthropological and metaphysical scaffolding that affords the individual access to happiness or salvation (*Salighed*) through the power of history. (To this extent, Climacus means for Christianity to save the temporal creation in a way that the Socratic does not.) This can only happen if God has entered the world, and for this to happen, God must become particular. Christ's particularity (historicity) distinguishes the

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a view. My reading of this line makes more sense of Kierkegaard's complex admiration – with distance – of Socrates without importing extraneous cosmological commitments about an afterlife, or postmortem conversion.

'pagan' from the Christian, but creates a potential problem of *relative* access; insofar as Christ enters space and time, this spatiotemporal dimension – in addition to being the medium through which one is exposed to revelation – risks setting individuals at degrees of distance from the origin point. (Lessing had intervened on this issue.) If some 'objective' viewpoint of history were possible where Christ could be located, those individuals closer to the place and time of Christ might be more blessed than those spatiotemporally distant, or they might find it easier to gain a "mutual understanding" with the incarnate God. Moreover, there are also those people (pre-Christian 'pagans') who lived before Christ, or far enough from Christ, that they could not receive the news. Things might, to put it bluntly, not be fair. Indeed, God might not be fair.[43]

But in *Fragments* the model of faith Climacus prescribes seems constructed precisely for the purpose of answering this question of fairness. I believe this is due to – and reveals – Climacus' and Kierkegaard's undergirding interest in ensuring that every single individual (*Enkelt*) understands themselves to be responsible for their own eternal happiness. Other factors, including the accidents of history, can play no substantive role; the world must be governed by a form of spiritual meritocracy. For if the world is 'pagan,' then one has happiness within them from the very beginning. If intellectual arguments could rationally compel correct Christian beliefs, then finding happiness is simply about reading and understanding sound argumentation. If one's proximity to the historical incarnation is crucial for one's ability to find unity with God – or if precise historical knowledge about the details of incarnate God can do so – then one's salvation is again determined by what one stumbles across (that is, facts) rather than one's own agency.

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[43] Recall the "Ultimatum," which raises a question much like this one before introducing sin as a solution (cf. p. 81f).

Put pictures of the two possible worlds ('pagan' and Christian) side by side— If I can perceive both as possible, does that mean I am faithful? No. If they are distinct to me, and clearly different, it means I am *aware*, but that does not mean I have faithfully chosen to become Christian. As Kierkegaard makes clear, it is more than possible to confront this 'either / or,' and yet not choose to actualize faith (to become a follower), choosing instead to "live within pagan conceptions" (as do A and Wilhelm) despite access to the idea of incarnation. Faith must be something that is *all mine*, but at the same time it must have been gifted from on high. As a gift, it is an organ I can use, serving as a special faculty for making a decision at the pivot point between 'Paganism' and Christianity; only the latter accounts for the decision that I confront. Faith is a necessary element for happiness. And if I refuse this organ (in offense), I can be grateful – as the Jut pastor from *Either / Or* claims – that it is I who am wrong, and not the world.

The mechane requires *work*. To operate it requires attentiveness, and to act while suspended in the air is much more difficult than to do so on solid ground. But all metaphors have limitations, and what is lost in the metaphor is the agency of the Christian disciple. If my life is to matter, meaning that I can relate to truth through my life, rather than simply *before* it, *after* it, *in spite of* it, then, for Climacus, nothing *necessary* can be why it matters. Climacus needs the perfection of eternity but with none of its compulsory necessity; for necessity denatures the whole enterprise. In this sense, the *struggle* – the task (*Opgave*) to become Christian – is also the gift (*Gave*) that Christianity offers.

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Though it may seem odd to say so, by characterizing the incarnation as a historically particular occurrence that *enables* the capacity in the individual with which to affirm it

(volitionally) as the crucial salvific moment of history, Kierkegaard curates an anthropological space for a form of suprarational decision-making that preserves the individual's responsibility. Only if there is an arena for agency like that which the condition carves out in an individual, only in faith – a crane whose mechanism grants me the perspective to decide whether I am a subject of a 'pagan' world or a subject of a 'Christian' world – can I choose the world in which I live. And once I incline toward Christianity, then so much is demanded of me, which – if I uncover my ears to the voice of God – I have taken on myself as a responsibility.

By ensuring that the only world-historical occurrence required for salvation cannot ever be precisely located in history with any empirical description, Kierkegaard makes it possible to include pre-Christian peoples within its purview, for Christ could always have come earlier (and farther away) than one suspects. By extending (backward, outward) the scope of Christian soteriology, Kierkegaard also extends both access to, and responsibility for, salvation. (In this sense, populations who, in 19th-century Europe may have been deemed 'pagan' might actually be citizens of Christendom, and thus deeply responsible for their own affirmation of the idea of incarnation, which – as members of Christendom – was offered to them, even if before Jesus.) Such a solution is distinct from other theological attempts to fold pre-Christian individuals into a Christian salvation history (for example, Karl Rahner's anonymous Christianity[44]) because it enables an interpretation that such peoples might not actually be pre-Christian, even if they are pre-Jesus, without relieving them of the responsibility of subjective appropriation of the incarnation.[45] Essentially, I believe Kierkegaard to be, as Climacus, advancing a form of

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[44] See Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, 16 vols. (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954–). Rahner's account of 'anonymous Christianity,' which articulates how pre-Christian individuals may have been saved through Christ, is expressed in places throughout vols. 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, and 16.

[45] Of course, this raises other problems, especially: What if a pre-Christian individual does not want to be Christian or consider themselves Christian? The most charitable interpretation of Kierkegaard (and Climacus) on this matter is to remind my reader that *Christianity* is a technical term encompassing any essentially historical soteriology that

inclusivist Christianity that clings to – even if in the most abstract of ways – the incarnation as a

decisive particular occurrence, in the interest of protecting the role of the will from inequitable

access to salvation, and from effacement by strong conceptions of rational necessity.

This interest in universal responsibility for salvation, and universal access, is hinted at

near the conclusion of *Fragments*, in which Climacus describes why his thought-experiment is a

"godly project":

> Would the god allow the power of time to decide [*afgjøre*] whom he would grant his
> favor, or would it not be worthy of the god to make the reconciliation equally difficult for
> every human being at every time and in every place, equally difficult because no human
> being is capable of giving himself the condition (but neither is he to receive it from
> another human being and thereby produce new dissension), equally difficult, then, but
> also equally easy—inasmuch as the god gives it. This, you see, is why at the beginning I
> considered my project (that is, insofar as a hypothesis can be regarded as such) to be a
> godly project, and I still consider it to be that, without, however, being indifferent to any
> human objection, since, on the contrary, I once again ask you, if you have any legitimate
> protest to make, to present it.[46]

Climacus claims, as I have ascribed to him in this section of the chapter, that those before any

purported occurrence of the incarnation are *not* excluded from the god's "reconciliation." It

would be silly for the god to "allow the power of time to decide" who benefits from salvation;

presumably, this is because it would not be just to base something so important on something as

arbitrary as the time and place of one's birth, for this is something no one can choose, and no one

is responsible for. What unifies all human beings ("at every time and in every place"), what

equalizes them all, is the *equal difficulty* of becoming happy through the god's offer. Effectively,

the god's love is impressively demanding in its requirements, but distributed without

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meets the demands of a finite being with an eternal consciousness. Even if this is granted, there are still numerous
problems pertaining to Christian inclusivism for which I can see no obvious defense from Kierkegaard's position.

[46] *PF* 106-107 / *SKS* 4, 303.

arbitrariness. Even a Socrates (not the character and quintessence of the Socratic position, but rather his historical counterpart) can *become Christian*.

Revealed in this passage, however, is a peculiar ambivalence. Sin, after all, was defined as being "polemical against the truth, which is expressed by saying that [one] has forfeited and is forfeiting the condition." One would therefore expect that there is no human being for whom *only* "the power of time" would arbitrarily prevent from having the condition, for they have all been responsible for forfeiting it themselves. Yet Climacus seems to want it both ways— sin must be something for which the human being is technically responsible, yet it is also something that, because no one has the capacity to annul sin's power through their own agency, leaves the individual *not* accountable (yet) for becoming faithful.[47] In other words, it appears that Climacus sometimes expresses a commitment to a principle like Harry Frankfurt's Principle of Alternative Possibilities, whereby responsibility is only possible to ascribe if someone is capable of doing otherwise.[48] In the case of someone in sin but with no access to the condition, it is unclear what sort of responsibility they have; in the case of someone in offense, which "comes into existence with the paradox," that individual could do otherwise, and the responsibility for refusing the paradox and the god-teacher is clear. To clarify further, this ambivalence does not pertain to the human being from the perspective of the Socratic position (or 'Paganism') because there is no such thing as sin from that vantage point. But from the Christian position, even a pre-Christian 'pagan' individual would be ascribed this type of sin, one which carries the mark of fault or responsibility, but which also *precludes* the ability to do otherwise.

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[47] Climacus attends to this very issue in an account of a child who spends his money on a toy; he can no longer exchange the toy for a book, for he "chose unfreedom," and "the curious thing about unfreedom is that once it is purchased it has no value whatsoever" (*PF* 16n / *SKS* 4, 224n).

[48] See Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 829–839. See also *Love, Reason, and Will: Kierkegaard after Frankfurt*, eds. Anthony Rudd and John Davenport (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

The best interpretation I can currently offer is that Climacus (perhaps Kierkegaard as well) conceives sin in two different respects. The former (sin *per se*) formally involves responsibility, but it is best described as a type of noetic and volitional entrapment. Whatever responsibility involved only hums in the background. The latter includes the concepts of despair, offense, and self-love, all of which – at least in their most important respects – do not appear, for Kierkegaard, to be possible independent of grace, or, put more abstractly, the condition. Grace not only regenerates the will (or creates the conditions for the will's regeneration), but the offer of grace also enables a new form of its own perversion through these active forms of sin.[49] In *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard provides a useful image for contrasting these two forms of sin, even if it does not wholly explain the distinction. When fishing, the character Frater Taciturnus (a pseudonym) finds the diary pages (written by Quidam, another pseudonym) comprising "'Guilty?' / 'Not Guilty?'" inside an old box wrapped in an oilcloth.[50] The writings themselves are a troubled series of anxieties, confessions, and fears about the author's moral failings (or possible moral failings). As Taciturnus notes, "The box was locked, and when I forced it open the key was inside…"[51] This image demonstrates both dimensions of entrapment by sin: Sin, absent the condition, is like having the key to the box, within the box itself; if you originally locked the key inside the box, it is your fault that it is there. You are responsible for

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[49] In a passage of *Either / Or* that anticipates the *wonder*, A writes, "When the idea [*Ideen*] of *Don Juan* emerged is not known; only this much is certain—that it is linked to Christianity and through Christianity to the Middle Ages. Even if the idea could not be traced with any certainty back to this world-historical period in the human consciousness, every doubt would be removed at once by a consideration of the inner nature of the idea" (*EO1* 87 / *SKS* 2, 92; I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation). The idea of a demonic, sensuous figure such as Don Juan attests to elements of Christianity that enable the possibility; it is a special type of sin that carries a trace of the *wonder*.

[50] It is possible that this image is an intentional inversion of Pandora's Box. The myth of Pandora is alluded to earlier in the book, in "In vino veritas" (*SLW* 74 / *SKS* 6, 73). I have Craig Campbell to thank for this observation.

[51] *SLV* 189 / *SKS* 6, 177.

having closed the box on the key, but not responsible each time you desire to open the box but

cannot. Sin, in offense at the paradox, is – with the once-closed box having been forced open by

Christ (as Taciturnus did) – to now hold the key but refuse to look inside the box to account.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

I conclude the chapter by gesturing to Kierkegaard's consistent commitment to individual

responsibility and universal access to salvation (that is, the axiom I have ascribed to him). In

Either / Or, this thread could be found in the anonymous Jut pastor's "Ultimatum." Its

metaphysical and anthropological conditions are pulled out in *Philosophical Fragments*. And, as

I will show in the following chapters, its psychological and moral dimensions appear in *Fear and

Trembling* and *Works of Love*, respectively.

But even near the very end of Kierkegaard's life and authorship, it was at the front of his

mind. In an illuminating journal entry from 1854, Kierkegaard writes the following:

> As soon as one asks whether the question of a hum. being's eternal blessedness
> [*Salighed*] is commensurable with its being decided [*Afgjørelse*] in time, by virtue of
> [*ved*] relation to a historical event, something terrible appears, something that torments
> one's sympathy—that then there will be countless millions who will not be eternally
> saved [*blive evige salige*].
> With regard to the countless millions who lived prior to this historical
> event—*item* with regard to the countless millions who have lived after it, but in complete
> ignorance of the existence of this historical event—if we assume that, in such
> circumstances, these people cannot in fact be eternally lost after all—if we assume this,
> and find a sympathetic consolation in so doing, then there remains the painful matter with
> respect to the millions who lived afterward or for every individual in relation to the
> countless people who live contemporaneously with him and for whom this historical
> event was proclaimed, but upon whom it made no decisive impression.
> As we stipulate, with greater and greater precision, the terms of salvation
> [*Saligheds-Vilkaaret*], to that same degree it becomes clear there are fewer and fewer
> whom we may dare believe will be saved. But for sympathy it is a torment to be saved in
> contrast to others.
> So I have come to understand it thusly: The terms of salvation are for each single
> individual [*Enkelt*], for each and every singular hum. being [*enkelt Msk.*], various [*det
> Forskjellige*]. There is given a common [*almindelig*] proclamation of Xnty, but as far as
> the terms of salvation are concerned, every single individual must relate themselves to
> God as a single individual…

But this sympathetic relief (which permits me to dare strain myself without being anxious for others) has, nonetheless, a sorrowful element—namely, that one hum. being can in no way help another, cannot in any deeper sense reassure him, or himself find reassurance in another.[52]

For Kierkegaard, Christianity's salvation narrative presents one problem nested within another. The broader problem is that an essentially historical account of salvation (such as that associated with Christianity in *Fragments*) threatens to exclude some individuals. Kierkegaard seems to grant fairly easily that ignorance of Christ should not condemn "countless millions"; though he does not specify how God would accomplish this, God, on Kierkegaard's account, seems moved – as the god in *Fragments* does – to offer salvation even to those who would be ignorant of a simplistically historical incarnation. This illustrates Kierkegaard's consistent commitment to the universal accessibility of salvation, anchored upon a single "historical event."

The solution to this problem is to recognize that salvation cannot be determined for someone by anything outside them (other than God, who is present in enabling the capacity for faith). (A statement like this is made by Climacus in *Fragments*' preface: "I can stake my own life, I can in all earnestness trifle with my own life—not with another's."[53]) What I take Kierkegaard to be getting at is something like what I have articulated earlier with respect to the faith/history problem: It is not possible for a single individual to know with certainty what occasion was simultaneously the moment of the condition's dispensation to them, nor is it possible to determine criteria for what would be a suitable occasion for the condition's dispensation (that is, what would have to appear in a report, or how accurate and precise it would have to be when compared to the historical record). This critical observation about *Fragments* is echoed in Kierkegaard's proclamation (in this journal entry) that, in order for the offer of

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[52] *KJN* 9, 480-481 / *SKS* 25, 474-475; NB30:111. I have slightly adjusted Bruce H. Kirmmse's translation.

[53] *PF* 8 / *SKS* 4, 217.

salvation to be universal, there may be "different" "conditions for salvation" for "each single

individual." One stumbles upon their idea of paradox (and the corresponding idea of God's self-

sacrificial love), but how they got there, and what narratives surround it, are not essential to it.

The subjective dynamic of faith overrides any corresponding world-historical explanation of

faith's temporal or causal conditions of possibility; the causation is there (it must be, if faith is

possible), but it is perpetually indeterminate.

But this solution brings another problem along. If the offer of salvation is universal, it

must be particular; and in this particularity, it means that only the single individual can be

responsible for it. Yet, if each is really individually responsible on these terms, then "one

hum[an] being can in no way help another." Effectively, to preserve universality and

responsibility, Kierkegaard commits himself to a form of soteriological liberalism; because no

one can do any substantive soteriological work for anyone else, each can only ever be an

autonomous citizen of the city of God. It is clear that this theological concern – an anxiety about

the salvation of others – lies underneath so much of Kierkegaard's authorial project, including

the Christology expressed in *Fragments*.[54]

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[54] In an extraordinary journal entry from 1849, titled "*Dialectics*," Kierkegaard explores the nexus of faith and grace with respect to the issue of personal responsibility or agency (referred to in terms of "subjectivity"):

> People have a pious suspicion concerning subjectivity, to the effect that as soon as the least is conceded to it, it will immediately lay claim to being meritorious—therefore objectivity is to be postulated.
> Fine. In order to constrain subjectivity it is rightly taught that no one is saved by good works, but by grace—and, consequently, by faith. Fine.
> But am I myself therefore unable to do anything with respect to becoming a believer [*Troende*]? Here one must either immediately answer with an absolute No, and then we have a fatalistic understanding of election by grace, or one must make a little concession. The fact is that people are always suspicious of subjectivity, and when it was established that a person is saved by faith, people immediately became suspicious that too much had been conceded here. So they added, ["]But no one can give himself faith, it is a gift of God for which I must pray.["] Fine.
> But can I myself pray, or are we to go further and say, ["]No, praying—i.e., praying for faith—is a gift of God that no one can give himself; it must be given to him["]? And what then? Then, once again, the ability to pray rightly that I might have the ability to pray rightly must also be given to me, etc.
> There are many, many complications—but at one or another point they must all be stopped by subjectivity. Making the criterion so great, so difficult can be praiseworthy as an expression for the majesty

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In these three chapters, I have made the case that in *Fragments*, Kierkegaard (as Climacus) offers a sincere account of Christianity centered on the historical incarnation. Though the incarnate god must be historically particular, I have argued that Climacus insulates the incarnation – both as 'first' world-historical fact, and as an object of worship – from problems associated with empirical description. Instead of (objectively) *in situ*, the incarnate god is discovered in a subjective encounter, which implies – but sheds no light on – an antecedent world-historical occurrence. (It is with these preceding arguments that I have attempted to deflate the so-called faith/history problem.)

Finally, I have argued that Climacus' thought-experiment reveals Kierkegaard's commitment to a relationship between Christianity and 'Paganism' that I have described using the model of the mechane. With respect to *Fragments*, I have examined the theological basis of this model, as well as gestured to some of Kierkegaard's reasons or adopting it; in particular, this involves Kierkegaard's consistent commitment to each individual being wholly responsible for their own salvation, a possibility only ensured by a mechane-like model of Christianity.

The following two chapters will draw together the work from this chapter and the discussion of *desire* from the Chapter I. In Chapter V, I will demonstrate that the model of the mechane, and Kierkegaard's axiomatic commitment to individual responsibility for salvation, find an expression in a form of *hope* that accompanies faith, as articulated in *Fear and Trembling*. In Chapter VI, I will gesture to how *Works of Love* also deploys the model of the mechane to defend an account of morality (as love for the neighbor) based on the distinction between the boundaries of 'pagan' and Christian agency.

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of God's infinity, but subjectivity cannot be excluded unless we want to have fatalism. (*KJN* 6, 420-421 / *SKS* 22, 415; NB14:123; punctuation redactions in *KJN*)

CHAPTER V.
IN FAITH, WHAT CAN I HOPE?:
FEAR AND TREMBLING'S ARTICULATION OF FAITH AS DENIAL OF THE TRAGIC

> Sarah denied it and said: "I did not laugh,"
> for she was frightened, but Abraham said:
> "No, you laughed."[1]

In this chapter, I build upon the concept of faith elucidated thus far in the thesis. Faith, I have shown, is for Kierkegaard a requirement for attaining eternal happiness or salvation (*Salighed*), but what does eternal happiness or salvation mean? What happens to an individual who has acquired it? *Philosophical Fragments* suggests an atonement (a "mutual understanding" between the individual and the god, or between the understanding and the paradox), but what shape does the atonement take for the follower? Are the individual's particular desires satisfied? *Fragments* is quiet about this.

Fear and Trembling will offer clues, even though it will not fill in the picture completely. In its narration of the *Akedah*, the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio posits a conception of faith that enables the Biblical character Abraham to get "Isaac back again by power of the absurd."[2] What does this mean? Among other questions, one might ask what the structure and requirements of actualizing faith are, and what de Silentio means by "absurd."[3] In this chapter I must address the requirements of faith and meaning of the "absurd" tangentially, but with the goal of interrogating what it means that, by faith, Abraham "gets Isaac back again." Put

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[1] Gen 18:15 (*GT-1740*). In Danish: "Og Sara nægtede, og sagde: jeg loe ikke; thi hun frygtede; men han sagde: nei, thi du loe." The "han" refers to Abraham, with whose name I have replaced the pronoun in my translation above.

[2] *FT* 57 / *SKS* 4, 150: "He [Abraham] gets Isaac back again by power of the absurd [*I Kraft af det Absurde*]. Therefore, Abraham is at no time a tragic hero but is something entirely different, either a murderer or a man of faith [*Troende*]." I have modified the Hongs' translation; they (reasonably) render *Kraft* as 'virtue,' which correctly translates the idiom *i Kraft af*, but I believe 'power' better captures the multiple meanings of *Kraft* (*ODS*).

[3] The Danish *absurd* would have carried the connotations of the Latin *absurdus*, but it often specifically referred to something unfair (*urimelig*), or something irrational (*fornuftstridende*), particularly to the absurd conclusion of a *reductio ad absurdum* ('*reducere til…*'). See *ODS*, including *ODS* Sup., for this last sense of the term.

differently: What does faith promise the individual, if anything, about themselves, their world, their future? What may the faithful individual *hope*?

I contend that in *Fear and Trembling*, faith must be understood as a response to the finite world's limitations that frustrate the human being's pursuit of desires. The limitation de Silentio takes to be emblematic of this problem is the chasm between individuals' efforts to live the best possible life, and the lives that they actually live. Because de Silentio often characterizes this limitation through an assessment of so-called tragic heroes (*tragiske Helte*) from history and myth, I will call this limitation the *tragic*. That is, it reflects what is tragic about finitude.

De Silentio frames this crucial marker of the tragic world with an "old proverb" at the beginning of the "Preliminary Expectoration"[4]: one's *work* often does not result in *bread*. Through two prolonged juxtapositions – (i) between the knight of faith and the knight of (infinite) resignation, and (ii) between Abraham and characters from Classical ('pagan') myth and history who sacrificed, or were prepared to sacrifice, their children (tragic heroes) – de Silentio reveals the central content of faith to be a commitment to the meta-position that the individual's highest desires are achievable through their efforts, and thus that whether they live a good life is their own responsibility. (This chapter will focus on the latter juxtaposition; the former would require its own prolonged discussion that goes beyond the scope of this part of my thesis.) A causal connection between 'works' and 'bread' proves to be a desire that undergirds other particular desires. At the same time, the *possibility* that the individual has a capacity for a faithful orientation toward the world and God – whether such an orientation is possible invokes the structure of the mechane – *constitutes* the very subjective posture in which the individual's efforts really are rewarded. What it means to get "Isaac back again" is to affirm that, in light of

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[4] *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123.

the possibility of faith, finitude is the stage on which an individual may pursue their highest desires, rather than an obstacle to such pursuits.

<center>* * *</center>

In the first section of this chapter, I ask how the structure of *Fear and Trembling* and the characteristics of its pseudonymous author might challenge an interpretation that views the book as representative of Kierkegaard's broader authorial goals. I also invoke two broad schemes for interpreting faith in *Fear and Trembling*; I side broadly with the latter scheme, on which I base my own exegesis of the text. In the second section, I unpack the opening passage of the "Preliminary Expectoration," arguing that it poses the *tragic* as a key problematic aspect of the world to which faith provides a solution. The passage central to this section laments the common disconnect between effort and result (or virtue and happiness), which marks *Fear and Trembling*'s broader portrayal of tragedy. In the third section, I attend to formulations of the text that show the structure of the mechane to be at work. Then, I examine de Silentio's juxtaposition of tragic heroes (particularly Agamemnon) and Abraham, to demonstrate that both the ethical heroism of the former archetype and the faith of the latter are connected to a *promise* (oath, covenant, etc.) that they have made. The promise of the tragic hero (a hero of the ethical) tacitly presumes the irreconcilability of their personal or particular desires and the general welfare, while Abraham's promise outright denies this irreconcilability. Faith, I conclude, involves a commitment to the causal connection between virtuous effort and a resulting good life, for which it must posit a "world of the spirit" as an arena in which this connection holds. Finally, I show that *Fear and Trembling* suggests that a commitment to the possibility of faith generates its own reward; in this way, faith reshapes desires such that the faithful individual may be satisfied that they alone – not fortune, nor an unjust cosmos – are responsible for the quality of their life.

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A. Obstacles and Pathways

> I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically.[5]

The primary trajectory of *Fear and Trembling* is to develop an account of faith (*Tro*) with reference to Abraham's covenant with God, and the *Akedah*. De Silentio contrasts the "movements" (*Bevægelser*) of Abraham's faith,[6] performed also by other characters – most notably, the knight of faith (*Troens Ridder*), who appears in the text in several shapes – with the movement of infinite resignation (*uendelig Resignation*) and the commitment of the tragic hero (*den tragiske Helt*) to the ethical (*det Ethiske*). De Silentio also draws a contrast between faith and an aesthetic (*æsthetisk*) impulse that emerges explicitly in the final major section of the text (Problema III). (Accordingly, faith serves as an alternative to the aesthetic and ethical categories of existence, which, in Chapter I, I characterized with an interpretation of *Either / Or*.)

Though the contours of *Fear and Trembling*'s articulation of faith are debated, it is clear that faith involves, not a rejection of temporality and finitude in favor of infinity or eternity, but rather some form of belief, trust, or other commitment to finitude, either in addition to infinitude or in contrast to it. After all, in *Fear and Trembling*, de Silentio writes "Temporality, finitude, is that on which everything turns."[7] In the context of *Fear and Trembling*'s treatment of Abraham, faith involves a posture of trust whereby "he gets back Isaac again" despite, or even because of, the sacrifice (*Offer*). (Perhaps having faith is causally implicated in Isaac's return.) Such an

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[5] Johannes de Silentio. *FT* 90 / *SKS* 4, 180.

[6] The term *Bevægelse* first appears in the preface to describe "assistant professor[s], tutor[s], and student[s]" who have supposedly made "the preliminary movement" (*Denne foreløbige Bevægelse*), that is, claiming to doubt everything – as with Descartes' methodological doubt – before going further (*FT* 5 / *SKS* 4, 101). The term is first deployed as an activity of faith – "the movement of faith" (*Troens Bevægelse*) – in the "Preliminary Expectoration" (*FT* 32 / *SKS* 4, 128).

[7] *FT* 49 / *SKS* 4, 143 (my translation).

event, explicitly described as "an impossibility" (*en Umulighed*)[8] and not merely "the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen,"[9] is achievable through the "power of the absurd." Moreover, this kind of faith is called "paradoxical"[10] or "the paradox."[11] The term "paradox" also refers to significant dilemmas relating faith to ethics, universality, communication, and God,[12] which, if they are to be dissolved, render Abraham's faith ungenuine. Therefore, these paradoxes are prerequisites for faith's possibility: "Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal… If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost…"[13]

1. Can *Fear and Trembling* be trusted?

Any interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* must grapple with these concepts, including what they mean and how they hang together (if indeed they do). But the book is fraught in a number of ways, which make it difficult to know how an interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* can shed light on Kierkegaard's thought more generally. Though it is nowhere near an exhaustive list, these issues include: First, the pseudonymity— Scholars have doubted that de Silentio can provide insight into Kierkegaard's view on faith, especially because de Silentio himself admits he does not have faith: "But I do not have faith; this courage I lack."[14] Second,

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[8] *FT* 47 / *SKS* 4, 141.

[9] *FT* 46 / *SKS* 4, 141.

[10] *FT* 49 / *SKS* 4, 143.

[11] E.g., *FT* 33, 37, 47 / *SKS* 4, 128, 132, 141.

[12] See Claire Carlisle, "Johannes de silentio's dilemma," in *Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling*: A Critical Guide*, ed. Daniel Conway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 44-60.

[13] *FT* 55 / *SKS* 4, 149.

[14] *FT* 34 / *SKS* 4, 129. For a selection of the many scholars who believe the character of de Silentio himself cannot be trusted, see C. Stephen Evans, "Faith as the *Telos* of Morality: A Reading of *Fear and Trembling*" (1993), in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, 209-223. Evans writes, "[T]here is evidence in *Fear and Trembling* itself that a

scholars have pointed out that several of de Silentio's key claims (and presumptions) seem to run contrary to positions Kierkegaard takes elsewhere: One— De Silentio describes faith as a "double-movement" (possibly incoherently), but elsewhere (such as in *Philosophical Fragments*) it appears to be a single movement.[15] Two— De Silentio seems to praise Abraham's apparent willingness to kill his son because of a private command from God, but in other works (such as *Works of Love*) Kierkegaard's ethics seems not to allow such exceptional acts, which would contradict the command to love the neighbor.[16] Three— Abraham in particular (as evinced by his

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straightforward reading of the book is likely to be misleading" (210). Evans takes note of the book's motto: "What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not" (*FT* 3 / *SKS* 4, 100). Evans writes, "This motto hints that Johannes's message about faith is written in such a way that it is likely to be misunderstood by anyone who, lacking faith, is not 'in the family.' Inasmuch as Johannes himself repeatedly informs us that he lacks faith and cannot understand it, the motto suggests that Johannes himself as "the messenger" may not adequately grasp the significance of his own work" (Evans, "Faith as the *Telos* of Morality," 211). Evans' argument is that, because de Silentio lacks faith, his understanding of faith – and hence, ability to communicate about it – must be compromised.

 Mooney makes a similar claim, putting it in terms of "experience." About de Silentio, he writes, "Because the poet-narrator lacks the conceptual-experiential repertoire available to the marvelous figure he venerates, the knight of faith appears, *to the poet*, to have acquired faith 'on the strength of the absurd'" (Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, 56).

 For *Fear and Trembling*'s motto, de Silentio's source is Johann Georg Hamann, "Letter to Johannes Gotthelf Lindner, Riga (March 29, 1763)," *Hamann's Schriften*, Vol. I-VIII, ed. Friedrich von Roth (Berlin: 1821-1843), vol. III [*ASKB* 538], 190. The account Hamann refers to is probably from Valerius Maximus' *Factorvm et Dictorvm Memorabilivm, Libri Novem*. Kierkegaard would likely have found this narrative in Valerius Maximus, *Valerius Maximus Sammlung merwürdiger Reden und Thaten*, Vol. I-V, trans. F. Hoffman (Stuttgart: 1829), vol. III [*ASKB* 1296], 455-456, 455n. For details, see *SKS* K4, 101 (100,1) and *FT*, "Notes," 339.

[15] *FT* 36 / *SKS* 4, 131. See [M.] Jamie Ferreira, "Describing What You Cannot Understand: Another Look at *Fear and Trembling*," *Kierkegaardiana* 24 (2007): 86-101. Ferreira offers a careful and complex account of de Silentio's ability to describe faith. In the end, she defends de Silentio's account as *mostly* coherent and *mostly* applicable to Kierkegaard's broader conception of faith (99). Yet it suffers from some internal inconsistency to the extent that the double-movement of faith de Silentio ascribes to both the knight of resignation and the tragic hero equivocates regarding the (first) movement of resignation. De Silentio, on Ferreira's reading, understands more than he thinks about certain aspects of faith, but less than he thinks about others. The reason for these inconsistencies, Ferreira suggests, is that de Silentio "is then like the messenger in the book's 'motto' – he does not understand what he conveys, while conveying what is necessary for us to understand that he doesn't understand" (98). She hypothesizes that Kierkegaard has included it to gesture to the incorrectness of framing faith as a double-movement (88).

[16] Many authors take variations on this stance. See Timothy P. Jackson, *Love Disconsoled: Meditations on Christian Charity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193-194. On de Silentio's distinction from Kierkegaard, Jackson writes,

> Writing from a religious point of view, Kierkegaard (but not de Silentio) can hold that what is forbidden by Christian ethics must also be forbidden by Christian faith, because God is the author of both. When de Silentio writes, "The absolute duty [to God] can lead one to do what ethics would forbid, but it can never lead the knight of faith to stop loving," [[*FT* 74 / *SKS* 4, 165]] he sets ethics and faith too completely in

communication with God), as well as the knight of faith in general, is capable of an "absolute relation to the absolute," which seems to circumvent the sin that, according to Kierkegaard's usual position, afflicts all human beings.[17]

In this chapter – and especially in this section of the chapter – there is not space to thoroughly refute all interpretations that would render problematic reading *Fear and Trembling* as advancing a conception of faith that accurately reflects Kierkegaard's thought, nor do I need to do so. It will be helpful, however, to situate my approach to the book vis-à-vis the scholars' observations I have invoked here. Regarding the charge that de Silentio's lack of faith precludes his ability to understand, and thus describe faith, I need only echo an observation I made in the introduction to this thesis pertaining to Kierkegaard's method. Simply put (*pace* Evans), Kierkegaard distinguishes between having become aware (of the possibility of a decision to become Christian) and having become Christian. One implication of this distinction is that being able to understand what faith is – de Silentio acknowledges frequently he cannot understand Abraham[18] – does not mean that one has become Christian, nor does having become Christian mean that one can provide a comprehensible description. In other words, being faithful does not render one's description of faith lucid or correct, nor does not being faithful poison any attempt

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opposition. De Silentio cannot make the leap out of a regnant moral paradigm and seems not a little fascinated by a raw power that must be obeyed. The power is sacred rather than profane, Johovah rather than the Hegelian state, but the pseudonym still seems latently authoritarian. (Single-bracketed interpolation Jackson's, double-bracketed citation mine.)

For another such account, see Gene Outka, "Religious and Moral Duty: Notes on *Fear and Trembling*," in *Religion and Morality: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Outka and John P. Reeder (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973), 204-254. Ferreira takes a similar line, contrasting the ethics of the pseudonymous *Fear and Trembling* with the genuine love-ethic of *Works of Love*. See M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's* Works of Love (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

[17] *FT* 56 / *SKS* 4, 150. See, e.g., Ettore Rocca, "If Abraham Is Not a Human Being," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 7 (2002): 247-258, especially 249.

[18] E.g., *FT* 37, 112 / *SKS* 4, 132, 200.

at description. De Silentio's admitted lack of courage (to have faith) does not annul his authority to describe faith because no such authority is available to anyone, regardless of whether they have become Christian. His attempt is sincere, and a reader can approach his dialectics accordingly.[19]

Now, to the three threads within *Fear and Trembling* that suggest inconsistency: First, regarding the double-movement of faith (*pace* Ferreira)— I agree with Ferreira that de Silentio's articulation of faith's "double-movement" is an oddity, and generates – if not inconsistencies – at least interpretive brambles from which it is difficult to extricate him. Moreover, as seen in *Fragments*, faith seems to involve a *single* movement by God or the regenerated will (or some combination thereof), through which an individual receives the truth-condition. It is my position, however, that de Silentio's description of faith as involving a double-movement is largely consistent with Kierkegaard's descriptions of faith in other texts. The double-movement, whereby one surrenders some commitment to a finite good or desire in the act of infinite resignation and then returns to embrace the finite, indeed over-sequentializes the movement of faith, but from the perspective of someone outside faith (such as de Silentio), describing faith as involving (first) a movement of resignation captures an attitude of acceptance that the best life cannot be achieved by pursuing natural or finite desires. This attitude is consistent with Kierkegaard's broader conception of faith. Such a move is not sufficient for faith (here, or on Kierkegaard's broader account), but it may be a necessary part, even if not a first step *per se*.[20]

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[19] Kant, for instance, is quite clear that the conditions of possibility of freedom cannot be cognized, but the function of freedom, including what it must be capable of in order to constitute freedom for a creature like the human being and how it interacts with other faculties, are described in great detail through his corpus. Faith, for de Silentio (and Kierkegaard), is similar.

[20] Even though a character such as *Either / Or*'s A has (likely) not made the movement of resignation, he might describe Wilhelm's position as one of resignation, insofar as Wilhelm has resigned the possibility of securing all his natural desires, electing to be satisfied with less.

Second (*pace* Gene Outka and others), to the claim that *Fear and Trembling* advances a divine command ethic, or barring that, defends the possibility of an exception to a universalized love-ethic— This claim is based on a misinterpretation of de Silentio's deployment of the *Akedah*, which pushes scholars to conclusions having little to do with *Fear and Trembling*'s central themes. (With reference to other scholars' positions on the book, I will say a little more about this in the following subsection.)

Third (*pace* Ettore Rocca): to the claim that Abraham does not experience sin, and therefore *Fear and Trembling*'s account of faith is distinct from the genuine Kierkegaardian version[21]— I concede the point that the character Abraham, on de Silentio's narration, is different from human beings within Christendom, and may be sinless. However, de Silentio's account of faith only uses the Abraham narrative as a point of departure because it underscores – as I will demonstrate in this chapter – the content of Abraham's covenantal faith in contrast to tragic heroes' commitments to other forms of oaths and promises; de Silentio does not need Abraham to be sinful (nor does he need Abraham to have a conception of Christ) for the key elements of Abraham's faith to be applicable also to those (sinners) in Christendom. Moreover, *Fear and Trembling* offers many other examples of figures who have or could have faith but do not (because of sin); de Silentio himself lacks the courage, showing precisely where sin cuts against faith, in a way sin does not for the steadfast Abraham (who, on de Silentio's narration, never wavers).[22]

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[21] Rocca's framing of the problem in "If Abraham Is Not a Human Being" is more nuanced than my summary statement attests. He does not think *Fear and Trembling* sheds no light on Kierkegaard's broader concept of faith, but instead believes that the text's articulation of faith is problematic due to Christ's absence (Rocca, "If Abraham…," 254).

[22] I offer a bit of speculation here: One of the problems with *Fear and Trembling* as a theological and philosophical production is that the text's primary motif involves Abraham's relationship to God, but Kierkegaard cannot ever illustrate what it would be like for Abraham to *come to faith*. Part of this can indeed be explained by Abraham falling outside of Christendom. However, it seems that Kierkegaard also wishes he could show how Abraham *could*

2. Two paradigms for interpreting *Fear and Trembling*

There are myriad schemes through which scholars have attempted to unpack *Fear and Trembling*'s meaning. Here (in the body of this subsection), I briefly address two, the latter of which will be crucial for staking my own intervention in the scholarship on the book: moral exceptionalism readings, and eschatological trust / radical hope readings.[23] The main item of

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have been otherwise than faithful (that is, if he had been sinful). Hence, Kierkegaard includes the *Stemning* ("Exordium"), four counter-Biblical 'vignettes' featuring Abraham falling short of faith (*FT* 9-14 / *SKS* 4, 104-111). It is almost as if Kierkegaard wants it both ways: to invoke the *Akedah* to showcase in stark terms the drama of faith, but without Abraham manifesting that drama internally. Yet the point of the text is presumably to depict the structure of the internal drama, for which the *Akedah* is an allegory or analogy. The result is an occasionally awkward blend of partial perspectives on Abraham (including the "Exordium") and numerous other characters and images (including de Silentio himself), which fill in the gaps in the text's core account of Abraham as faith's father.

[23] A broader typology of secondary literature on *Fear and Trembling* could include (i) biographical interpretations, (ii) a more general 'moral conduct' category (of which 'moral exceptionalism' readings are one part), and (iii) a general soteriological category (of which trust / hope readings are one part).

Regarding (i) biographical readings, some have argued that *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* (published the very same day) constitute a secret message to Regine Olsen, from whom Kierkegaard famously broke his engagement, or at the very least that these texts comprise an attempt to explain and cope with this decision in his writing. See, e.g., Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 258-265 / Garff, *S.A.K. (Søren Aabye Kierkegaard): en biografi* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2000), 227-234; and Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 191. Other accounts identify Kierkegaard's relationship with his father as a salient theme in the book. See, e.g., Ronald M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 186-200; Ronald M. Green, "Deciphering *Fear and Trembling*'s Secret Message," *Religious Studies* 22, no. 1 (Mar. 1986): 95-111, especially 108-111; and Wolfdietrich von Kloeden, "Der Vater M. P. Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard as a Person*, eds. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1986): 14-25.

Moral conduct readings (ii) argue, in general, that *Fear and Trembling* advances some position about appropriate moral or ethical conduct, or that moral norms should be subordinated to religious norms or even done away with entirely. Sometimes they are based on an 'irrationalist' reading of the text, and sometimes they propose that de Silentio is arguing for a higher form of moral conduct associated with faith, but not the category of the ethical). Though several of the following authors have offered different accounts of *Fear and Trembling* in other productions, Outka, Ferreira, Caputo, Troels Nørager, Robert Merrihew Adams, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Jacques Derrida have advanced versions of moral conduct readings: Outka, "Religious and Moral Duty"; Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 40; Caputo, *How to Read Kierkegaard*, 53; Troels Nørager, *Taking Leave of Abraham: An Essay on Religion and Democracy* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008), 45-98; Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 290; Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, in *The Gift of Death (Second Edition) and Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008 [1992]), 61-69 / Derrida, *L'Éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don: colloque de Royaumont, décembre 1990* (Paris: Métailié-Transition / Diffusion Seuil, 1992), 62-69; and Lévinas, "A propos de 'Kierkegaard vivant,'" in *Noms propres* ([Montpellier:] Fata Morgana, 1976), 89 / Levinas, *Proper names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 76.

Soteriological readings (iii) assert that Kierkegaard is most interested in *Fear and Trembling* to provide insight (perhaps indirectly) into Lutheran conceptions of sin, grace, and faith. There are a wide variety of explanations how the book does so. See, e.g., Ronald M. Green, "Enough is enough! 'Fear and Trembling' is Not about Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 191-209; Ronald M. Green, "'Developing' *Fear and Trembling*" (1998) in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 257-282; Jeffrey Hanson, *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith: The Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious in* Fear and Trembling (Bloomington and Indianapolis:

Fear and Trembling on which these two schemes differ is how to understand the role of God's

command to sacrifice Isaac as a narrative element involved in de Silentio's praise of Abraham's

faith— Was God's command a *special opportunity* for Abraham to express faith, or an *obstacle*,

through which Abraham demonstrates faith by persevering?

Outka's interpretation is a classic example of the moral exceptionalism scheme: "The

kind of religious belief held in *Fear and Trembling* exemplifies *par excellence* the effects of

bringing a being on the stage [God] who is uniquely the object of both love and fear. What

occupies us here of course is the effect on morality. *Can* or *must* religious duty conflict with

moral duty? Kierkegaard opts for the stronger contention: collision must occur."[24] Though Outka

criticizes de Silentio's portrayal of the ethical as inconsistent,[25] and though he himself would

modulate de Silentio's claims about the necessary conflict of divine command and moral

obligation,[26] *Fear and Trembling*, according to Outka, evinces the view that a duty to obey

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Indiana University Press, 2017); John Lippitt, *The Routledge Guidebook to Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2003]), 175-195; and John J. Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, ed. E. Mooney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 196-233. I believe soteriological readings of *Fear and Trembling* to be broadly correct, and such accounts have largely supplanted moral conduct readings in recent years. However, moral conduct readings remain influential. For instance, in Gordon Marino's edited volume *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, published largely for the purpose of undergraduate education, the volume's first selections are excerpts from *Fear and Trembling* that highlight the conflict between faith and ethics: "Problemata" I and II ("Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?" and "Is there an absolute duty to God?") (*FT* 54, 68 / *SKS* 4, 148, 160). These excerpts are not given suitable context, and I believe this excerpting practice encourages moral conduct readings. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [excerpts], trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, ed. Gordon Marino (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2004), 7, 24.

Most interpretations of *Fear and Trembling* do not neatly fall within one of the categories I have listed; there are some excellent ones, for instance, that perform exegetical maneuvers similar to soteriological readings but argue that *Fear and Trembling* has ramifications for how to understand a faithful individual's moral posture that anticipate Kierkegaard's later non-pseudonymous work's positions on Christian love and the sanctified will, including *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847) and *Works of Love*. See, e.g., Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*; Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's* Fear and Trembling*: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010); and Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46-108.

[24] Outka, "Religious and Moral Duty," 205.

[25] Ibid., 253.

[26] Ibid., 250.

God's commands *will* for the faithful person override ethical obligation, understood in universalistic Kantian terms.[27] Put succinctly, this scheme for reading *Fear and Trembling* examines the one-on-one communication between God and Abraham as critical to understanding faith, and argues that the possibility of such communication carves a space for a life in the world that excepts someone from universal moral norms. On Outka's reading, Abraham is the father of faith *because he is receptive to God's commands*, something which – outside of that subjective space – is horrifying. On this rendering, the command to kill Isaac is not an obstacle for faith, but is the salient point of contact between God and Abraham in which faith expresses itself.

The more significant approach to *Fear and Trembling* for my argument is the scheme for interpreting faith as 'eschatological trust' or 'radical hope.' John J. Davenport has been a preeminent advocate for an interpretation of this sort, but John Lippitt has developed it further.[28] These interpretations attend to the context of the *Akedah*, including Abraham's covenant with God. God makes a promise to Abraham about a child (Isaac), and then later (in Genesis 22) God threatens to change the terms of the covenant (or at least seems to) by ordering Abraham to kill Isaac. In this sense, the command to sacrifice Isaac serves as narrative *obstacle* that Abraham's faith *overcomes*. (Based on this observation, Davenport draws the conclusion – one I agree with – that divine command and moral exceptionalism accounts of *Fear and Trembling* begin on the wrong foot, so overemphasize the disparity between Abraham and others as a moral agent.[29])

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[27] Ibid., 216.

[28] See Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*"; and Lippitt, *Guidebook to* Fear and Trembling, 2nd ed., 175-195. Davenport identifies Hannay as one among several earlier antecedents for this line of exegesis (221). See Hannay, *Kierkegaard. The Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 80. Roe Fremstedal also appears to proffer such an interpretation. See Fremstedal, "Kierkegaard's double movement of faith and Kant's moral faith," *Religious Studies* 48, no. 2 (June 2012): 199-220, especially 207-212.

[29] See Davenport's arguments against 'V-suspension' and 'K-suspension' (Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," 212-220).

According to Davenport, Abraham's faith is a "firm conviction that God's revealed promise will be fulfilled" regardless of any obstacles that may emerge.[30] And an obstacle does emerge: God demands that Abraham sacrifice Isaac; thus, it would seem (at this point) inevitable that God will not fulfill the covenant. But according to Davenport, in faith, Abraham believes that "even if Isaac is sacrificed, somehow he [Isaac] will still live and have children leading to a great nation chosen for God's plan."[31] This seems to involve, for Davenport, that Abraham simultaneously holds beliefs that at least appear to contradict one another: "Because of his faith in God's original promise to him, Abraham does not believe that sacrificing Isaac on Mount Moriah will permanently end Isaac's life in this world. This clearly entails that Abraham believes he can sacrifice Isaac *without murdering him*. This paradox depends on trust that God's promise is true, even when God's own later command mysteriously tempts him to doubt it."[32] On Davenport's reading, Abraham's faith involves a (practical) intention to perform the sacrifice, but also the belief that the sacrifice will not constitute murder, or will not permanently "end Isaac's life in this world." Davenport is clear that for de Silentio, "Abraham's faith does not depend on any calculation of how this could be."[33] One does not need to *predict* what will transpire, but somehow God must fulfill the covenant, on some interpretation that requires or results in Isaac's literal, physical survival.

Davenport's reading goes further, arguing that the structure of Abraham's faith reveals de Silentio's conception of the (formal) structure of faith in general: "Kierkegaard recognizes that even though the content of Abraham's faith (the promise in which he believes) does not refer to a

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[30] Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," 201.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

new life in a world to come, it performs the same eschatological function that faith in salvation beyond death does for Christians."[34] Faith involves, on Davenport's account, trust that somehow the good will ultimately prevail, despite obstacles that no human agency can overcome.[35] (No invocation of the afterlife is necessary, but it is possible on this model.) The qualification about agency is crucial. However the good wins the day, it cannot be by human hands, for the problems that require eschatological resolution are too large. God must do the work.[36]

On the basis of Davenport's reading, Lippitt seeks to determine this aspect of faith (as trust) more thoroughly. He does so by locating in de Silentio's concept of faith a conception of hope that Davenport fails to account for. After praising Davenport's interpretation of faith as eschatological trust, Lippitt writes, "So what is it that we are to learn from Abraham? The short answer is: what it means to trust – and, I would add – to hope. My further suggestion is that Abraham serves as a precursor of the love that *Works of Love* describes as 'believing all things' [*WL* 225f / *SKS* 9, 227f] (a deliberation essentially about trust) and 'hoping all things' [*WL* 246f /

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Readings such as Davenport's, which treats faith as *eschatological trust*, are open to a wide variety of mechanisms by which – contrary to reason – God acts to uphold the good. Though, again, I subscribe broadly to Davenport's model of faith as eschatological, I believe de Silentio forecloses a number of options through which God could act "by power of the absurd." For instance, I think de Silentio dismisses (though not altogether explicitly) reliance upon supernatural miracles, or a paradisiac afterlife, to explain how faith "gets Isaac back again."
 De Silentio provides some examples from which I draw this conclusion. Contrasting a simplistic hope that something miraculous will happen with faith's expectancy, de Silentio writes, "If, for example, in the face of every difficulty, a young girl still remains convinced that her desire will be fulfilled, this assurance is by no means the assurance of faith" (*FT* 47 / *SKS* 4, 141). This naïve hope for a miracle or unlikely eucatastrophe is referred to as an "esthetic emotion," not faith (ibid.). Elsewhere, de Silentio distinguishes between Abraham's expectancy of faith (in which his youthful desire is preserved) and that of Moses striking the rock in Num 20:1-12: "Moses struck the rock with his staff, but he did not have faith" (*FT* 19 / *SKS* 4, 115). In the case of Moses, water indeed comes from the rock as Moses had hoped; this suggests that de Silentio is disconnecting the result that is hoped for from the disposition of faith. Even though the supernatural miracle occurs, this does not imply faith.
 Suggesting that de Silentio is unsatisfied with the notion of an afterlife, and may even classify it as an "esthetic emotion" like the naïve young girl's hope, he mentions twice that Abraham had faith "for this life" (*FT* 20 / *SKS* 4, 116). This concern with the world, rather than some vision of an afterlife, is reflected throughout the book's characterization of the knight of faith (in contrast to the knight of infinite resignation, who may or may not take refuge in the notion of an afterlife).

SKS 9, 246f].”[37] Lippitt takes note of Davenport's presumption that faith's referent is the literal delivery by divine agency (through some unpredictable and inexplicable means) of the promised good. Lippitt writes, "Is faith in 'getting Isaac back' faith in 'something particular'…? …After all, God has made Abraham a specific promise. But compare the 'tax collector' knight of faith whom Johannes imagines fantasizing about a sumptuous meal [*FT* 39 / *SKS* 4, 133]. He hopes against the available evidence, yet if he doesn't get this particular something…, then 'curiously enough he is exactly the same' [*FT* 39 / *SKS* 4, 134]."[38] For Davenport, faith involves trust that somehow, God will stay true (*literally*) to the covenant: I may be tasked with sacrificing my son, but I, Abraham, will be the ancestor to Isaac, and he the ancestor to nations. Lippitt's rejoinder, based on other elements of *Fear and Trembling* (such as the tax collector; *Rodemester*), is to challenge Davenport's presumption that the covenant must be upheld particularly *qua* literally.

To supply an account of hope that fits *Fear and Trembling*, Lippitt turns to philosopher Jonathan Lear's concept of "radical hope," derived from Lear's evaluation of Amerindians' ('hopeful') religious responses to catastrophic loss of their homes and cultures.[39] The crucial tenets of Lippitt's invocation of Lear's account of "radical hope" agree with Davenport's presentation of faith as 'eschatological trust,' but they also include, first, a recognition that the individual's desires and preconceptions of the good life may (and likely *must*) be transformed as the individual comes to faith,[40] and second, that a form of courage is required to embrace the

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[37] Lippitt, *Guidebook to* Fear and Trembling, 2nd ed., 186.

[38] Ibid., 187.

[39] Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[40] Lippitt, *Guidebook to* Fear and Trembling, 189.

restructuring of one's values through this transition.[41] On Lippitt's reading of *Fear and Trembling* (contra Davenport), the knight's faith does not refer to a literal fulfillment of the promised good. Not only will the promise be delivered in a fundamentally unpredictable *way*, but *what* is delivered may be different than expected.[42] On such a reading of faith, Abraham's faith that he will "get Isaac back again" may be figurative language for a form of mature grief, or even genuine sorrow, that does not collapse into resignation. Perhaps, in faith, the knight of faith does not literally marry the beloved princess, but comes to have his desires reshaped such that he respects the princess's decision not to marry him and treasures the honesty of their relationship.[43]

Davenport's interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* is on the right track, and Lippitt provides a crucial improvement. Both scholars offer alternatives to problematic interpretations of *Fear and Trembling* that search vainly for a justification of the position that private religious experience can dictate ethical conduct. Lippitt's version of "radical hope" is especially helpful in going beyond Davenport, that is, in providing an explanation for how Abraham might "get Isaac back again," or for how the knight of faith might get the beloved princess back, such that de Silentio's vision of faith is satisfied without specific literal conditions being met (such as Isaac not dying, or the princess marrying the knight). De Silentio claims that in faith, "one does not lose the finite but gains it whole and intact."[44] This is an expression of recovering the passion and joy of one's capacity to desire. It does not imply retrieving the finite in the precise

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[41] Ibid., 192f.

[42] This resonates with Paul's account of the two covenants (of the spirit, of the flesh) in Gal 3-4. It also reflects the brief comments about weening that close each of the four vignettes in the "Exordium." As with mother's milk, one can grow attached, not only to an object, but also to a particular constellation of desires for objects. In faith, both the desires and the entire arrangement thereof are subject to change (*FT* 9-14 / *SKS* 4, 104-111).

[43] *FT* 41f / *SKS* 4, 136f. This is my own example based on elements from *Fear and Trembling*, not Lippitt's.

[44] *FT* 37 / *SKS* 4, 132.

configuration that the person might have desired, absent faith.[45] Getting Isaac back again may indeed look very different than one might expect.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

In the pages above, I have advanced my support for 'eschatological trust' / 'radical hope' interpretations of *Fear and Trembling*, and in particular, Lippitt's account. However, Lippitt's interpretation of faith and hope can be developed in two respects. First, it is possible to identify precisely the feature of the cosmos that, on de Silentio's account, threatens the ultimacy of the good: in this world, one's efforts do not guarantee a proportional reward. This serves as a meta-obstacle for the achievement of an individual's desires. Accordingly, when one has faith, one commits to the non-ultimacy of this meta-obstacle, which reflects an undergirding meta-desire that individuals' efforts *do* guarantee proportional rewards. Second, the operation by which faith counteracts this obstacle can be inferred through *Fear and Trembling*'s remarks about individual responsibility. In these elements of the text, I locate again Kierkegaard's *axiom* about individual responsibility. Moreover, in these passages, de Silentio hints that the conditions according to which faith is possible seem at the same time to satisfy the individual's meta-desire by providing a subjective (spiritual) arena in which one's efforts are rewarded.

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[45] On this interpretation, *Either / Or*'s Johannes the seducer, for instance, would *not* – in faith – somehow remain in love with Cordelia, nor would Cordelia magically love him back; he might – though this is merely to guess – realize the error of how he had formerly coordinated his desires and pursue a new type of love, that is, a love for the neighbor.

B. On Working and Eating and Sowing and Reaping

> Every Night & every Morn
> Some to Misery are Born
> Every Morn & every Night
> Some are Born to Sweet Delight
> Some are Born to Sweet Delight
> Some are Born to Endless Night[46]

> In the world of spirit, it is otherwise.[47]

1. An Old Proverb

Some people are luckier than others. At the extremes – whether born with a twisted spine,[48] left to freeze by cruel parents,[49] or decimated as part of a wager by the very God they revere[50] – some people's lives are miserable due to no decisions or demerits of their own, while others' lives are rich and secure based on no decisions or merits of their own. Some are born to sweet delight, others born to endless night. The cosmos does not seem to be governed by justice. It seems ultimately unfair. It seems fundamentally tragic.[51]

De Silentio recounts this state of affairs at the very opening of the "Preliminary Expectoration." This passage poses the problem for which faith will offer a solution:

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[46] Excerpt from William Blake, *The Pickering Manuscript*, The Pickering Manuscript Copy 1 (c. 1807), Manuscript Object 18 (Bentley 126.18), in, *William Blake Archive,* eds. Morris Eaves, Robert Essick, and Joseph Viscomi (2011), <http://www.blakearchive.org/>. Accessed 16 December 2019, <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/bb126.1?descId=bb126.1.ms.18>. This portion of the manuscript is often read as a single poem titled "Auguries of Innocence," but there is doubt among scholars whether the manuscript heading "Auguries of Innocence" refers to the lines I have excerpted here. See Blake, *William Blake: Collected Poems*, ed. W. B. Yeats (London & New York: Routledge, 2002 [1905]), 248-249. I have elected to use ampersands (&) to represent the character indicating "and" in Blake's script.

[47] Johannes de Silentio. *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123.

[48] Yves Marie André, *La vie du R. P. Malebranche* (Paris: Ingold & Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1886), 4n5.

[49] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 1992), 204-205.

[50] Job 1:9-12 (*NRSV*).

[51] As I will show later, no matter how hard *Fear and Trembling*'s tragic heroes work toward the good, they cannot secure it entirely or reliably.

An old proverb [*Et gammelt Ord*] picked up from the external and visible [*udvortes og synlige*] world, says: "Only the one who works gets the bread [*kun den, der arbeider, faaer Brødet*]." Oddly enough, the proverb does not fit the world in which it is most at home, for the external [*udvortes*] world is grounded on the law of imperfection [*Ufuldkommenhedens Lov*], and here it occurs over and over again that the one who does not work gets the bread, and the one who sleeps gets it even more abundantly than the one who works. In the external [*udvortes*] world, everything is the possessor's [*Ihændehaverens*]; it is subject to the law of indifference [*Ligegyldighedens Lov*], and the one who holds the ring, the spirit of the ring obeys him whether he is a Noureddin or an Aladdin, and the one who holds the world's treasures, he has them regardless of how he got them.[52]

Here, de Silentio laments that in life, it does not seem that we receive our just deserts. Some may work righteously for the good life, but they are not guaranteed to receive it, while others fail to work, but seem to live good lives. In short, in the "external visible world," it seems we do not reap what we sow, nor, if we seek, do we necessarily find. (This is contrasted with "the world of the spirit," in which "divine order prevails."[53] I will pick up on "the world of the spirit" shortly.)

Inquiring into the source of the "old proverb" will help to make sense of it: "Only the one who works gets the bread." Identifying the source proves more complicated than expected. Commentators have suggested that its origin is a pericope from 2 Thessalonians 3:

You yourselves know how it [*det* refers to Christ's teaching, "*den Lærdom*" from 2 Thess 3:6] requires you to imitate us; for we did not live without propriety among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread [*Brød*] for nothing but instead worked [*arbeidede*] with grit and strain night and day so not to be a burden to you. Not because we had only that much ability; but we wanted to give you an example to imitate. For when we were with you, we required [*bøde*] of you that: If anyone does not want to work [*arbeide*], he also ought not eat [*han bør ikke heller æde*]. For we hear that some among you are going about without propriety, and do not work [*arbeide*], but go about your own useless business. Regarding

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[52] *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123. I have adjusted the translation by Hong and Hong. I follow Hannay in glossing "*Et gammelt Ord*" as "an old proverb." See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1985), 57. De Silentio's description of the phrase as a *gammelt Ord* is suggestive of *Míshlê* (מִשְׁלֵי), the book titled *Proverbs* in English. This book was titled *Salomo Ordsprog* or *Ordsprogene*, depending on the particular published edition, in Danish Bibles of Kierkegaard's era. However, the verbiage of these passages is different than *Fear and Trembling*, with *arbeide* not appearing in either proverb.

[53] Ibid.

this we command and admonish, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that they work [*arbeide*] in silence and eat their own bread [*Brød*].[54]

However, the content of the Biblical passage does not thematically resonate with the opening of the "Preliminary Expectoration." Though the words *arbeide* and *Brød* indeed appear in proximity to one another in the *NT-1819* version of the passage, Paul's epistle does not comment on the relationship between actions and just deserts with which de Silentio is concerned. Paul's words have a very particular context, and they are directed to a small community of early Christians in Thessalonica, some of whose members were accused of avoiding work (possibly based on theological convictions). Moreover, it would be odd for de Silentio to refer to Paul's specific injunction to specific individuals as an "old proverb."

What, then, is the origin of the old proverb? Despite the problem I just articulated, the textual similarity to 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 is difficult to ignore. I contend that de Silentio is *indirectly* alluding to a repurposing of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 which was common in Scandinavia (and elsewhere) after the Reformation. Birgit Stolt has documented that Luther's writings about the ethics of labor were taken up by Swedish reformers such as Olaus Petri, against the practices of Christian mendicants. Stolt writes: "The duty to work in connection to vocation, not least the Bible verse, 'The one who does not work shall also not eat' [2 Thess 3:10], fit Swedish agrarian society like a glove."[55] The verse 2 Thessalonians 3:10 was associated particularly with Genesis

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[54] See *FT*, "Explanatory Notes," 343 / *SKS* K4, 114 (123,3), for this citation. The precise passage identified by Hong and Hong is 2 Thess 3:10, while the *SKS* commentaries identify the *NT-1819* version of 2 Thess 3:10-12. The passage quoted here is 2 Thess 3:7-12 (*NT-1819*). In Danish: "I vide selv, hvorledes det bør Eder at efterfølge os. Thi vi levede ikke uskikkeligen iblandt Eder; ikke heller aade vi Nogens Brød for Intet, men arbeidede med Møie og Besvær, Nat og Dag, for ikke at være Nogen af Eder til Byrde. Ikke fordi vi jo havde Magt dertil; men vi vilde give Eder os selv til et Mønster at efterfølge. Thi og der vi vare hos Eder, bøde vi Eder, at, dersom Nogen ikke vil arbeide, han bør ikke heller æde. Vi høre nemlig, at Nogle omgaaes uskikkeligen iblandt Eder, og arbeide ikke, men tage sig unyttig Handel for. Saadanne byde og formane vi ved vor Herre Jesum Christum, at de arbeide i Stilhed, og æde deres eget Brød."

[55] Birgit Stolt, *Luther själv: Hjärtats och glädjens teolog* [Luther Himself: The Theologian of Heart and Joy] (Skellefteå, Sweden: Artos & Norma, 2004), 38 (my translation from Swedish). I have Elisabeth Gerle to thank for directing me to this source. She cites this passage (by Stolt) in Elisabeth Gerle, *Passionate Embrace: Luther on*

3:19,[56] becoming widely circulated to admonish the peasantry to perform (largely agricultural) labor: "Through the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the earth, for you were taken therefrom; for you are dust and shall return to dust."[57] The same association between these verses is maintained in textual notes in *GT-1740* and *NT-1819*; Genesis 3:19 is cited directly under 2 Thessalonians 3:10. This suggests that 2 Thessalonians 3:10's transformation into a motto about the duty to perform labor would likely have held in Denmark as it had, according to Stolt, in Sweden. On this hypothesis, de Silentio's old proverb would indeed be alluding to 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12. But more importantly, the force of the reference involves, not Paul's epistles to the early Christian community in Thessalonica, but rather God's decree in Genesis 3:19 that postlapsarian beings must conduct labor in order to survive.

I can now offer a clearer picture of the opening passage of the "Preliminary Expectoration." When de Silentio remarks that, "Oddly enough, the proverb does not fit the world in which it is most at home" – that is, the "external [*udvortes*] and visible world" – he means to associate externality and sensation with some notion of fallenness. In the postlapsarian world – that is, the world initiated by God's decree in Genesis 3:19 that humans must labor and struggle to survive – one *has to work*. But, perhaps surprisingly, the world in which we human beings live and toil thus seems fraught in a double sense: Not only have we been condemned by

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Love, Body, and Sensual Presence (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 300 / Gerle, *Sinnlighetens närvaro: Luther mellan kroppskult och kroppsförakt* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2015), 384.

[56] See Stolt, *Luther själv*, 33; and Gerle, *Passionate Embrace*, 300 / 384. Indeed, this usage of 2 Thess 3:10 appears to be widespread, even outside of Scandinavia and into the twentieth century. British colonist John Smith cited it in his speeches to the colonists he governed in Jamestown to discourage sloth. See John Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia [1606–1612]," in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580–1631)*, vol. I, ed. Philip L. Barbour (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 259: "…you must obey this for a law, that he that will not worke shall not eate (except by sicknesse he be disabled) for the labours of 30 or 40 honest and industrious men shall not bee consumed to maintaine 150 idle varlets."

[57] Gen 3:19 (*GT-1740*): "I dit Ansigtes Sveed skal du æde Brødet, indtil du bliver til Jord igien; thi du er tagen deraf; thi du er Støv, og skal blive til Støv igien."

God to sweat for our sustenance, but our work does not even guarantee the bread for which that very work is supposedly required.

This is important if we consider that, for de Silentio (and for Kierkegaard elsewhere), human beings have an eternal consciousness. The opening passages of the "Eulogy on Abraham" reveal what this means: namely, despite it being a product of fallenness, the human being wants to work, labor, *struggle*—

> If there were no eternal consciousness [*evig Bevisthed*] in a human being… if a boundless emptiness, never satisfied [*aldrig mættes*], hid beneath everything, what would life be other than despair? If such were the situation, if there were no sacred bond that knit humankind together, if one generation [*Slægt*] rose after another like the greenery in the forest [*som Løvet i Skoven*], if one generation succeeded another like birdsong in the forest, if a generation passed through the world as a ship passes through the sea, as wind through the desert, a thoughtless and unfruitful act [*Gjerning*], if an eternal oblivion, always hungry, lurked for its prey and there were no power strong enough tear it away from it—how empty and consolation-less life would be![58]

In this passage, de Silentio alludes to the words of the *Iliad*'s Glaucus II ("*som Løvet i Skoven*"), responding to a question posted by Diomedes on the battlefield about his ancestry.[59] Glaucus denies that he has divine heritage, but the two recognize quickly that their ancestors were friends, leading them to exchange armor rather than battle one another. De Silentio's point is that, even though humans are beings subjected to the limitations of nature (that is, to the extent that "one generation rose after another like the greenery in the forest" – to the extent that Glaucus II is not

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[58] *FT* 15 / *SKS* 4, 112. I have modified the translation by Hong and Hong.

[59] Ibid. Note the phrase "som Løvet i Skoven" ("like the greenery in the forest") and the repetition of "Slægter," which indicate an allusion to Book VI of the *Iliad* as translated into Danish. See Homer, *Homers Iliade* (Sjette Sang), trans. Christian Wilster, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1836), 99 (lines 145-149). (This allusion is noted at *FT* 15n3 / *SKS* K4, 108 (112,8).) Glaucus responds to Diomedes' suggestion that he is a disguised divine being:

> Brave son of Tydeus, why do you ask me regarding my lineage? / Just as the leaves of trees, so are the generations of humanity, / The leaves are strewn by the wind onto the earth, but when the forests green, / fresh ones burst forth on branches through spring's return, / So the generations of humanity: one is born, another disappears. (My translation is from Wilster's Danish edition: "Modige Søn af Tydeus! hvi spørger du mig om min Herkomst? / Ligesom Træernes Blade, saaledes er Menneskens Slægter, / Bladene strøes af Blæsten paa Jord, men naar Skovene grønnes, / Skyde der friske paa Grenene frem ved Vaarens Igjenkomst, / Saaledes Menneskens Slægter, een fødes, en anden forsvinder.")

of Olympian heritage), there is still something in the human being that yearns for meaning and purpose beyond the natural cycle of generation and destruction. The human being wishes to have a lineage, an existence, a name that persists. In contrast to the songbirds or forest greenery, the human individual desires to express their individuality into the finite world such that it could persist through time, approximating eternity.

This process of instantiating one's eternal consciousness in finitude is *work*. (Hence, de Silentio recounts the struggles of various heroic characters, including Abraham: "…everyone was great wholly in proportion to the magnitude of that with which he *struggled*."[60]) For this struggle to be satisfying to the human being, there must be some basic order to it, such that human struggles find a meaningful, "proportion[al]" reward. But as the opening to the "Preliminary Expectoration" laments, the world is not just— it is tragic. At least the "external" world is. Is there another world? De Silentio establishes this notion of the flawed "external" world as a foil for what he calls the "world of the spirit."[61] What is the difference between them?

2. The External World and the World of Spirit

What is the "external and visible world"? It might be tempting to interpret it as identical to the finite, or temporal world (recall: "Temporality, finitude, is that on which everything turns"). Though the concepts certainly overlap in what they refer to, I believe doing so is a mistake. According to de Silentio, externality indeed implies finitude, but it is a specific qualification of finitude, namely the aspect of the created world that is at once sensible (visible, *synlig*) and also subject to decay and limitation; it is the element of the finite world that seems to

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[60] *FT* 16 / *SKS* 4, 113.

[61] Hong and Hong begin a new paragraph at this point, which is absent in the original Danish. See *SKS* 4, 123.

resist hope. In its epistemic aspect, a fitting descriptor for externality is *phenomenal* (in the Kantian sense); in its metaphysical aspect, a fitting descriptor is *natural*. Externality seems associated with expectations and calculated results rather than the interior governance of self.

De Silentio's conceptual associations are observable in a passage from the "Eulogy," in which he explores what is "wondrous" (*vidunderlig*) about Sarah's pregnancy: "From an external perspective [*I udvortes Henseende*], the wonder [*Vidunderlige*] is in the fact that it happened according to their expectancy; in a deeper sense, faith's wonder [*Troens Vidunder*] is in the fact that Abraham and Sarah were young enough to desire [*ønske*] and that faith had preserved their desire [*Ønske*] and thereby their youth."[62] Kierkegaard often associates the term "wonder" with faith. (The same word is used by Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments* – *Vidunder* – to refer to the structure that Ferreira labeled the "*a priori* proof," that is, Climacus' suggestion that having an idea of the incarnation attests to the historicity of the incarnate god.) Here, de Silentio distinguishes between a wonder from an "external perspective" and "faith's wonder," the latter of which is a wonder in the "deeper sense." The external wonder refers to Sarah's pregnancy at an old age, but more precisely, *that* this pregnancy occurs according to the *literal* terms of God's promise.[63] It is wondrous because what was promised by God to happen, *literally* did happen for Sarah and Abraham. Normally in this world – that is, when things are not wondrous (in any sense) – what one hopes or expects to happen does *not* happen. The universe does not, at least *externally*, appear to be governed by any sort of satisfying moral order or rational order. (This is what de Silentio means by the laws of imperfection and indifference in the opening passage of

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[62] *FT* 18 / *SKS* 4, 115. I have shifted Hong and Hong's translation in several places to preserve terminological consistency. Throughout *Fear and Trembling*, Hong and Hong translate versions of *Vidunder* variously as "marvel" and (as in this case) "wonder." They also translate *I udvortes henseende* as "Outwardly."

[63] See Gen 17:17-19 (*GT-1740*).

the "Preliminary Expectoration": the former highlights a lack of moral structure to the cosmos, while the latter highlights the prominence of fortune in determining who satisfies their desires. One recalls A's lamentations— In light these facts of the world, where should anyone begin?)

In a "deeper sense," the wonder is that "faith had preserved their desire [*Ønske*]," that they did not give up hope that the covenant would be upheld. In faith, Abraham and Sarah were unflappable despite the laws of imperfection and indifference. Their desire did not make its home the external world, but rather the world of spirit, which *is* governed by a moral order:

> In the world of the spirit, it is otherwise. Here an eternal divine order prevails. Here it does not rain on both the just and the unjust; here the sun does not shine on both good and evil. Here it holds true that only the one who works gets bread, that only the one who was in anxiety finds rest, that only the one who descends into the lower world rescues the beloved, that only the one who draws the knife gets Isaac.[64]

The world of the spirit is not a *place*, but a claim about the ultimate order of the world. The crucial differentia between it and the external world is that it can offer rewards (or punishment) fitting an individual's struggles. In the world of spirit, "divine order," understood as divine justice, "prevails." It is not a universal paradise; it is a form of spiritual meritocracy: each gets what they deserve, according to their labor. For de Silentio, *this* is the world that is made possible by, and in, faith.[65]

It is worth lingering for a moment on an implication of this passage. What does it mean that, in the world of the spirit, "only the one who draws the knife gets Isaac." It seems that de Silentio is suggesting that faith's results are only guaranteed (that is, faith only 'works' to get

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[64] *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123.

[65] Here I follow Fremstedal in recognizing a strong parallel to Kant's conception of the highest good. See Fremstedal, "Kierkegaard's double movement of faith and Kant's moral faith," 208: "Interpreted in Kantian terms, taking care of Isaac (the highest) represents the union of morals and nature, virtue and happiness… *Fear and Trembling* calls the union of virtue and happiness, interpreted as the world where virtue leads to happiness, 'the world of the spirit' and 'an eternal divine order'… [B]oth Kierkegaard and Kant interpret this union of virtue and happiness as the highest good." See also Roe Fremstedal, "The concept of the highest good in Kierkegaard and Kant," *International Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 69, no. 3 (June 2011): 155-171.

Isaac back for Abraham) if the world is ultimately a world of the spirit. But this raises questions. How do I know that this *is* a world of the spirit; how do I know that the external world is not ultimate, or all there is? It is of course possible to *believe* that the world is divinely ordered independently of de Silentio's specific conception of faith. But the fact that its order demands that "only the one who draws the knife gets Isaac" suggests ideas specific to de Silentio's account of faith. Could I have enough faith to retrieve Isaac (or my personal equivalent) if I do not at the same time believe (even a little) that the world is ordered in this way? I will leave this for now with the following suggestion: If faith (like Abraham's) is possible, then the world must be a world of the spirit; but lacking the belief that the world is ultimately a spiritual world will turn out to be a marker of the tragic hero, for whom all the (human) courage in the world cannot recover his desire. Whether the world is ultimately a world of spirit (or not), and whether faith is possible (or not), are ultimately questions for faith alone, and nothing short of it.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

In this section of the chapter, I have posited that the question to which de Silentio's conception of faith supplies an answer is one about the universe's governance (or not) by divine justice. Moreover, I have claimed that, for de Silentio, the efficacy of faith (to get Isaac, or the finite, back) hinges on whether the world is exhausted in what is external and visible (and unfair), or whether it is a "world of spirit." In the next section of the chapter, I will show how the structure of the mechane appears in *Fear and Trembling* to connect these two claims.

C. The Mechane and the Paradox in *Fear and Trembling*

> …I bid the reader to bear these consequences *in mente* at every point, even though it would be too prolix for me to write them all down…[66]

In the midst of "Problema I," de Silentio introduces a formulation that is so important that he repeats variations of it throughout the rest of the book. Yet at the same time, it is awkward enough to convey in writing that he cheekily asks his reader to commit it to memory. This formulation is a qualification of the paradox, namely one that repeats the structure of the mechane. Its fullest expression reads thusly:

> Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal—yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world precisely because it has always existed. For if the ethical—that is, social morality [*det Sædelige*]— is the highest and if there is in a person no residual incommensurability in some way such that this incommensurability is not evil (i.e., the single individual, who is to be expressed in the universal), then no categories are needed other than what Greek philosophy had or what can be deduced from them by consistent thought.[67]

(Variations on this formulation occur in "Problemata" II and III, each corresponding to the Problema's respective dilemma.[68]) For now, I will set aside what precisely de Silentio means when he ascribes to the paradox "that the single individual is higher than the universal." This will require a juxtaposition with the tragic hero, to whom I will turn shortly. Instead, I will focus on this sentence: "If this [paradox] is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world precisely because it has always existed." What would it mean for faith to never exist because it has always existed?

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[66] *FT* 56 / *SKS* 4, 150. I have modified the Hongs' translation slightly.

[67] *FT* 55 / *SKS* 4, 149.

[68] *FT* 81, 82, 113 / *SKS* 4, 171, 172, 201.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus claims that an essential characteristic of

Christianity's soteriology is that it involves historical novelty: if Christ had always been around

(or rather, if the condition is simply an essential feature of the human being), then Christ is not

Christ and Christianity collapses into the Socratic. The historical element is implicit in *Fear and*

Trembling, too. Though de Silentio never explicitly attends in other passages to the significance

for faith of God's intervention into time, in this passage, faith must have *become possible* for the

human being. This is implied in the collapse of faith *always existing* into faith *never existing*. But

less important in *Fear and Trembling* are the conditions under which faith became possible;

rather, de Silentio explores a particular characteristic of faith, which, if absent, would fail to save

Abraham from being classified merely as a murderer. In *Fear and Trembling*, this also occurs in

formulations (such as the one in the above passage) that operate as thought-experiments.[69] The

same hypothetical structure from *Fragments* is visible here: *If* faith is x (hypothetically), then y

follows. And if what follows from this purported x is *not y*, then this purported x is not faith

(*modus tollens*). Implicit in the background of de Silentio's reasoning is that Abraham is praised

within Christendom as the father of faith, but the paradoxical feature of faith – that it permits

Abraham's singularity or individuality to rise above the universal – is ignored. For faith to be

faith, its very possibility requires a perspective that renders it distinct from all competing claims

to the highest. Its possibility must be affirmed from a vantage point that, if indeed the vantage

point is possible to occupy, already suggests the possibility of faith. This is the mechane. (Here,

this vantage point is the fulcrum is faith, which involves the distinctiveness of a *promise*.)

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[69] The thought-experiment element of *Fear and Trembling* has also been identified by Ingrid Malm-Lindberg in "The Thought Experimenting Qualities of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*," *Religions* 10, no. 6 (June 2019): 391-407.

       Note that *Repetition* is also framed as a thought-experiment, one which includes an account of its pseudonymous author Constantin Constantius' attempt to perform an actual experiment by trying to recreate a positive experience he had in Berlin during his youth. The book's full title is *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology* (Gjentagelsen: Et Forsøg i den experimenterende Psychologi) (*R* 125 / *SKS* 4, 7).

In *Fragments*, the structure of the relationship between the Socratic (or 'Paganism') and the Christian suggested that, if the Socratic position were true (as the highest possible way of life), Christianity is necessarily false. Yet if Christianity's claim is true (and faith is the highest possible way of life), it must be so non-necessarily, making a 'pagan' world possible. In *Fear and Trembling*, faith is – though with different emphases – one possible view of the highest life, in virtue of which one may fall short, if one serves (at best) the ethical. Yet if the ethical (social morality, *det Sædelige*, *Sittlichkeit*) is the highest (and thus faith is impossible), it means something quite specific about what sort of good life is available to the individual in a tragic world (and thus what must, by contrast, be possible in the world of the spirit). To refer to the opening of this dissertation— The tragic hero will have to choose between Scylla and Charybdis (and, by being a *hero* of the ethical, they will always choose Scylla); Abraham does not have to choose because the power of faith permits him to choose not to choose between the two.

1. The Tragic Hero's Oath

> …see! kjære Fader! her er jeg![70]

The tragic hero represents, for de Silentio, the highest possible way to live the ethical life, expressed in a case of collision between the tragic hero's ethical duty and utmost personal desire.[71] (The tragic hero is thus a limit case of the ethical archetype; in this way, de Silentio

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[70] "Look, dear father! Here I am!" Iphigenia to Agamemnon. My translation from Danish of Euripides, *Iphigeneia i Aulis*, trans. Christian Wilster, in *Euripides*, ed. Wilster (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1840) [*ASKB* 1115], 159 (line 1557).

[71] Though I lack the space to make such an argument here, the tragic hero is one (principled) type of knight of resignation, insofar as the tragic hero is willing, as I will show, to resign their desire to preserve their ethical commitment. The crucial common element is that both resign from pursuing their personal desires because of the hand that fortune deals them. For the tragic hero, the ethical rule itself ultimately collapses as a solution for coordinating their desires in a satisfying way; a situation occurs where a promise demands giving up a personal good. Imagine if Wilhelm were forced – by fate or fortune – to kill his wife; whether he could claim satisfaction with his life or not after doing so, his resulting despair would attest to the ultimate failure of the ethical.

– like Climacus – uses characters and archetypes to think through faith "algebraically."[72]) "The difference between the tragic hero and Abraham," writes de Silentio, "is very obvious. The tragic hero is still within the ethical. He allows an expression of the ethical to have its τελος in a higher expression of the ethical; he scales down the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to a feeling that has its dialectic in relation to the idea of moral conduct."[73] For the tragic hero, there is a hierarchy of values set in relation to principle behind, and anchor of, that hierarchy. A value or rule of one sort must be subordinated to a higher one when it conflicts with it. In this way, the things in life that are personally valuable to the tragic hero (that is, that particular hero's desires or wishes; *Ønsker*) are categorizable and thematizable against the rule of the ethical in general, which is transformed into an overriding desire through the tragic hero's ethical commitment. This is what it means when de Silentio says that it is the tragic hero's "ethical task continually to express himself in this [the universal], to annul his singularity in order to become the universal [*Almene*]"[74]: If I am governed according to the ethical – if I am being properly ethical – my individual desires, insofar as they are merely particular to me, will not motivate me to act in contradiction to the higher rule. And, presuming there is nothing higher

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[72] *PF* 91 / *SKS* 4, 288.

[73] *FT* 59 / *SKS* 4, 152.

[74] *FT* 54 / *SKS* 4, 148. The Danish word translated as "universal" is *Almene*, which could also mean "general." Based on the significance of universality to Kant's moral theory, some readers have suggested that this means Kierkegaard is taking aim at Kantianism (alongside Hegelianism) with de Silentio's critique of the category of the *ethical*. See, e.g., Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, eds. C. Stephen Evans and Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 42n54. I believe either "general" or "universal" to be a viable translation, but "universal" perhaps better reflects that for de Silentio, ethics implies a rule or principle that holds universally, even if he does not necessarily mean that it does so – I would argue – with the same mechanism as Kant's categorical imperative. Most moral theories, insofar as they involve norms that must be obeyed or goods that must be pursued without exception, have an element of universality; I believe it is to this broad type of universality de Silentio is referring. We can see this by how he qualifies universality in the context of ethics at the beginning of Problema I: "The ethical as such is the universal [*Almene*], and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means it applies at all times" (*FT* 54 / *SKS* 4, 148). De Silentio implies universality *qua* categorical application, but the patient of *det Ethiske* itself may be understood in terms of either general welfare or universality *qua* universal moral consideration. No notion of the categorical imperative is required.

than a given rule, this rule would be identical, claims de Silentio, to a person's eternal salvation, which – in this context – I take to imply the overriding desire.[75] That is to say, the ethical rule becomes the highest desire *qua* motivational attractor. In short, this desire exerts the ultimate motivational pull on an individual and organizes that individual's other ends; if there is nothing higher than an ordering principle or desire, then the principle or desired good must pull an individual with the force of eternal salvation. The tragic hero, insofar as he is tempted to "assert himself in his singularity before the universal," is drawn to lose sight of the highest in the interest of something lower but closer to him, i.e., to follow a rule of pursuing his own good rather than a universal rule.[76] But insofar as he succeeds as an ethical hero, he subordinates the lower to the higher and qualifies under the universal rule, dispelling the tension.

This would all be well and good for the tragic hero, except that he is a hero in a *tragic* world: one governed by the laws of imperfection and indifference, as per the "Preliminary Expectoration." Given the imperfection of the world, the "eternal salvation" de Silentio speaks of in the context of the ethical does not circumvent the inevitability of loss. The tragic hero does not get the bread they worked for. We can see this in how de Silentio describes the tragic heroes Jephthah, Brutus, and Agamemnon: each such hero subordinates their desire to a *promise*. (Abraham's story has, as is well known, its own promise; an examination of these characters' respective promises will provide the fulcrum on which I differentiate faith from the ethical.)

Jephthah is one of the judges of Israel, from Judges 11-12. He is charged with mounting a defense against the Ammonites to ensure the survival of the kingdom. He swears to God that,

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[75] *FT* 54 / *SKS* 4, 148. Note that in the very same passage, de Silentio describes this form of self-assertion as a sin (*synder han*). This is interesting in that it implies that de Silentio views sin – at least in the context of the ethical – as acting out of a principle or set of principles that are improperly ordered with respect to the highest available good.

[76] Ibid.

should he win against them, he will sacrifice whatever comes out of his house's doors upon his

return from the campaign. In a tragic turn, it is his daughter who emerges in celebration of his

victory: "She was the only single one; he of himself otherwise had neither son nor daughter. And

it happened, when he saw her, then he ripped his clothes and said, 'Ah! My daughter, you have

utterly taken me down; and you are one of those who destroy me; for I, I opened my mouth to

the LORD, and I cannot call it back.'"[77] The despondent Jephthah gives her two months to weep

for her virginity, completes the sacrifice, and then commemorates the time of her death as one of

lamentation for the women of Israel.[78]

Kierkegaard introduces Jephthah in "Problema I" (after which he is only mentioned once,

in passing)[79]:

> When the valiant judge who in the hour of need saved Israel binds God and himself in
> one breath by the same promise [*Løfte*], he will heroically [*heltemodigen*] transform the
> young maiden's jubilation, the beloved [*elskede*] daughter's joy to sorrow, and all Israel
> will sorrow with her over her virginal youth. But every freeborn man will understand,
> every resolute woman will admire Jephthah, and every virgin in Israel will wish to
> behave as his daughter did, because what good would it be for Jephthah to win the
> victory by means of a promise [*Løfte*] if he did not keep it—would not the victory be
> taken away from the people again?[80]

The first thing to attend to in this passage is that the promise between Jephthah and God is

invoked by Jephthah (not God) in order to achieve a particular external (*udvortes*) result (victory

over the Ammonites to secure and rule Israel). This distinguishes Jephthah's oath from

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[77] Judg 11:34-35 (*GT-1740*): "…hun var ikkun den eeneste; han havde [ellers] af sig hverken Søn eller Daatter. Og det skede, der han saae hende, da rev han sine Klæder, og sagde: ach! min Daatter, du har aldeles nedbøiet mig, og du er af dem, som forstyrre mig; thi jeg, jeg oplod min Mund til HERREN, og jeg kan ikke kalde det tilbage."

[78] Interestingly, de Silentio includes an Old Testament / Hebrew Bible figure alongside Roman and Greek examples of tragic heroes. I suspect (though am uncertain) that this is because Kierkegaard categorizes the three as similarly 'pagan.'

[79] *FT* 87 / *SKS* 4, 177.

[80] *FT* 58 / *SKS* 4, 151.

Abraham's covenant, which God initiates but for which God does not request a sacrifice, at least until Isaac. (I am unsure whether de Silentio considers the symbolic or substitutive ritual of circumcision to count as a sacrifice.) Jephthah, in short, enters into a type of barter with God to secure victory given the uncertainty of the outcome. (That is to say, fortune is a factor.) Second, the result of keeping the oath is described as transforming jubilation to sorrow for Jephthah's daughter, but also for Jephthah. His daughter is his "beloved," an element of his life whose well-being is central to his own desires. The conditions of the vow, together with the conditions of the imperfect creation, have forced a hard choice between *his* own desire and the rule of the ethical.

Lucius Junius Brutus, central to Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita Libri* as one of the founders of the Roman Republic, is the second of de Silentio's tragic heroes. After the overthrow of King Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (the same Tarquin mentioned in *Fear and Trembling*'s epigraph[81]), Brutus brings together the people of standing in Rome to swear an oath: "[Brutus'] first act was to secure the people, who were now jealous of their newly recovered liberty, from being influenced by any entreaties or bribes from the king. He therefore made them take an oath [*iure iurando adegit*] that they would not suffer any man to reign in Rome."[82] As the citizens, in unrest after the overthrow, become anxious at the possible return or influence of a Tarquin king, Brutus must assemble a crowd again and repeat the oath. This time, Livy juxtaposes Brutus' role in the legal foundation of the Roman Republic against Brutus' personal desire: "*Personal regard* made him [Brutus] reluctant to speak, nor would he have spoken had not his affection for the commonwealth compelled him."[83] As fate would have it, a contingent of imperials related to the

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[81] *FT* 3 / *SKS* 4, 100.

[82] Livy, *The History of Rome* [Ab urbe condita libri], trans. William Masfen Roberts (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912), vol. 1, 71 (2.1.8-10).

[83] Livy, ibid., 71 (2.2.5) (my italics).

former ruling house conspire to seize power in Rome. They are led by a band that includes two of Brutus' sons. Holding to his own oath, Brutus himself passes the death sentence on his sons.

De Silentio has the following to say about Brutus, who does not appear again in *Fear and Trembling*:

> When a son forgets his duty [*Pligt*], when the state entrusts the sword of judgment to the father, when the laws demand punishment from the father's hand, then the father must heroically [*heltemodigen*] forget that the guilty one is his son, he must nobly hide his agony, but no one in the nation, not even the son, will fail to admire the father, and every time the Roman laws are interpreted, it will be remembered that many interpreted them more learnedly but no one more magnificently than Brutus.[84]

Again we see de Silentio highlight the dilemma between the tragic hero's own desires (Brutus' concern for the well-being of his sons) and a duty to the state. The focal point of the sacrifice in the narrative is not the sons' death itself but is rather to be found in the subject-position of the hero. Brutus cannot hold onto his desire at the same time he fulfills his oath; his agony reveals what results if the ethical is the highest (thus, if there is no world of spirit).

Fear and Trembling spends more time with Agamemnon than the previous two figures. De Silentio's version of the character draws from Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*. (De Silentio directly quotes from Christian Wilster's Danish translation of the play.[85]) In the play, the seer Calchas tasks Agamemnon with sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia, lest the winds remain unfavorable for the Greek army's campaign to Troy to retrieve Helen from Paris. Agamemnon at first deceives Clytemnestra and Iphigenia in order to bring them to Aulis where the Greek army is gathering, concealing the plan to sacrifice her to Artemis. But as he has second thoughts, the Greek army grows ever more bloodthirsty, threatening to destroy the political fabric of Greece.

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[84] *FT* 58 / *SKS* 4, 152-153.

[85] De Silentio quotes Wilster's translation twice in one paragraph in "Problema I" (*FT* 57 / *SKS* 4, 151) and cites it again in "Problema III" (*FT* 87 / *SKS* 4, 177). See Euripides, *Iphigeneia i Aulis*, trans. Wilster, 116, 125, 145.

After Agamemnon changes his mind again, Iphigenia makes peace with her role and proudly

submits to the knife as Greece's savior, proclaiming, "Your daughter should not treasure life so

much."[86] This resolves the play's tension but leaves Clytemnestra plotting revenge against

Agamemnon.

De Silentio's discussion of *Iphigenia in Aulis* extends throughout the "Problemata." He

does not invoke it explicitly, but Agamemnon's oath lies in the background of Euripides' version

of the Aulis myth. It is mentioned in a lengthy speech by Agamemnon at the beginning of the

drama presenting the play's mythic backdrop to the audience:

> King Thestius' daughter Leda bore daughters three / Phoebe and Clytemnestra, who my
> wife / became, and Helen; as suiters to her came / from Hellas nearly every rich high-
> born bachelor. / They wildly threatened each other, even to bloody deed / was each one
> prepared if the fair maiden he won not. / Most befuddled her father Tyndareus now
> became, / Should his daughter marry a suiter or not, / What would be best? Then this
> popped into his mind: / Each suiter should sincerely promise [*love*] with vow [*Eed*] and
> hand, / Confirm their joint covenant [*Pagt*] with burnt offering, / And bid the gods punish
> the one who broke the promise [*som Løftet brød*], / To hurry to aid right away the man
> who got Helen / as wife if someone stole her away, / And drove her rightful husband
> from the marital bed, / And go to battle against the reaver, and pillage / His city, in Hellas
> or in foreigners' country. / Jointly they swore [*svor*]; but then old Tyndareus / had tricked
> them quite cunningly, as right when he gave / his daughter herself the right to choose the
> one of the swarm / to whom sweet love [*den søde Elskov*] set her hunger, / Her choice
> landed — oh, would that it never have happened! — on Menelaus. But from Phrygia
> came the man, / who was adjudicator of goddesses, the news reports truly, / to
> Lakedaimon; clad in flowery gown, / with gold he displayed grandly, and foreign
> baubles, / And aflame with love [*Elskov*] he brought home to Ida / the willing Helen,
> while Menelaus was / traveling; now like a fury, he ran / through Hellas and invoked the
> ancient vow [*Eed*] / To Tyndareus to avenge the one insulted.[87]

This speech lays out a complicated mythic history of the foundation of Greece as a state. In the

context of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the campaign against Troy, occasioned by Paris' kidnapping of

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[86] My translation from Wilster's Danish: "Heller ikke bør din Datter skatte Livet altfor høit…" Euripides, *Iphigeneia i Aulis*, trans. Wilster, 153 (line 1391). For a published English translation, see Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, trans. Charles R. Walker, in *Euripides V: The Complete Greek Tragedies* (3rd Ed.), eds. David Grene, Richmond Lattimore, Mark Griffith, and Glenn W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 161 (lines 1384-1385).

[87] My translation from Wilster's Danish. Euripides, *Iphigeneia i Aulis*, trans. Wilster, 103 (lines 49-79). For the published English version, see Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, trans. Walker, 95-96 (lines 49-79).

Helen, constitutes the fulfillment and continued validation of a pact that universally binds all Greek men of standing. Helen's Greek suitors, once murderous toward one another, are brought together under this common oath to form the Greek state. When Helen is kidnapped, the seal of the pact and its primary condition for being legally binding (manifest in Helen as the wife of Menelaus) are annulled. This threatens to send the men of standing back into savagery. Iphigenia's death (and Agamemnon's decision to have her killed) is the pivot point between civilization governed by law (a revenge-prevention contract agreed to by Helen's suitors) and collapse into civil war. It is in this tension that Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia; his dilemma is to choose between his personal desire (the well-being of his beloved daughter) and the idea of general welfare as such (metaphorically represented by Greece *qua* state), with respect to this oath. As with the other tragic heroes, Agamemnon's commitment to the ethical involves subordinating his personal desire (his daughter's life) to that of the general welfare or universal.

With the above in mind, it is possible to make sense of de Silentio's most explicit summary of the dilemma of the tragic hero. Though it aims to achieve clarity, it is quite cryptic:

> The tragic hero assures himself that the ethical obligation [*Forpligtelse*] is totally present in him by transforming it into a desire [*et Ønske*]. Agamemnon, for example, can say: To me the proof that I am not violating my fatherly duty [*Faderpligt*] is that my duty [*Pligt*] is my one and only desire [*eneste Ønske*]. Consequently we have desire and duty face to face with each other. Fortunate [*Det Lykkelige*] is the life in which they fall together, in which my desire is my duty and the reverse, and for most human beings the task in life is simply to adhere to their duty and to transform it by their enthusiasm [*Begeistring*] into their desire. The tragic hero gives up his desire in order to fulfill this duty.[88]

What does it mean for the tragic hero to "transform" the obligation of duty "into a desire"? Here, I think de Silentio is referring to a reconfiguration of one's desires through the power of choice (similar to that lauded by Wilhelm in *Either / Or*). This transformational power is described as

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[88] *FT* 78n / *SKS* 4, 169n. I have adjusted this translation; the Hongs usually translate *Ønske* as 'wish,' but desire is reasonable and perhaps reflects more clearly the nature of the collision between faith and the ethical.

enthusiasm (*Begeistring*), which also connotes vigor, excitement, or energy. What is involved in holding oneself to the ethical (and becoming a tragic hero) is to make oneself *desire* the ethical, that is, to make it a rule of action. If one can do so, it causes all lower duties and responsibilities (including "fatherly duty") to fall under the umbrella of abiding by duty *per se*. Such a person is ethical by following a sort of script; thus, when part of this script involves subordinating one lower duty to a higher one (such as killing one's beloved child to respect the oath of the state, an oath which constitutes, on this analogy, the ethical principle as such), the ethical agent is excused from what would – independent of the higher duty – be a violation. On such a rendering, Agamemnon has not violated his fatherly duty because it is folded under duty *per se*.

What is strange about the passage is that de Silentio then says, "we have desire and duty face to face with each other." Yet it seemed that dutiful obligation had been transformed into my "one and only desire"; from whence has desire returned to oppose the duty-made-desire? Here, I think de Silentio is equivocating about the term 'desire' (*Ønske*). It means alternately a rule for action, and a sort of want, hope, or wish that reflects the tragic hero's particularity (as it would for any individual). Agamemnon loves his daughter. Yet this cannot be respected by duty, at least not when such a misfortune strikes and tests the ethical commitment. Therefore, the ethical, at its highest, must always involve preparedness to cast aside one's personal desires.

In each of the tragic hero's cases, they are caught in a dilemma, where they must subordinate either their desire to responsibility, or responsibility to desire. Because they are ethical heroes, they subordinate their desires to their duty. In each case, this subordination is performed with respect to a promise (oath, vow, pact, etc.), which sets the terms and scope of the ethical. In no case does the promise permit flexibility, and in no case does the promise constitute the fulfillment of the tragic hero's desire. De Silentio appears to conceive social morality (*det*

Sædelige) as securing some limited welfare at the cost of each individual covered by it (like a Hobbesian social contract), pitting the general welfare against the individual's desire. When misfortune occurs, a choice is *forced*; there is no way to choose both.[89]

2. Abraham and the Covenant

…see, her er jeg.[90]

The (ethical) promises entered into and championed by tragic heroes reflect an attempt to cope with the tragic conditions of the external world (governed by the laws of imperfection and indifference). But they do not deny the fundamental limitations of that world, and instead serve as an example of what it means to navigate within such dark waters. Abraham's promise proves to be of a different kind.

The potential conflict in Abraham's trial is actually difficult to discern. In the sense that killing Isaac would destroy Abraham's relationship with Isaac, it may seem obvious, but the coordination between the competing elements of desire and duty, which is clear with respect to the tragic heroes (and their corresponding oaths), is less so in the case of Abraham.

De Silentio signals that, insofar as ethical duty pertains to him, "for Abraham the ethical had no higher expression than family life."[91] There was no authority outside of Isaac, Sarah, and

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[89] At one point in the text, when referring to Agamemnon's intent to sacrifice Iphigenia, de Silentio uses the phrase, "the [tragic] hero must raise the knife" (*FT* 57 / *SKS* 4, 151). In Danish, the clause is, "Helten skal løfte Kniven." The translation is reasonable (though *skal* could also be rendered as 'will' or 'shall'). But interestingly, this is the only time de Silentio refers to 'raising' or 'lifting' a knife rather than 'drawing' (*at drage*) the knife, the latter of which he uses to depict Abraham with Isaac. The verb *løfte* ('to lift,' 'to raise') is a homophone with the noun *Løfte*, meaning a 'promise,' which appears multiple times in the text. This unique formulation in the text might suggest how Agamemnon (a tragic hero), must always be prepared to cut (by lifting the knife: *løfte Kniven*) between two options with respect to his (ethical) promise (*Løfte*). He must always decide between himself and the promise.

[90] "Look, here I am." Abraham to God. Gen 22:1 (*GT-1740*).

[91] *FT* 112 / *SKS* 4, 200.

Eliezer, to whom he might have to subordinate his wishes.[92] But as an individual, what does Abraham desire? It appears tied up in the content of the covenant itself: "By faith Abraham received the promise that in his seed all the generations of the earth would be blessed."[93] Later, de Silentio writes, "But Abraham had faith specifically for this life—faith that he would grow old in this country, be honored among the people, blessed by posterity, and unforgettable in Isaac, the most precious thing in his life, whom he embraced with a love that is inadequately described by saying he faithfully fulfilled the father's duty [*Faderens Pligt*] to love the son, which is indeed stated in the command: the son, whom you love."[94] The love Abraham has for Isaac – "the most precious thing in his life" – supersedes both the "father's duty" (the ethical) and Abraham's desire to be "blessed by posterity, and unforgettable in Isaac," the latter of which forms the basis of what God promises Abraham in the covenant. In other words, for Abraham, his desire (*Ønske*) is to become "father to many nations" (*mange Hedningers Fader*),[95] while his ethical duty involves his obligations to his immediate family.

The structure of desire and duty for Abraham is starkly different from that of the tragic heroes, even inverted: For Abraham there simply is *no conflict* between his personal desire and his expression of the ethical. Whereas Agamemnon must choose between his desire and duty, Abraham's both reside in the object of God's covenant: that is, in the well-being of Isaac, the "child of promise" (*Forjættelsens Barn*).[96] The trial Abraham undergoes (whereby he is instructed to kill Isaac) does not put Abraham in a dilemma. On the contrary, it simply attests to

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[92] Ibid.

[93] *FT* 17 / *SKS* 4, 114.

[94] *FT* 20 / *SKS* 4, 117.

[95] Gen 17:4 (*GT-1740*). Note that *Hedning* is also a noun meaning, for Kierkegaard, 'gentile,' or 'pagan.'

[96] *FT* 21 / *SKS* 4, 117.

Abraham's covenant with God as precisely the sort of covenant that does not require subordination of one choice to another. In faith, one need not choose between desire and duty.

Yet this does not mean that nothing is risked or given up in faith. De Silentio writes, "For the knight of faith, desire and duty are also identical, but he is required to give up both. If he wants to relinquish by giving up his desire, he finds no rest, for it is indeed his duty. If he wants to adhere to the duty and to his desire, he does not become the knight of faith, for the absolute duty specifically demanded that he should give it up."[97] This passage recognizes that for the knight of faith (as for Abraham, the father of faith), "desire and duty are… identical," as I have argued. (For the tragic hero, they are only united by being willfully combined through "enthusiasm.") But I have also portrayed Abraham as losing nothing in faith, suggesting that faith allows Abraham to *keep* Isaac (through – though I have not assessed the terminology directly – a suspension of the ethical). In this passage, however, de Silentio describes faith as "giving up both" "desire and duty." This makes sense if we recognize that Abraham never actually *enters* faith; he simply *is* faithful (so it seems). But for another knight of faith (in Christendom, perhaps), the object of desire and any ethical authority are subject to transformation.

In other words, for faith (on *Fear and Trembling*'s account), it is necessary to surrender one's particular desires but hold fast to the notion of desire for the finite in general. This is what it means for faith to retrieve the finite, and for Abraham to "get Isaac back again." This permits flexibility, a flexibility that involves openness of the sort suggested in Lippitt's account of faith as "radical hope." And duty, too, may be modified: "[I]t does not follow that the ethical should be invalidated; rather, the ethical receives a completely different expression, a paradoxical

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[97] *FT* 78n / *SKS* 4, 169n. I have modified the Hongs' translation.

expression, such as, for example, that love to God may bring the knight of faith to give his love to the neighbor—an expression opposite to that which, ethically speaking, is duty."[98]

However, by recognizing the tragic heroes as embodying a crucial point of contrast to faith, whereby (in the ethical) one's duty and personal desires are at loggerheads – whereby, no matter how hard one tries, fortune may demand that one lose everything one cherishes – it is possible to determine this faithful hope more thoroughly. Along with *faith* that the tragic world of the ethical is not ultimate, there comes a hope that the central tragic limitation of the external world does not hold (that is, in the "world of the spirit"): It is possible to work in, with, and through faith – and to receive the bread deserved.

D. Birthing One's Own Father

> If your one and only desire [*Ønske*] was denied to you, my listener, you are still happy… you say: In relation to God I am always in the wrong. If you yourself were the one who had to deny yourself your highest desire, you are still happy…[99]

Does faith await God's action to bring about the good (to reconcile obligation and desire)? Or does faith bring it about by itself? (Here, I abstract from questions about grace and divine agency involved in gifting the capacity of faith; there is simply no room for them here.) Put succinctly: Does faith *believe* something good will happen, or does faith make it happen?

De Silentio never definitively answers this question, but hints in several places that faith plays a role in bringing about the good. After invoking the possibility of the world of the spirit, in which the flaws of the external world would not hold sway, de Silentio writes, in a passage I

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[98] *FT* 70 / *SKS* 4, 162.

[99] *EO2* / *SKS* 3, *EO2* 353 / *SKS* 3, 331. I have slightly modified this translation by Hong and Hong (cf. pp. 83-84).

have already quoted earlier (cf. p. 280), "Here [in the world of the spirit]… *only* the one who

draws the knife gets Isaac."[100] Drawing the knife is *required* for getting Isaac back; if the knife

were not drawn, then Isaac would not be returned. If – as I have argued – faith involves a hope

that duty and desire can be reconciled (that there is a connection between virtue and happiness),

then this means that faith plays some role in, at least subjectively, actualizing this world. This

does not mean that faith miraculously creates a "world of the spirit" in some objective sense, but

rather – I suspect – that faith generates a practical possibility to act *as though* happiness could be

achievable through one's own effort. In other words, if faith is possible, it is by faith (and only

by faith) that there exists a "world of the spirit" in which justice prevails, in which one is

rewarded for one's struggle. Yet the space in which justice would prevail is that very arena of

faith's possibility, namely the subjective space in which – "in absolute relation to God"[101] – one

has faith or falls short by their own fault. Faith creates the "world of the spirit," which is the only

space in which success at the struggle to yoke desire to virtue – that is, faith – is possible.[102]

This circularity, one in which occupying a vantage point makes possible a decision to

affirm the truth of the very conditions that make that vantage point possible, is that of the

mechane. Its presence in *Fear and Trembling* is attested to by de Silentio's articulation of the

paradox in the "Problemata," which he bids his reader always keep *in mente*: "If this is not faith,

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[100] *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123 (my italics).

[101] *FT* 71 / *SKS* 4, 162.

[102] In the upbuilding discourse "On the Occasion of a Confession" (1847), Commonly called *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, Kierkegaard implies that the problem of fruitless striving – introduced so clearly in the "Preliminary Expectoration" to *Fear and Trembling* – can be remedied through the unification of the will. He sets up the problem with a discussion of Ecclesiastes, citing Eccl 3:9: "What benefit from all his striving does he have who exerts himself!" (*UDVS* 8 / *SKS* 8, 124). (The scriptural citation comes from *Det Gamle Testaments poetiske og prophetiske Skrifter*, trans. Jens Møller, vol. 1, 422.) Yet this proves to only be an affliction for those in "double-mindedness"; the solution is to will in self-unity (*UDVS* 24 / *SKS* 8, 138). Effectively, the problem of works and bread is framed as one involving the fragmentation of the individual's will.

then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world precisely because it has always existed."[103] It is also attested to by a striking image in the "Preliminary Expectoration," which follows shortly after his introduction of "the world of the spirit" as that rule according to which divine justice prevails. Drawing a contrast between the individual who does not work (and yet, in the external world, is so often rewarded with bread) and the person of faith, de Silentio writes, "Here it does not help to have Abraham for a father [Mt 3:9] or seventeen ancestors; the one who wants not to work, him it fits what has been written about the Israel's virgins: he births wind [Isa 26:18]—but the one who wants to work, he births his own father."[104]

To struggle in faith does not rely on any external authority. It is to birth yourself, but not directly; it is to birth your own *father*, to create the conditions for the possibility of that very struggle. To depend on your fortune ("Here it does not help to have Abraham for a father") would be to ask for less responsibility – less freedom – than faith both demands and provides. (On this basis de Silentio critiques any philosophy or theology that would begin in faith but hope to "go further" as attempting – vainly and self-defeatingly – to build upon the labor of others.[105]) If faith is possible, then "each generation [*Slægt*]" (indeed, each individual),

> begins primitively, has no task other than what each previous generation had, nor does it advance further, insofar as the previous generations did not betray the task and deceive themselves. The essentially human is passion, in which one generation perfectly understands another and understands itself. For example, no generation has learned to love from another, no generation is able to begin at any other point than at the beginning, no later generation has a more abridged task than the previous one, and if someone desires to go further and not stop with loving as the previous generation did, this is foolish and idle talk.[106]

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[103] *FT* 55 / *SKS* 4, 149.

[104] *FT* 27 / *SKS* 4, 123. I have adjusted the translation by Hong and Hong. It is unclear whether the image of birthing one's own father refers to an external source. I have not located any plausible attribution.

[105] See, e.g., *FT* 7, 37, 88, 121, 123 / *SKS* 4, 102, 132, 177, 209, 210.

[106] *FT* 121 / *SKS* 4, 208-209.

De Silentio's depiction of the highest good is a world of the spirit, which constitutes a fair arena for the struggle of faith, and whose possibility depends on the individual's faith. Herein resides the *axiom*, as well as the circularity of the mechane, but inflected in such a way as to offer a point of view from which the highest good assumes a particular shape: The highest good *asserts a causal connection between one's struggle (works, virtue) and fitting results.* But the highest good *is the very causal connection between the struggle and fitting results.* Faith is that very thing, the possibility of which requires a struggle that justifies itself through the promise that in it, all such struggles are fair.

Fear and Trembling makes the case that faith brings about a transformation, or reconfiguration of desire. A faithful person is not satisfied with less *per se*, but takes ultimate satisfaction in the possibility of reconciling work and bread (virtue and happiness); this reconfiguration is what is meant by gaining the finite back "whole and intact" and by Abraham getting "Isaac back again." Faith reinforces the finite world by draping it in spirit, transforming the finite world from merely "the external and visible world" into the "world of the spirit." In this transformation, other desires (natural desires, preferences, etc.) are viewed from above, but exactly what is left of them is unclear, except that they are transformed to involve the paradoxical and circular arrangement I have described here. The next chapter will attempt to address the question of what remains of an individua's desire by turning to *Works of Love*, to examine faith's transformative (moral) effect on desire.

CHAPTER VI.
THE LOVE-COMMAND, DESIRE, AND THE NEIGHBOR, IN *WORKS OF LOVE*

"…the unexamined life is not worth living…"[1]

"…a life without loving was not worth living…"[2]

In this chapter, I bring the insights from earlier in the thesis to Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous *Works of Love*,[3] investigating how Kierkegaardian faith has an expressive moral dimension, based on a decisive transformation of the individual's desire.

Articulated as straightforwardly as possible, *Works of Love*'s central claim is that the Christian love-command (*Bud*, or *Kjerligheds-Bud*) runs contrary to the self's inclinations to love and benefit itself. To love (*elske*) the neighbor (*Næsten*) requires a decisive commitment to self-denial (*Selvfornegtelse*), which involves, depending on one's interpretation of *Works of Love*, either the purgation or transformation of self-love (*Selvkjerlighed*). Love of neighbor stands also in contrast to reciprocal or mutual love (*Gjenkjerlighed*) and preferential love (*Forkjerlighed*), forms of natural love that, though praised among classical philosophers and poets as erotic love (*Elskov*) and friendship (*Venskab*), actually conceal, from the perspective of Christianity, an egoism reducible to self-love. Kierkegaard thus contends that right Christian love involves a rejection of *philia* and *eros* in favor of a form of *agape*, one that demands the reshaping of one's character and actions according to the duty (*Pligt*) to love all people disinterestedly and equally.

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[1] Socrates, in the *Apology*. Plato, *Apology*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 33 (38a). In Schleiermacher's German translation, with which Kierkegaard was likely familiar, this line reads, "…ein Leben ohne Selbsterforschung aber gar nicht verdient gelebt zu warden…" *Des Sokrates Vertheidigung*, in *Platons Werke*, trans. Schleiermacher, vol. 1.2, 222.

[2] Kierkegaard, in *Works of Love*. WL 38 / *SKS* 9, 45. I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation. See previous note: The Danish for 'worth' is *værd*, a cognate of *verdient* from Schleiermacher's translation of the *Apology*.

[3] In Danish, *Works of Love*'s title is *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, or, *Love's Acts*. I believe that it is an allusion to the Danish title of the Book of Acts: *De hellige Apostlers Gierninger* or *Apostlernes Gjerninger*.

In this chapter I develop an interpretation of Kierkegaard's understanding of the divine command to love the neighbor, as expressed in *Works of Love*. My argument is that, while the love command is critical to Kierkegaard's moral theory, it does not reflect a commitment to a divine command theory of morality. This positions me against interpreters of the text such as Evans and Philip L. Quinn, who trace the source of moral obligation to God's command to love the neighbor.[4] I affirm that the love command plays a central role in providing conditions for moral obligation, but this is because it performs a modification of the human subject that unlocks a possible object of desire (the good of the other), and enables prioritizing this desire. (According to Kierkegaard, these options are not available to human beings who have not seriously considered, or been exposed to, the message of Christianity, that is, 'pagan' individuals.)

The key modification by the love command is to enable the possibility that an individual can desire the well-being of an *other* (the neighbor) without that desire being indexed to their own happiness. In other words, the love command enables altruistic motivation, which – on Kierkegaard's account – would otherwise be impossible, due to a state of agential entrapment related to the human being's sin.[5] The love command, however, is insufficient to sanctify individuals entirely— it *enables* altruistic motivation; it is not sufficient to compel individuals to act on it, for they continue to experience self-interested desires among the constellation of all their desires. This dynamic, which involves competing incentives, engenders a distinctive type of obligation: *moral* obligation, which bears the name love for the neighbor (*Kjerlighed til Næsten*). This is what Kierkegaard means when he says that, for Christianity, "love is a matter of

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[4] See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Philip L. Quinn, "Kierkegaard's Christian Ethics" (1998), in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 349-375.

[5] The noetic aspect of this entrapment, as expressed in *Philosophical Fragments*, was a topic of Chapters II and III.

conscience"[6]— the concept of the neighbor introduces an overarching desire that demands

organizing other desires in the interest of other individuals. Christianity, from which love for the

neighbor comes, thus has an ambivalent relationship to "pagan"[7] or "lower"[8] forms of love and

desire. On the one hand, all love – including love for the neighbor – must work through the

medium of desire for particular individuals, objects, and outcomes. But on the other hand, being

motivated through these forms of love alone constitutes morally wrong selfishness.

A. Believing in Love

The first deliberation of *Works of Love* begins by enjoining that the reader *believe* in love. As

discussed earlier in the thesis, in Danish, the word for 'belief' is the same as that for 'faith': *Tro*.

Here, Kierkegaard imbues the word with its Christian connotations in order to establish a

subjective 'pivot point' regarding the possibility of other-interested desires: love:

> If it were so, as conceited sagacity [*indbildsk Kløgt*], proud of not being deceived
> [*bedrages*], thinks, that we should believe nothing that we cannot see with our physical
> eyes, then we first and foremost ought to give up believing in love [*Kjerlighed*]… We
> can, of course, be deceived [*bedrages*] in many ways. We can be deceived by believing
> [*at troe*] what is untrue, but we certainly are also deceived by not believing what is true.
> We can be deceived by appearances, but we certainly are also deceived by the sagacious
> [*kløgtige*] appearance, by the flattering conceit [*Indbildskhed*] that considers itself
> absolutely secure against being deceived.[9]

The target of Kierkegaard's criticism is "conceited sagacity" (which might be better translated as

something like 'deluded cleverness'). This likely refers to forms of philosophical eudaimonism

or egoism that would attempt to collapse Christian accounts love (particularly *agapic* love, as

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[6] *WL* 137 / *SKS* 9, 139.

[7] See, e.g., *WL* 21, 24-25 / *SKS* 9, 29, 32-33, but there are many such occurrences.

[8] *WL* 237 / *SKS* 9, 238.

[9] *WL* 5 / *SKS* 9, 13.

articulated by Paul and the Gospels) into an expression of self-interest or natural appetite. As usual, Kierkegaard has Christendom in his sights, for his next remarks echo his analogy of the writing on paper (concealing a palimpsest) from *The Point of View of My Work as an Author* (cf. p. 33): "Which deception is the more dangerous? Whose recovery is more doubtful, that of the one who does not see, or that of the person who sees and yet does not see? What is more difficult—to awaken someone who is sleeping or to awaken someone who, awake, is dreaming that he is awake?"[10] Kierkegaard's point is that, by constraining one's understanding of desire with skepticism (philosophical or otherwise), someone can deny themselves a critical component of happiness. Hence: "To defraud oneself of [*bedrage*… for] love is the most terrible, is an eternal loss, for which there is no compensation either in time or in eternity."[11]

Straightaway, Kierkegaard has introduced faith as an element of love. *Believing* (merely intellectually) that altruism might be possible is almost certainly insufficient, on his account, to enable the possibility of love, but the term flags the role of faith (or belief, *Tro*) in love for the neighbor. Like faith, the love command will serve as a fulcrum between two possible organizational schemes for the individual, and as in Kierkegaard's other works, it is his task to force his reader into an awareness of what their deepest commitments are, so that there is no wriggling out of the responsibility to decide (which turns out also to be a responsibility to love).

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[10] Ibid.

[11] *WL* 5-6 / *SKS* 9, 14. Kierkegaard emphasizes "for" in the Danish, to highlight a different sense of *bedrage*.

B. The Command to Love and the Structure of Obligation

In the first part of the second deliberation, Kierkegaard introduces the love command with reference to Matthew 22:39: "…You shall love the neighbor as yourself."[12] By commanding love, love is made into a duty. Kierkegaard provides a firm statement of the implications of love as a duty: "'You shall love.' Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against despair."[13] This statement of the duty to love suggests that by rendering love a duty, the love command confers certain perfections to love that it would not otherwise have (including "independence" and security "against despair"). In *Philosophical Fragments*, it was clear that the human being's capacity to apprehend and affirm the historicity of occurrences (in particular, the incarnation) was engendered by the encounter between the god and the individual who received the condition; in other words, God bolstered, supplemented, regenerated, or otherwise transformed a human power. Here, something similar seems to be happening; the command to love regenerates certain features of human love.

What is not clear, however, is whether the divine authority behind the command itself suffices to render love of the neighbor *obligatory*. In other words, is the love command obligatory *because of the divine authority of the God who commands it*, or does obligation emerge through some other scheme?

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[12] *WL* 17 / *SKS* 9, 24.

[13] *WL* 29 / *SKS* 9, 36.

1. Divine Command Accounts of *Works of Love*

Quinn and Evans have both claimed that *Works of Love* advances a divine command ethic of morality. Quinn writes, "The Christian ethics set forth in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* is at least as demanding as Kantian ethics. Its demands are, he thinks, specified by genuine divine commands and not merely by a moral law that can also be thought of as a divine command."[14] Here Quinn reproduces a common interpretation of Kierkegaard's moral theory, namely that it reproduces a deontological formulation of Kantian ethics.[15] However, Quinn draws a distinction between the two based on the authority of divinity in issuing commands. The rationale for Quinn's distinction resides in how the command, because of its divine origin, reshapes human loves[16]; in other words, he appeals to statements by Kierkegaard such as, "Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured against every change," in order to attribute to Kierkegaard a divine command theory of morality.

The natural question to ask is, what constitutes a divine command theory of moral obligation? Evans has proposed a reasonable definition, which animates his own interpretation of Kierkegaard as a divine command theorist: "A divine command theory of moral obligation, as I shall understand the term, is therefore committed to the following two propositions: (1) Any action God (understood as a perfectly good, all-powerful, and all-knowing Creator) commands his human creatures to do is morally obligatory for them. (2) Any action that is morally

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[14] Quinn, "Kierkegaard's Christian Ethics," 352.

[15] In his critique of *Works of Love*, Adorno draws this comparison explicitly. T. W. Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung/Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 8 (1939–1940), 416. Outka's framing of Kierkegaardian love as *agapic* "equal regard" strongly implies the connection. See Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 7-54.

[16] Philip L. Quinn, "The Divine Command Ethics in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, eds. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 31f.

obligatory for humans has the status of moral obligation because God commands it."[17] On

Quinn's interpretation of Kierkegaard, the first condition is satisfied; the one command (even

though it is given multiple formulations, in the Bible and by Kierkegaard) is to love the neighbor,

and Kierkegaard seems committed to this being sufficient for (moral) obligation. But on Quinn's

reading, the second condition is unmet. All Quinn has done is cite an account by Kierkegaard of

how God's command bestows perfections on love, not generated – in virtue of being commanded

by God – obligation.[18] Since moral obligation does not emerge *because of* the command's author,

Quinn does not actually attribute to Kierkegaard a divine command theory of morality.

Evans provides a more extensive account of divine command morality in *Works of Love*.

He argues that, on an attentive reading of Kierkegaard, it becomes clear that he endorses a

specific type of divine command theory, not one in which God arbitrarily issues commands

(here, one recalls moral exceptionalism readings of *Fear and Trembling*), but rather one in which

God issues commands perfectly suited to the nature of the human being. Evans frames his

interpretation of Kierkegaard in relation to Aquinas' teleological account of human nature, and

Robert Merrihew Adams' formulations of divine command.[19] He writes,

> …God's commands are rooted in God's broader teleological vision of the good. This
> account will bring morality into connection with human nature and what fulfils human
> nature. To that degree this version of a divine command theory is closer than one might
> think to a human nature theory. God's commands can be understood as fitting our human
> nature and as being directed to our happiness. This divine command theory… differs
> from a human nature theory in claiming that moral obligations do not follow directly

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[17] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 120-121.

[18] On this reading, I follow R. Zachary Manis' critique in Manis, "Kierkegaard and divine-command theory: replies to Quinn and Evans," *Religious Studies* 45, no. 3 (Sep. 2009), 290-293, 304. Manis describes his critique as "negative" in the sense that Quinn does not provide a sufficient textual basis for his claim about Kierkegaard's endorsement of a divine command theory (304).

[19] Through his book, Evans refers to multiple sections of Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, but he cites Aquinas only rarely.

from human nature alone. On such a view morality fits human nature, but one cannot deduce our moral duties simply from a knowledge of human nature.[20]

In other words, for Kierkegaard – so Evans' reading goes – God's command to love the neighbor is still necessary for moral obligation, yet this command is issued by God for a reason, namely that it meets deeply human needs.

I think Evans is correct that for Kierkegaard, the command to love the neighbor provides an avenue for the human being to fulfill a deep desire for fellowship with others that cannot – that is, from a state of sin before or independent of the command – be met otherwise. In other words, I think Evans is onto something when he invokes human nature as a domain of capacities over which God's command exerts an influence. However, Evans presumes that what is *obligatory* in the command to love the neighbor resides in the *authority* of God: "Kierkegaard believes that the concept of a command logically presupposes a commander with the authority to issue the command. God is the one who has this authority, and Kierkegaard does not flinch from the consequence of a divine command account of moral obligation…"[21] Though there are indeed passages where Kierkegaard refers to love requiring "obedience" to God[22] – Evans cites these – it is not clear (as Evans alleges) whether God's authority even generates the obligation to be obedient to God. In what follows, I will not attempt to refute Evans' interpretation of *Works of Love* directly; instead, I defend an alternative interpretation of the role of the love command in providing the conditions for moral obligation.[23]

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[20] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 9.

[21] Ibid., 123. See also, C. Stephen Evans, "Authority and Transcendence in *Works of Love*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 3 (1998): 23-40.

[22] *WL* 20 / *SKS* 9, 28. Evans cites this passage at Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 123.

[23] Though I am not committed to their broader interpretations of *Works of Love*, this puts me roughly on the same side as other opponents to divine command theory readings, e.g., Manis and Ferreira. See Manis, "Kierkegaard and divine-command theory: replies to Quinn and Evans"; and Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 40-42.

2. Cracking Open the Human Being

> "You were not mistaken, mother; for this man too is Alexander."[24]

> Love does not seek its own.[25]

> To the query, "What is a friend?" his reply was, "A single soul dwelling in two bodies."[26]

Though insightful, Evans too readily collapses the dynamic of the love command into a single movement, where God's divine authority is rendered into moral obligation. Instead, I show that the love command plays a different role: in introducing the idea of the neighbor to the human being, it enables new possible objects of desire – formerly foreclosed in sin – and new ways for the human being to arrange their desires. The moral obligation to love emerges through, and as, the very possibility of loving an *other*.

As we shall see, the process by which this occurs involves a shift in perspective induced by the love command. The love command evokes for human subjectivity the concept of the neighbor. The neighbor categorically refers to all human beings (because of its non-particularity) yet, paradoxically, it can still be the object of a human being's love. Love for the neighbor thus stands above (as eternity to time, or universality to particularity) particular desires and preferential loves (*Forkjerlighed*); it engenders a desire for the good of all others, a categorical benevolence that cracks the human being in two (or *almost* two). It shows these lower loves to be

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[24] Narration of Alexander and his lover Hephaestion, meeting Sisygambis. Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander the Great of Macedon (Vol. I: Books 1-5)*, trans. John C. Rolfe, *Loeb Classical Library* vol. 368 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 140-143 (3.12.17).

[25] 1 Cor 13:5 (*NT-1819*), as cited by Kierkegaard on *WL* 264 / *SKS* 9, 263.

[26] Diogenes Laertius, on Aristotle. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Vol. I: Books 1-5 (5.1: Aristotle)*, trans. R. D. Hicks, *Loeb Classical Library* 184 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 462-463.

always self-directed.[27] To be provoked by the command (and by the neighbor) is thus to allow oneself to be lifted up, as though by the mechane. The individual who hears the command views love of the neighbor in contrast to lower desires, which desires could be pursued also without the concept of the neighbor. That is, they are desires and loves that could be pursued by 'pagans.' Obligation emerges from this change in perspective; one can view the higher and lower loves simultaneously, which both pull on oneself to actualize various possibilities.[28] Conscience emerges within, and *as*, the overlapping purview of the higher and lower forms of desire or love, through which benevolence can configure and prioritize expressions of preferential love and desire according to itself. (Obligation is therefore not derived from God's authority.)

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At the beginning of the second deliberation, Kierkegaard introduces *sin* as a presupposition of Christianity. Christianity begins self-consciously by challenging the pre-Christian ('pagan,' sinful) dynamic of human desire: "Every discourse, particularly a section of a discourse, usually presupposes something that is the starting point… When it is said, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' this contains what is presupposed, that every person loves himself. Thus, Christianity, which by no means begins, as do those high-flying thinkers, without presuppositions, nor with a flattering presupposition, presupposes this."[29] Recall that *Either /*

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[27] I imagine Kierkegaard is considering examples such as Alexander's comment about his lover Hephaestion to Sisygambis, or the famous remark about friendship attributed to Aristotle (both quoted above). Even though each is a noble expression of love, Kierkegaard would notice the *self*-direction implied in each, and the lack of alterity.

[28] This is reminiscent of Kant's description in *Religion* of the moral law in relation to self-interest. The *Wille* gives a 'higher,' more rationally coherent law that competes with a rule for acting based on interest in one's own happiness. An inversion of the proper order (sin) subordinates the former to the latter. See Kant, *Religion*, 82-83 / AA 6:36. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard is not necessarily suggesting that the love command has re-ordered (reverted) the orders of desire within the self; that would imply complete sanctification. Instead, the love command *reawakens* the 'higher' desire (benevolent, equal desire for the good of all others), whose passionate call had been obscured by sin.

[29] *WL* 17 / *SKS* 9, 25. Presumably Kierkegaard's dismissive reference to "high-flying thinkers" refers to speculative philosophers in the Hegelian school.

Or's A could not decide where to begin; acting on any particular desire would result in regret— either A's pursuit would be frustrated by misfortune, or if fortunate enough to attain his desire, it would dispel the passion that motivated the pursuit and cost him other possible desires. Christianity begins distinctively – so claims *Works of Love* – not by *selecting* an object of desire (as A frequently attempts, as does Johannes the seducer), nor by denying one's desire altogether with an overriding obligation (like *Fear and Trembling*'s tragic heroes), but rather by asserting the limitation of the human being's capacities *in situ*.[30] That is to say, Christianity does not supply another particular desire which is to be pursued *instead* of other natural desires or preferential loves; rather, it critiques all such desires through recognition that the plurality of possible objects of desire conceals a common, undergirding desire: what is good for the self.

What Kierkegaard has done is to establish, once again, a vantage point from which it is possible to recognize two alternatives. The scheme by which he does so replays the structure of the mechane: It may simply be a fact that the human being is limited in how it can love and desire (that is, only ever indexed to self-interest), or perhaps (with God's help) the human being can do more than this. If the latter is true, then a perspective in virtue of which the two options can be evaluated vis-à-vis one another is possible to inhabit. This is not a posture of intellectual deliberation, but one of passionate decision— Christianity does not *argue* that human beings are self-interested; on the contrary, it simply *posits sinful self-interest*, which requires a perspective that involves the possibility of something greater. Indeed, this act of positing is, as Kierkegaard has stated, contained within the '*as yourself*' of the love command.

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[30] Echoes of the "Ultimatum" can again be heard. An account of sin provides the traction to offer a better scheme for configuring desire.

As with other instances of the mechane, the Christian option emerges as – and is constituted in – a 'no' to its opposite.[31] Kierkegaard is quite clear that, by presupposing self-love as the default state of the human being,[32] the love command has no interest in "proclaiming self-love as a prescriptive right."[33] Whatever love is, it decries what it was but no longer has to be. "[O]n the contrary," Kierkegaard writes, "it is Christianity's intention to wrest [*fravriste*] self-love away from us human beings. In other words, this is implied in loving oneself; but if one is to love the neighbor *as oneself*, then the commandment, as with a pick, wrenches [*vrister*] open the lock of self-love and wrests [*fravrister*] it away from a person."[34]

His analogy of wresting and wrenching open a lock is central to my interpretation: Kierkegaard makes clear with it that the love command does not simplistically supplement the human individual with a completely new capacity; instead, it frees but also deploys the mechanism of desire and motivation already in the human being. Let us examine Kierkegaard's language. Christianity frees love from its shackles, but it uses a pick to "wrench it open," suggesting that it approaches self-love from outside its normal mode of operation (much as a pick is designed to fool or break a lock, not fit it as would the corresponding key). The verb *at vriste* implies prying something open (and *at fravriste* to pull or wrestle something from someone), or at least to use force to open something closed. But it is related also to the Danish

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[31] This remark is structured similarly to a locution in Levene, *Powers of Distinction: On Religion and Modernity*, 19: "Modernity arises as a refusal, and the refused positions arise simultaneous with it."

[32] By 'default,' I mean the state of the human self independent of, or prior to, Christianity. It is a question whether the love command restores agency or generates radically novel possibilities. Presumably from the Christian perspective, it is the former, as sin implies a corruption of some original complete, though limited, state.

[33] *WL* 17 / *SKS* 9, 25.

[34] Ibid. In the Hongs' translation, they insert a paragraph break between these sentences, which is absent in the Danish original.

verb *at vride*, which means 'to twist,' implying a circular or turning motion.[35] The implication is that the love command – in its inclusion of the presupposition '*as yourself*' – grapples self-love, wrestles with it, spins it around, and turns it on its head. *But it does not annihilate it*, for *it is the very mechanism of desire*. Indeed, Kierkegaard continues his description of this transformation with further images of circular or twisting motions: "But this *as yourself*—indeed, no wrestler can wrap himself around the one he wrestles as this commandment wraps itself around self-love… Just as Jacob limped after having struggled with God, so will self-love be broken if it has struggled with this phrase that does not want to teach a person that he is not to love himself but rather wants to teach him proper self-love."[36] The love command uses self-love as the raw material, and reforms it. A person is now free to desire something other than themselves.[37]

Thus far I have developed an interpretation of the love command, not as generating *immediately* an obligation to love the neighbor, but instead as freeing love's operations from being directed only toward the good of the self; this is not yet a sufficient alternative to Evans' picture. The question remains: How does Kierkegaard get us to obligation without relying on

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[35] Moreover, the word is related to older Danish terms for bodily joints permitting circular motion: *Vrist* ('wrist' being its English cognate) still has associations with the ankle in modern Danish (*ODS*; *DDO*).

[36] *WL* 18 / *SKS* 9, 26.

[37] Is it plausible for love for the neighbor – a duty – to be accounted for as a type of desire? Ferreira is attentive to this aspect of love, highlighting that Kierkegaard refers to love – even obligatory love for the neighbor – as involving a *need*. In Danish the word is *Trang* (a desire such as a 'thirst' or 'craving'). See Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 39-41. As Kierkegaard writes, it is "the expression of the greatest riches is to have a need; therefore, that it is a need in the free person is indeed the true expression of freedom. The one in whom love is a need certainly feels free in his love" (*WL* 38 / *SKS* 9, 45). Love desires – *as the duty to love the neighbor* – even though it is categorical. It *wants* another person, "on one condition, that he [the lover] does not confuse love with possessing the beloved" (ibid.). (Kierkegaard then contrasts this independence with the dependence of desiring a beloved so much that, should they die or should the relationship suffer a misfortune, all would be lost. Based on this description, one is reminded of *Fear and Trembling*'s discussion of infinite resignation, and many musings by A in the "Diapsalmata.")
    In the second *Critique*, Kant also explicitly folds the rational will under the faculty of desire: "The **faculty of desire** is a *being's faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations*" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 144n / AA 5:9n). Kierkegaard's conception of desire may be narrower (though less clearly specified) than Kant's, but the treatment of moral obligation as desire is not altogether unprecedented. It is not absurd for Kierkegaard's notion of love to be a duty that is also a desire.

divine authority to insert (or be the force behind) the *shall* in every obligatory act? I think the answer can be found in his concept of the neighbor (*Næsten*).

A key implication of Kierkegaard's discussion of Christianity's presupposition is that, when Christianity introduces the command to love the neighbor, it does not really modify the mechanism of human motivation, nor does it introduce a new form of love to the human being. The organ of love is the same, whether 'pagan' or Christian, whether in sin or in loving the neighbor: Love naturally aims (at least in the fallen human) toward benefitting the self. What *is* radically novel about Christianity is its injection of the concept of the *neighbor* into the arena of desire and motivation. "Who, then, is one's neighbor?" Kierkegaard asks:

> The neighbor… is nearer to you than anyone else. But is he also nearer to you than you are to yourself? No, that he is not, but he is just as near, or he ought to be just as near to you. The concept 'neighbor' is actually the redoubling of your own self… [W]hat self-love unconditionally cannot endure is redoubling, and the commandment's *as yourself* is a redoubling. The person aflame with erotic love, by reason or by virtue of this ardor, can by no means bear redoubling…"[38]

The neighbor is a special possible object of love, a redoubling of the self. Insofar as it redoubles the human being's self, which begins with a fallen love that aims to benefit its own self, it then can love the neighbor. But the neighbor does not redouble the self in the way that objects of preferential love reflect our own self-interest. Rather, it does so in such a way that that the neighbor completes a conduit to the genuinely *other* person. The neighbor has the qualities of both self and (changeless, featureless) other, each of which is necessary to perform this role. (Though Kierkegaard does not deploy the term 'paradox' in *Works of Love*, we might still identify the concept of the neighbor as paradoxical.) As a redoubling of the self, the structure of the neighbor anticipates and fits the limitations of the fallen self's love (*which*, recall, on Christianity's presupposition, *always loves itself*). But at the same time, like an adapter between

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[38] *WL* 21 / *SKS* 9, 29.

two otherwise non-fitting cables, it enables the possibility of connecting the self to another through a love that would otherwise be incapable of doing so, channeling love beyond what Kierkegaard calls the *other-I* and toward a genuine other.[39] Put differently, the neighbor is an impossible, yet somehow accessible, object of love, one which enables an escape from the solipsism of the fallen human's moral-motivational scheme while still being within reach.

It is on the basis of the possibility of loving the neighbor (through this redoubling of the self), and *only* on this basis, that Kierkegaard believes genuine moral obligation is possible. If erotic love and friendship (that is, preferential love) are the highest and altruism is impossible for the human being (that is, if Christianity is false— recall the mechane), then "the task depends upon whether fortune will give one the task."[40] But for Kierkegaard, "in the moral sense this simply expresses that there is no task."[41] In other words, if preferential love is all there is (and the neighbor is not the object of love), there is no access point to receive, or understand, obligation – a *moral* obligation – that carries the force it needs. As Kierkegaard writes, "To love the beloved, asks Christianity, is that loving? —and adds, 'Do not the pagans [*Hedninger*] also do the same?' To love the friend, is that loving? asks Christianity—'Do not the pagans [*Hedninger*] also do the same?"[42] "On the other hand," he continues, if "one *shall* love the neighbor, then the task *is*, the moral task, which in turn is the origin of all tasks. Precisely because Christianity is the true morality, it knows how to… preclude all wasting of time;

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[39] *WL* 53-54 / *SKS* 9, 60-61.

[40] *WL* 51 / *SKS* 9, 58.

[41] Ibid.

[42] *WL* 53 / *SKS* 9, 60. This passage is an allusion to Mt 5:46-47. However, *NT-1819* includes the word *Toldere* ('government officials,' or as in *NRSV*, 'tax collectors') instead of *Hedninger* ('pagans,' 'gentiles'). The *SKS* commentators suggest that Kierkegaard may have translated *Hedninger* from the words οἱ ἐθνικοὶ in Greek versions of the New Testament. See *SKS* K9, 119 (29,2).

Christianity is immediately involved in the task because it has the task within itself."[43] With its

concept of the neighbor, the love-command enables the possibility of altruism and with it the

possibility of the moral task. If there are genuinely obligatory norms, *if morality exists*, then it

must involve the very concepts of duty, love, and alterity that Kierkegaard associates with the

concept of the neighbor. Effectively, the neighbor is a possible object of desire in virtue of which

other desires are rendered lower, subordinate. It is not that whether one loves the neighbor is

subject to some external scheme for moral evaluation; to love the neighbor is to enter into

morality as such. For Kierkegaard, it is the nexus in which genuine obligation emerges, and

which is capable of weighing, adjudicating, and governing other loves and desires under its

purview. This is why, in a later deliberation, Kierkegaard characterizes Christian love in terms of

conscience (*Samvittighed*).

In the final section of this chapter, I approach this deliberation to ask what sort of

specificity love for the neighbor demands. How – by what means and rules – does love for the

neighbor adjudicate preferential loves? If, as I have argued (according to Kierkegaard), love for

the neighbor enters the world to make possible a distinctive form of obligation (*moral

obligation*), what does it actually demand that human beings *do*? (The answer I will offer is

unlikely to satisfy, as Kierkegaard – through *Works of Love* – seems frequently to contradict

himself, and offers little clarity.)

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[43] Ibid.

C. "Christianity has not changed anything"

> If there is no love, hope would not exist either; it would just remain lying there like a letter waiting to be picked up.[44]

It seems that, for Kierkegaard, Christianity actually changes nothing, or at least nothing directly. It changes individuals, but to what end? Kierkegaard notes that Christianity, wielding love for the neighbor, "wants to have infinity's change take place internally [*i det Indvortes*]."[45] Kierkegaard's deliberation on love as a matter of conscience will provide some clues.

About Christianity, Kierkegaard writes, "[it] has not wanted to topple governments from the throne in order to place itself on the throne; it has never contended in an external sense [*i udvortes Forstand*] for a place in the world… In other words, just as the blood pulses in every nerve, so does Christianity want to permeate everything with the relationship of conscience."[46] The love command – Christianity – permeates everything. But if it changes nothing "in an external sense," what does it do? To illustrate how love for the neighbor governs other loves and desires, Kierkegaard invokes the example of love for the neighbor in the case of a marriage, which presumably involves preferential or erotic love. He refers to the tradition by which a minister asks if a romantic couple have consulted with their consciences before entering a marriage. He then makes a number of cryptic remarks that require interpretation.[47] How is love for the neighbor (as something universal, duty-bound, based in equality) compatible with a relationship between special beloveds such as spouses?:

> Christianity through marriage has made erotic love [*Elskov*] a matter of conscience… Christianity has not selectively made erotic love a matter of conscience, but because it

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[44] Kierkegaard. *WL* 259 / *SKS* 9, 258.

[45] *WL* 144 / *SKS* 9, 145.

[46] *WL* 135 / *SKS* 9, 137.

[47] *WL* 138 / *SKS* 9, 140.

has made all love a matter of conscience it has made erotic love that also… Christianity does not want to make changes in externals [*i det Udvortes*]; neither does it want to abolish drives or inclination…[48]

This is the Christian. It is so far from being a matter of first having to get busy to find the beloved that, on the contrary, in loving the beloved we are first to love the neighbor. To drives and inclination this is no doubt a strange, chilling inversion… Your wife must first and foremost be to you the neighbor; that she is your wife is then a more precise specification of your particular relationship to each other… If this were not the case, how would we find room for the doctrine of love for the neighbor; and yet we ordinarily forget it completely. Without really being aware of it ourselves, we talk like pagans about erotic love and friendship, arrange our lives paganly in that regard, and then add a bit of Christianity about loving the neighbor.[49]

The Christian may very well marry, may very well love his wife, especially in the way he ought to love her, may very well have a friend and love his native land; but yet in all this there must be a basic understanding between himself and God in the essentially Christian, and this is Christianity.[50]

What is remarkable about all of these passages is how *little* love for the neighbor seems to transform *particular* relationships with respect to their *particularities*, even as it transforms the type of love that governs particular relationships. One must love one's spouse as a neighbor "first and foremost," but it is unclear what results from the "strange, chilling inversion" "to drives and inclination," or what is involved in someone's "basic understanding between himself and God." It seems at least that no change is *a priori* necessary when a preferential or erotic love begins to involve love for the neighbor, except that it becomes "a matter of conscience." As Kierkegaard puts it, "If this were not the case how would we find room for the doctrine of love for the neighbor?" Love for the neighbor must operate on a separate 'elevation' than other loves, even though it always works through them. If it is on the same 'level,' or 'competes' alongside them, then it does not accomplish what Kierkegaard needs it to.

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[48] *WL* 139 / *SKS* 9, 141.

[49] *WL* 141 / *SKS* 9, 142-143. I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation.

[50] *WL* 145 / *SKS* 9, 146.

Kierkegaard reaffirms the quietness of love shortly thereafter, but with a subtle

clarification:

> To repeat, Christianity has not changed anything in what people have previously learned about loving the beloveds, the friend, etc., has not added a little or subtracted something, but it has changed everything, has changed love as a whole… This it has done by making all love a matter of conscience, which in relation to erotic love and friendship etc. can signify the cooling of passions just as much as it signifies the inwardness of the eternal life.[51]

The basis on which Kierkegaard relates conscience to friendship and erotic love presumes a

juxtaposition, like those in his other works, between 'pagan' conceptions of love and a Christian

one. (This is something he does explicitly in parts of *Works of Love*, but not in this passage.)

When Kierkegaard mentions that "Christianity has not changed anything in what people have

previously learned" about love, he is referring to the arrangements of particular, preferential

loves described by Classical Greek and Roman sources. With respect to these ways that love is

expressed (that is, through *particular desires* for *particular objects and people*), Christianity

makes no changes *a priori*, except to render the question of how to arrange these desires a *moral*

question, one that involves an *ought* determined by benevolence for all others. What is meant by

the "cooling of passions" is not that Christianity enervates passion *per se* (faith, after all, is an

infinite passion), but rather that love for the neighbor stands above 'pagan' passions (that is, the

passions for preferential love) and subjects them to itself as subjects of its benevolent rule.

Thus, it is not that the introduction of Christianity into the world, on Kierkegaard's

account, makes no changes at all. In fact, it changes human beings insofar as it turns them into

moral creatures, that is, beings who have a genuine desire for the well-being of *others*.[52] But the

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[51] *WL* 147 / *SKS* 9, 148-149.

[52] It is of course implausible to suggest that Christian religious traditions have an exclusive claim to altruism. This is another instance of Kierkegaard's parochialism.

chessboard on which love for the neighbor must play is that of the *human* mechanism of desire

and motivation, which always involves desire for particular people in particular ways (that is,

preferential loves). This does not leave us with the satisfaction of knowing what sort of

normative ethic Kierkegaard would advocate,[53] but it does explain how Kierkegaard might

occupy positions as seemingly contrary as the following two remarks at first seem to suggest:

> The times are past when only the powerful and the prominent were human beings—and
> the others were bond servants and slaves. This is due to Christianity…[54]

> "Provide money for us, provide hospitals for us, that is the most important!" No, says
> eternity, the most important is mercifulness. From the point of view of eternity, that
> someone dies is no misfortune, but that mercifulness is not practiced certainly is.[55]

For Kierkegaard, Christianity is not interested to achieve anything in externals *directly* (that is,

not insofar as it is strictly speaking "eternity"), but it does aim to *make* moral agents who are *not*

only eternally interested. This is why eternity is indifferent to death and suffering while, insofar

as it motivates human beings (who are also finite and temporal), it still has indirectly resulted

– on Kierkegaard's understanding – in the widespread abolition of slavery.[56] It opens up the

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[53] Here, I obliquely refer to a robust and continuing debate in the scholarship about *Works of Love* stretching back to Adorno, who was sharply critical of the book. The question asked is whether Kierkegaard's love is asocial or acosmic (Adorno thinks yes), and if not, how it is not. For just a slice of the literature on this issue, see Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love"; Peter George, "Something Anti-social about *Works of Love*," in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan, 1998), 70-81; Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*; John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Sharon Krishek, "Kierkegaard on Impartiality and Love," *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (Mar. 2017): 109-128.

[54] *WL* 74 / *SKS* 9, 80.

[55] *WL* 326 / *SKS* 9, 323.

[56] It is not only doubtful whether Christianity has caused the abolition of slavery; it is doubtful whether such "times are past" at all. Kierkegaard's invocation of abolition is further interesting in the tension it creates with passages from *Philosophical Fragments*. I have already quoted the following on p. 227. "If that fact [incarnation] came into the world as the absolute paradox, all that comes later would be of no help, because this remains for all eternity the consequences of a paradox and thus just as definitively improbable as the paradox" (*PF* 94-95 / *SKS* 4, 292). According to Johannes Climacus, one could not muster evidence from the (purported) abolition of slavery to show that Christian love even exists because, if abolition of slavery could only be explained through the historical irruption of Christianity, then abolition must be just as paradoxical as Christianity. Hence, it could not be observed empirically.

individual's ability to desire the well-being of others *per se*, and in so doing, bestows on them moral obligation. The human being alone – in *relation* to God vis-à-vis the command, and without any set of prescriptions – must navigate the questions of how to be political, how to practice ethics, and what social arrangements are just or unjust, based on their loves and desires.

* * *

In this chapter, I have argued that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* does not advance a divine command theory of morality. Instead, the command to love the neighbor enters the human consciousness in a way that opens up human desire, enabling desire for the well-being of another person (that is, altruism). In virtue of its relative superiority over other such desires, love for the neighbor motivates, or obligates actions in a new way. With respect to other, lower configurations of desire (such as erotic love and friendship), love for the neighbor performs the role of conscience, which simply *is*, for Kierkegaard, the stage on which morality plays. Kierkegaard does not provide a clear normative ethic based on this account of love, but suggests that love's modification of human beings turns them into moral agents, indirectly resulting in institutional and political changes that favor social justice.

CONCLUSION.
EACH BEGINS AT THE BEGINNING, PART 2

> [T]his commandment that I am commanding
> you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too
> far away.[1]

In this thesis, I have argued that, according to Kierkegaard's conception, Christianity is a decisive, novel, and most importantly, *distinctive* scheme for the individual to organize their desires in pursuit of the good life. For human beings – creatures with an eternal consciousness – in order to live the best possible life, an individual must first become conscious of, and appreciate, the distinctiveness of Christianity before affirming (with the organ of faith), that the world they inhabit is indeed the world that Christianity promises.

Kierkegaard's method for communicating (always indirectly) this distinctiveness involves juxtaposing the theological, metaphysical, and anthropological scaffolding of Christianity with alternative schemes for living the best life. As I have shown, throughout Kierkegaard's corpus, these alternatives are often collectively classified under the term 'Paganism' and depicted with references to non-Christian[2] intellectual and religious traditions. 'Paganism' is not haphazard for Kierkegaard; he constructs the category by carefully distilling practical and theoretical principles from non-Christian philosophies, characters, and myths, using them to formulate a rubric (or rather, set of rubrics – the aesthetic, the ethical, the Socratic-religious) that, when contrasted with Christianity, shows them to deliver a life that falls short of

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[1] Deut 30:11 (*NRSV*).

[2] More specifically, non-Christian, non-Jewish traditions, though it is not always clear with Kierkegaard.

what the human being desires.[3] What makes Christianity distinctive – that is, what makes it *not-'Paganism'* – is also what allows it to deliver the best possible life to the human being.

Through his construction of these two categories ('Paganism' and Christianity), Kierkegaard loads into 'Paganism' all possible organizational schemes for the cosmos and the human being that would leave the individual unable to live the best possible life: Either they must expend their passion by relying on fortune (and suffering misfortune along the way) to reach their desires – here is Charybdis, an image that resonates with the practical fetishizations of *Either / Or*'s A; or they must, by fiat, focus their passion to find satisfaction by fulfilling some desires at the costs of others – here is Scylla, whom Wilhelm would surely praise Odysseus for choosing; or, like Socrates, they can deploy their passion in the honest and thoroughgoing practice of negating all inadequate attempts to begin a life, which at best can condition an ascent that, at least for Johannes Climacus, pales in comparison to the blessedness of meeting the incarnate god as an equal on earth.[4] Christianity, on the other hand, is treated as that very set of anthropological and theological scaffolding that provides an alternative to these 'pagan' choices (these 'either / or's).

If Christianity is true, then it must have entered into the 'pagan' world as the *not-'pagan.'* I have offered an analogy to communicate the complexities with which Kierkegaard thinks through this dynamic: the mechane. According to Kierkegaard, the process by which an individual enters Christianity (and exits 'Paganism,' if they have the courage) involves a non-vicious circularity, one which never permits forgetting that the world could have been, could

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[3] Though Kierkegaard is surely careful with how he constructs 'Paganism' as an intellectual category in the context of his theological project, this is not to imply that he is careful with the source material or with the terms and categories he haphazardly applies to various peoples and religious traditions.

[4] *PF* 29 / *SKS* 4, 235-236.

indeed actually be, 'pagan.' In this sense, Christian faith, as the hoist of the crane, requires support through a taut connection to the ground. It must be tensely balanced by the counterweight of 'Paganism' as a *possibility*. To be lifted by Christian faith (only with the aid of God *qua* paradox) enables a perspective by which one can engage Christianity as offering a practical scheme for living the best life (the Christian religious stage). One is suspended, as by a mechane above the stage, and can see the alternatives. Put differently: For Kierkegaard, Christianity gifts the individual the capacity recursively to decide on Christianity, a decision which constitutes the most serious sort of responsibility (the *axiom*). In deciding on Christianity (faithfully, lovingly, *becoming Christian*), the individual's desires are transformed or expanded in such a way that the following becomes clear to them: the best life begins in and through such responsibility, while lower natural desires (and schemes to organize them for the good life) are, once lifted up, just as they appear: lower, insufficient.[5]

* * *

Perhaps I should have begun this conclusion otherwise. (It is hard to know where to begin.)

This project has been an attempt to begin thinking with Kierkegaard. If I have indeed begun, then this is no real conclusion, but a continuation of the beginning. If I have been honest to this task, and charitable, then I do not rest— "I am by no means standing still. I have my

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[5] Is it really the case that Christianity, for Kierkegaard, provides the only conditions for a genuinely good life? I have suggested this is so, but Kierkegaard often writes things that suggest the contrary. In *Fear and Trembling*'s "Epilogue," Johannes de Silentio says the following: "Whether there also are many in our day who do not find it [faith], I do not decide. I dare to refer only to myself, without concealing that he has a long way to go… But life has tasks enough also for the person who does not come to faith, and if he loves these honestly, his life will not be wasted, even if it is never comparable to the lives of those who perceived and grasped the highest" (*FT* 122 / *SKS* 4, 209). How seriously should this be taken? It is difficult not to see any other life as merely a consolation prize, when it is judged against the life of faith. Each person only gets one, after all; why settle for something unreliable or relatively unsatisfying, when the impulse inside each of us – presumably bound up in what Kierkegaard dubs *eternal consciousness* – is to find "the idea for which [one is] willing to live and die"? (*KJN* 1, 19 / *SKS* 17, 24; AA12 (1835)).

whole life therein."[6] So in these next pages, I share two possible trails on which to continue beginning, with Kierkegaard and beyond. They would not take me, or Kierkegaard, in opposite directions; they may only diverge at this or that point, likely to reconverge later.

A. Problem 1: Kierkegaard and Kant

> In this kind of work we know that even the right explanation is ineffectual.[7]

It is my contention that the *shape* of Kant's philosophy and that of Kierkegaard's thought are more similar than it might appear to casual readers of both, that there are not only shared (sometimes implicit) goals between their projects, but also that an analysis could be conducted to reveal the parallel roles that seemingly disparate concepts play in achieving these goals. I have hinted at this in footnotes throughout this thesis, but not argued for this stance in the body.

Recent work has indeed pushed in this direction, some of it quite good.[8] But for the most part, this scholarship stops by locating similarities and differences between the two, or by

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[6] *FT* 123 / *SKS* 4, 210. I have slightly modified the Hongs' translation.

[7] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 74.

[8] Early examples of drawing out similarities between Kant and Kierkegaard include a comparative piece by Swiss theologian Emil Brunner and a critique of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* by Adorno that observes similarities (unfavorable, in Adorno's eyes) to Kant's ethics. See Emil Brunner, "Das Grundproblem der Philosophie bei Kant und Kierkegaard," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3, no. 2 (1924): 31-46; and Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love." Recent major proponents of rethinking the relationship between the two authors include Ronald Green, Ulrich Knappe, and Roe Fremstedal. Each is helpful in his own way. See Green, *The Hidden Debt*; Ulrich Knappe, *Theory and Practice in Kant and Kierkegaard* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Ronald M. Green, *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011); and Roe Fremstedal, *Kierkegaard and Kant on Radical Evil and the Highest Good: Virtue, Happiness, and the Kingdom of God* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Of the three, Fremstedal's is in my judgment the most astute. His work is particularly adept at attending to Kierkegaard's commitments both to granular and broad aspects of Kant's transcendental and practical philosophy. Knappe's interpretation of the two is thorough, but he still reads Kierkegaard as an irrationalist, thus setting Kierkegaard fundamentally at odds with Kant.

　　　Green's account is perhaps the best-known; it is particularly useful for its attempt to consider which were the works authored by Kant that Kierkegaard encountered, as well as laudable in its courage to suggest major overlapping theological concerns between the two figures. I find several of Green's assertions, however, to be at best difficult to assess, and farfetched at worse. Among them is the idea that Kierkegaard self-consciously obscured his indebtedness to Kant's thought. (It strikes me as obvious that Kierkegaard would have been unconscious of his

drawing historical connections. My interest in this matter, to make it clear, is not historical. I do

not ultimately care what Kierkegaard thought of Kant, what he imbibed unconsciously through

his education, or what he accidentally developed in parallel to Kant as a response to similar or

related problems in philosophy and theology. (Indeed, in some cases it is patently clear that

Kierkegaard grossly misunderstood crucial aspects of Kant's thought.[9]) My interest is rather to

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commitments to Kant's philosophy because his interpretation of Kant's moral thought was, as manifestly clear from his journal, poor. Cf. p. 325n9) Part of Green's assertion involves the notion that Socrates, in Kierkegaard's authorship, became a cloaked representation of Kant (See especially Green, *The Hidden Debt*, 114-119). Green is clear that this is merely a "suggestion meant to stimulate our thinking," (114) but such lampshade hanging is insufficient to shield the "suggestion" from critique. In this case, I wonder not exactly whether Green has misinterpreted Kierkegaard, but actually whether he has seriously considered Kant's own troubling of the boundaries between the immanent and transcendent. True, there is a formal remnant of immanence in Kant's moral thinking that, in a certain manner of speaking, overlaps Kierkegaard's portrayal of Socrates. Reason, after all, is *human nature* for Kant. Yet in Kant's moral theory, there is a gulf between the epistemic landscape of pure reason and the form of law (on the one hand), and (on the other hand) hypothetical imperatives and inclinations. I am hesitant to articulate it so baldly, but Kierkegaard's commitment to transcendence in the figure of Christ (not Socrates) does not stray far from the boldness of Kant's question that drives the second *Critique*: Is pure practical reason possible? (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 148 / AA 5:15). The only grounds for taking Kant to be the *éminence grise* beyond Kierkegaard's Socrates would be if Kierkegaard grossly misread him in precisely the way required (admittedly possible, but unlikely), or if Kierkegaard located in Socrates an account of the transcendental conditions of pure reason being practical (farfetched). One should wonder whether we have actually grappled with the two figures if we continue to consider Kierkegaard a strictly religious thinker and Kant a strictly secular one. (Green does not end his interpretation on this note, but his approach, as with other scholars who think through the two authors in tandem, seems to assume it as the basis of his comparison.)

[9] For one key example, it seems that Kierkegaard grossly misunderstood Kant's account of autonomy. In an 1850 journal entry, he writes the following:

> Kant held that the hum. being was his own law (autonomy), i.e., bound himself under the law he gave himself. In the deeper sense, what this really postulates is lawlessness or experimentation. Its earnestness will be no more rigorous than were the blows that Sancho Panza inflicted on his own backside. It is impossible for me actually to be stricter in A than I am or wish to be in B. There must be constraint if it is going to be in earnest. If I am to bind myself and there is no binding force higher than myself, then where, as the A, who binds, can I find the rigor I do not possess as B, the one who is to be bound, when, after all, A and B are the same self[?] (*KJN* 7, 42 / *SKS* 23, 45; NB15:66)

Kierkegaard's fundamental concern with Kant's account of autonomy is that the self could not be a sufficient source of authority over itself in order to determine a moral action. This is not by itself an implausible or unprecedented critique. However, Kierkegaard's comparison of the self *qua* A and self *qua* B suggests a misinterpretation, namely that the salient feature of the faculty of the *Wille* is the faculty of choice (*Willkür*). On this reading, self$_A$ seems capable of choosing to issue a rule to self$_B$, which seems capable of choosing whether to follow it. (Here I abstract from any conception of sin that would override its ability to do so.) But for Kant, the will is not autonomous because it has the free choice to invent a law and then direct itself to obey it; it is autonomous in being the source of the moral law distinct from the (heteronomous) law of nature, which (in moral cases) may be represented as the determining ground of action. I further suspect, given Kierkegaard's inclusion of the terms "lawlessness" and "experimentation" alongside Kant's idea of autonomy, not to mention to allusion to Sancho Panza, that Kierkegaard thoroughly believes Kant's conception of the autonomous self to be autonomous insofar as it can invent a rule to issue itself. One is led to think that Kierkegaard considers the Kantian self both *as legislator* and *as legislated* to be

identify, characterize, develop, and evaluate (what I believe to be) the broader, structural

isomorphisms of the two figures. Among others, I believe it possible to demonstrate that

Kierkegaard was consistently committed to Kant's distinction between *noumena* and

phenomena, which Kierkegaard represents through the interplay of numerous terms not always

deployed consistently, including 'externality' (*Udvorteshed*), 'historical' (*historisk*),

'inwardness' (*Inderlighed*), 'internality' (*Indvorteshed*) and 'eternal' (*evig*); that there is a crucial

structural isomorphism between, on the one hand, Kant's notion of reason's pure consciousness

of the moral law as a *Factum der Vernunft*[10] and its connection to the postulates of pure practical

reason, and on the other hand, Climacus' 'deduction' of Christian doctrine from a hypothesis of

the *moment*; and that their ethics and concepts of sin show clear parallels.

The goal of such a project would be to pressure both authors in order to demonstrate

convergence between the two. Research would focus on further unearthing the undergirding

religious dimension of Kant's thought, as well as the tendency toward 'algebraic' or even

implicit 'geometrical' (in the spirit of Spinoza) reasoning that Kierkegaard (and especially some

of his pseudonyms – A, Johannes de Silentio, Johannes Climacus, Anti-Climacus) deploys.[11]

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involved in acts of deliberation about what to do. But the moral law, according to Kant, does not work this way. It is not invented in the imagination, as Kierkegaard seems to think, and then selected as a decree; it is, instead, the pure form of law as such. The matter is not necessarily whether the will is capable of wrangling a self simultaneously motivated by inclinations (though how moral and non-moral motivations may mix to result immorally in selfishness becomes a central question in the second *Critique* and *Religion*), but what would make it possible for the pure form of law, through the legislative aspect of the *Wille*, to be capable of motivating the human being in the first place. (I have Anna Barres to thank for originally directing me to this journal entry.)

[10] See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 162-166 (AA 5:29-33).

[11] Though his critique is wide-ranging, Bernard Williams' diagnosis of Kant's moral theory is that it smuggles in a central commitment about what morality must achieve: "The purity of morality itself represents a value. It expresses an ideal, presented by Kant, once again, in a form that is the most unqualified and also one of the most moving: the ideal that human existence can be ultimately just. Most advantages and admired characteristics are distributed in ways that, if not unjust, are at any rate not just, and some people are simply luckier than others. The ideal of morality is a value, moral value, that transcends luck." Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006 [1985]), 195. This is a crucial observation: Morality is a theory of life that makes the most important domain of action one that *excludes chance*. He continues: "This is in some ways like a religious conception. But it is also unlike any real religion, and in particular unlike orthodox Christianity. The

Based on their convergence, the next question would be to determine how to draw on Kierkegaard's thought to develop Kant's practical philosophy and critique of theology. Of particular interest is the mechane structure— Where Kant often engages in argumentation or reasons based on an appeal to the intuitions he presumes to share with his readers (for instance, in the case of mathematics comprising *synthetic a priori* judgments, or especially in the case of the *Factum der Vernunft*), Kierkegaard positions the reader in an asymmetrical 'either / or,' in which the option he hopes his reader will affirm *cannot* (if it is to hold the power he believes it has) be necessarily true. To leave my thoughts bare: The *Christian position* (including love for the neighbor) that Kierkegaard develops in accord with a concept of faith results in something quite similar to the mature moral and critical thought that Kant *argues* for, but Kierkegaard requires the decision of faith to enter it, not argumentation. Kierkegaard indeed refuses the closure of a system, but he only keeps it propped open by a crack (albeit an all-important one).

B. Problem 2: Expanding the Mechane— "for the sake of earnestness and jest"

> Borne: Am I a person or a weapon?
> Rachel: You are a person. But like a person, you can be a weapon, too.[12]

Kierkegaard, through the voice of Climacus but elsewhere, too, proposes a scheme for a historical soteriology that involves paradox. And paradox is a concept that (for Climacus, for

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doctrine of grace in Christianity meant that there was no calculable road from moral effort to salvation; salvation lay beyond merit, and men's efforts, even their moral efforts, were not the measure of God's love" (ibid.). As I have argued, Kierkegaard's religious thought hopes precisely to delimit the sort of arena in which "human existence can be ultimately just"; in this sense, Williams misses the mark about the limits of Christianity, but his insight is astute. Kant and Kierkegaard (as I have argued with reference to the *axiom*) share a common impulse that the ultimate goods of life must involve responsibility for acquiring them, and to some extent their individual control; luck, fortune, and fate must be exiled or subordinated in the good life.

[12] Jeff VanderMeer, *Borne* (New York: MCD, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 279. I have modified the original formatting and punctuation.

Kierkegaard) finds its origin in a particular strand of Christian theology, indeed originally in the incarnate god-teacher that the historical Kierkegaard would identify as Jesus. But at the same time, Kierkegaard's conception of paradox points to his embrace of a set of ideas that, contra his assumptions, are *not* uniquely Christian, at least not in the sense that Christianity refers to the religious tradition(s) that commonly bear that name. A qualitatively distinct form of love, a historical point of departure for a qualitatively distinct type of happiness— these are not ideas that only emerge in the eastern Mediterranean region in the first two centuries CE. Is it possible to formalize these ideas for philosophical, ethical, and political conversations in a way that avoids the limited scope of Kierkegaard's vision? If so, are there good reasons to do so?

A research project could attempt to modulate the results of Kierkegaard's ignorance and parochialism in a way that renders his theology more palatable to modern moral sensibilities but still treats it as a theology *for Christians*. This is not, however, what I have in mind. Instead, I propose pushing on Kierkegaard's theology (as articulated through Climacus' works) as a critic, taking seriously the concepts of the Socratic, 'Paganism,' paradox, and Christianity, but expunging the *ad hoc* elements most unnecessarily 'plagiarized' from the Christian tradition. What Climacus really uncovers – and what the mechane highlights – is a commitment to *distinctiveness*— not the distinctiveness of this or that religious tradition or philosophy, but the distinctiveness of those features of the human being that *connect the possibility of happiness to the capacity to affirm the very distinctiveness that creates those conditions for happiness.*

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus insists that the historical details of the god-in-time do not matter for faith, but he apparently remains committed to the idea that the god became a teacher, that the god appeared in one place, that the god became *a* human being. To push Climacus' rejection of historical details further would be to inquire whether the gift of the

paradox could happen without even this thin set of particular details, in a way that (at least in principle) excludes *a priori* no one from the *offer* of salvation, such as those who lived before Jesus. I ask: Is there a way to preserve the *distinctiveness* of Climacus' (and Kierkegaard's) theology while allowing it to shed even those minimal facts from the "world-historical *nota bene*"? Is there a way to hold onto the idea that, absent some crucial event, the human being would be *limited* in their capacities and motivations, yet permit this crucial event to be smeared throughout history? (Smeared such that, based on subjective engagement by *any* individual, it could bring them into the possibility of happiness and love for the neighbor, that is, into the *truth*?[13])

In other words, what happens if we take the best parts of Climacus' silly 'plagiarism' (those parts that capably criticize anchoring faith on rational argumentation and historicism) at face value, but put pressure on them until paradox becomes – not an "*ubique et nusquam*" (for then it would not be paradox) – but rather, fundamentally *dislocated*. For if the paradox-made-particular did not need to live in this or that town, or grow to *x* centimeters tall, why not believe the paradox was some other type of event or change (as long as it can be encountered and affirmed as paradox)?[14] Maybe the paradox came at the dawn of behavior modernity during the Neolithic, or maybe to some long-forgotten tribe of proto-human ancestors, who held the idea near their hearts and passed it on through some newly awoken sense of universal fellowship.[15] Or

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[13] Here I wonder if I have pushed Climacus (and Kierkegaard) in the direction of a thinker such as Alain Badiou in his *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[14] Pojman asks— why not believe that "God became a rattle snake and build a system around that truth"? (Pojman, "Kierkegaard on Faith and History," 63). The reason why not, for Climacus, is that a rattle snake is unlikely to be able to teach. But by expanding an idea of what constitutes teaching, the presumption that the incarnation was in a single biological human being might be challenged.

[15] One imagines the theophany of a "New Rock" to an ancestor of *Homo sapiens*, but hopefully resulting in far less violence: Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 11.

maybe it entered the world when a character with the initials "J. C." authored *Philosophical Fragments*, or possibly when some reader digested those fragments the first, or second, or tenth time? If it is impossible to say when and where, then these epistemic limitations can be invoked to extend the limits of the paradox past the historical, geographical, and cultural limits of what Kierkegaard considered Christianity in order to include – though never with the force of necessity – more and more persons. 'Paganism' (though not the term) must be preserved as a concept, but – insofar as it refers to the remainder not included in the scope of the paradox – it points (almost certainly) to no one; it becomes an infinitely thin boundary to the domain of paradox. In effect, this would be to recognize Kierkegaard's Christianity as supercessionist but transform it into a form of inclusivism that, in being so stripped down, avoids most dangers of inclusivism while still providing a rubric for how to assess or guide human beings in the organization of their desires.

The above proposal for an account of paradox still involves determinacy. Does paradox need determinacy? Can we allow paradox to be so indeterminate (world-historically) that the subjective engagement with the *possibility* of paradox would suffice for the sort of decision that the mechane presents?[16] What would Climacus lose by allowing the paradox not to enter the world at a determinate *time* and *place* at all, as long as it enters. All that is needed is *particularity* (in a subjective encounter) and *non-necessity*. As long as the power of eternity can be encountered subjectively by individual consciousnesses at a time and place in *their own lives*, is this not sufficient to dispense the condition (without reducing it to the occasion)? On such a

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[16] Here I echo elements of Levine's questions form "Why the Incarnation Is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard." Why could God not (that is, without incarnating into a physical form) still do the work of providing the condition for human beings?

reading, we recognize that Climacus wears two masks— "for the sake of earnestness and jest"[17]: one that obscures Christian doctrine with a comedic philosophical façade, and another beneath it, which pretends to be sincerely and uniquely Christian. Remove both— what do we find? Perhaps a foundation for making judgments in a way that transcends the boundaries between philosophy and theology.

This maneuver is, bluntly, to turn the straightforward rationale for Kierkegaard's citation of 1 Corinthians 2:9 on its head, yet simultaneously to take its meaning seriously— If the best ideas and motivations available to the human being could not arise in the merely human heart, the conclusion I want to draw is that most (all?) human beings – insofar as their motivations are really shaped by such ideas and motivations – have more than merely human hearts.

A goal in this endeavor is to ask what capacities for critique a modified version of Kierkegaard's theology might offer. Of particular interest is whether the structure of the mechane can provide a vantage point for evaluating accounts of how to adjudicate discourse in the ('secular') space of public reason, or for formulating criteria to determine what ideas, motivations, and actors constitute positive contributions to the collective project of politics. What I have in mind is a model (like the mechane) that recognizes the fundamental principles of governance as *decided upon* (even if not consciously or deliberately) in a way that is self-consciously self-referential. And insofar as they are *decided upon*, they must, following the mechane, be *cut* away from their alternative(s).

With the mechane, Kierkegaard provides a meta-frame for *deciding* to adopt foundational principles. His fundamental assertion about the human being is this: there is (*possibly*) a *difference* in the human being, an internal doubleness that demarcates what is the merely human,

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[17] *PF* 72 / *SKS* 4, 272.

from what is in the human but encountered as greater. This fundamental distinction can *appear* natural, an essential part of the constitution of the human animal; and indeed, for Kierkegaard, it must be *possible* that such an appearance reflects the essentially human, for the necessity of the alternative gets us nowhere. The mechane offers a vantage point to recognize that the very possibility of instantiating these greater parts (such as love, fellowship, freedom, equality, universal justice) must be decided on by a power that can only be exercised – is only *possible* to exercise – through the recursive affirmation of this very shape of the human, and this organization of the world. One must be brought into the circle, which is always marked by a conditional, a hypothetical. *If* we human beings are more than human – if we have a divine idea, a motivation to love an *other*, a desire for coherence between the right and the good that *can be satisfied*, or, following 1 Corinthians 2:16, "the mind of Christ" – then we *must* (a *must* like the *shall* of the love command) act on these special parts of ourselves.

What is crucial about this structure for conducting the process of public reasoning, is that it permits, indeed demands, distinguishing between rules for living that affirm the possibility of such a distinction and those that do not. (For Kierkegaard, this is the difference between Christendom and *becoming Christian*.) This distinction must be made when it is inquired which ideas deserve a seat at the table (for the determination of rules for living, such as how to govern justly); if they are incompatible with utopian impulses, such as love and equal concern for others, they should be dismissed. To take Kierkegaard seriously, some ideas do not even deserve to partake in the crumbs that fall from the table of public discourse, and should be excluded categorically (slavery certainly, capitalism probably) because almost by definition, the values behind them are at odds with a commitment to love the neighbor. This is not to say that the task of deciding which ideas are worthy is easy. Confidence with faith and love does not equal

certainty, and no one should be naïve. To draw the knife and make such cuts is fraught; it is dangerous; it is possible to be corrupted into fascism or other abuses[18]; it is, at its best, to wield the highest parts of the human being with the force and precision of a weapon, but never *as* a weapon.

The question to which Kierkegaard's mechane is an answer, is: *how do I begin?* As an answer, the mechane offers no single conclusion, but rather the shape of a decision. It can never take the shape of an authority, rational or otherwise. This is because, if the mechane is to be a gift, it must also be task; only if the individual chooses to desire the responsibility of such a choice can – for Kierkegaard – they live (among others) the highest life.

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[18] Carl Schmitt's 'decisionism' represents an instance of this. See Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985 [1922]), 15.

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