

Kierkegaard's Postscript in Light of Fear and Trembling: Eschatological Faith

JOHN J. DAVENPORT*

ABSTRACT: *There is a single unified conception of religious faith in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling and Concluding Unscientific Postscript: existential faith is absolute trust in an eschatological promise, i.e. a miraculous realization of ethical ideals that is beyond all human power to accomplish or even predict. Faith in this sense has the precondition of "infinite resignation," which is a purified state of ethical willing in which the agent accepts her/his own inability to actualize the ethical, outwardly or inwardly. This condition is explored extensively by Climacus in this discussion of "existential pathos," which shows why the resigned agent has to trust in an absolute source of eschatological possibilities to guarantee the ultimate meaningfulness of his/her ethical striving. The distinction between Religiousness A and B, along with different senses of "the absurd" and "the absolute paradox" can all be explained in terms of different kinds of eschatological possibility.*

KEY WORDS: *Abraham; Absolute; Absurd; Anxiety; Climacus; Eschatological event; Eschatology; Eternity; Ethical Stage; Ethics; Existential faith; Faith; Incarnation; Inwardness; Kierkegaard, Søren (1813-1855); Paradox; Pseudonyms; Religion; Religiosity A; Religiosity B; Religious Stage; Resignation; Stages in Life.*

RESUMO: *Segundo o autor do artigo, há uma única concepção do religioso presente nas obras Temor e Tremor e Postscript Conclusivo e Não-Científico de Søren Kierkegaard, concepção essa fundada na ideia de que a fé existencial consiste numa confiança absoluta na promessa escatológica, ou seja, numa realização miraculosa de ideais éticos que estão para além de todo e qualquer poder humano de os realizar ou mesmo sequer de os antecipar. Neste sentido, a fé tem como condição prévia a "resignação infinita", a qual consiste num estado purificado de vontade ética em que o agente aceita a sua própria incapacidade de actualizar o ético, seja isso de forma exterior ou interior. Esta condição é extensivamente explorada por Climacus na sua discussão do "pathos existencial", o qual mostra precisamente por que razão o agente resignado tem que confiar numa fonte absoluta de possibilidades escatológicas em ordem a poder fazer face ao mais radical sem-sentido inerente ao seu processo de actualização do ético. Assim, o artigo pretende mostrar até que ponto a distinção*

* Fordham University (Bronx, NY - USA). The author dedicates this article to Merold Westphal, his colleague at Fordham University, and to "the many wonderful graduate students who I have met through him".

kierkegaardiana entre Religiosidade A e B, bem como os diferentes sentidos do "absurdo" e do "paradoxo absoluto" podem ser explicados em termos dos diferentes tipos de possibilidade escatológica que o pensamento pode identificar.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Abraão; Absoluto; Absurdo; Acontecimento escatológico; Angústia; Climacus; Escatologia; Estádio Ético; Estádio Religioso; Estádios da Existência; Eternidade; Ética; Fé existencial; Fé; Incarnação; Interioridade; Kierkegaard, Søren (1813-1855); Paradoxo; Pseudônimos; Religião; Religiosidade A; Religiosidade B; Resignação.

1. The Problem: How does the *Postscript* relate to *Fear and Trembling*?

Within scholarship on the philosophical work of Søren Kierkegaard, the 'holy grail' remains finding a single consistent understanding of "religiousness" that makes sense of what is said about resignation and faith in *Fear and Trembling* while also explaining what is said about religiousness A and B in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to the *Philosophical Fragments*. We can be sure that we have not fully understood Kierkegaard until such a unification is achieved. This paper makes a new start towards that goal by extending what I call my "eschatological" reading of *Fear and Trembling* to the *Fragments* and *Postscript*.

The importance of this task perhaps requires some initial defense, since many analyses of the *Postscript* seem content to ignore *Fear and Trembling* altogether. And could not the different pseudonymous authors to whom Kierkegaard mischievously attributed his major early works take quite different approaches to the meaning of faith and the content of religious experience, giving us a multiplicity of only partly overlapping perspectives? They certainly could and do, but two points tell in favor of looking for underlying unity.

First, the contributions of the pseudonyms are supposed to be varying perspectives on the same three existential stages or life-views (and sub-stages within them); hence, totally incommensurable accounts of the aesthetic, ethical, religious and their relationships would undermine both the philosophical and edifying purposes of clarifying these fundamental attitudes to life. But clarifying the existential stages was Kierkegaard's main goal in his so-called 'first authorship.' Second, despite its great length and tortured structure, which seem to parody Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Postscript* is clearly both the culmination and masterpiece of the first authorship, in which the story of the existential stages is completed in the account of religiousness A and B. The varying perspectives of the different pseudonyms do not have equal authority; their insights and more are meant to be synthesized by the pseudonym "Johannes Climacus" in his *Philosophical Fragments* and its *Postscript*, which alone communicate the most radical form of the religious.

Thus, although the *Postscript* has a special relation to the *Fragments*, since both are attributed to Climacus and the *Postscript* explicitly develops the central problem of the *Fragments*, Kierkegaard wrote the *Postscript* to serve as the decisive conclusion to all his earlier pseudonymous works. In the *Postscript*, their development was to be joined with the edifying themes of the signed discourses that he published alongside *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, the *Concept of Anxiety*, and *Stages on Life's Way*. This is one reason why Kierkegaard includes in the *Postscript* an ironic commentary (titled "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature") surveying most of the preceding pseudonymous books and some of the discourses; it is also why he ends with a declaration that he is the author of the these "authors" and indirectly of their works (CUP 625-626).¹ This declaration shows that the *Postscript* is the decisive pseudonymous work. Yet, among the other works it superintends, Kierkegaard knew that *Fear and Trembling*² would be the most famous and influential (FT 257; Pap X² A 15), and this prediction has come true.

Thus the story of the stages in the *Postscript* has to agree at a deep level with the story in *Fear and Trembling* if the former is to provide the comprehensive perspective on all the earlier works, as Kierkegaard intended. He could hardly write one book to make his conception of the religious famous, and another to provide his conclusive account of the religious, yet make them largely disjoint or even inconsistent. Rather, he intends these works to cohere with each other in a mutually supporting fashion. This is evident when, in discussing Lessing, Climacus tells us that he read *Fear and Trembling* and "In that book I had perceived how the leap... as decision... becomes specifically decisive for what is Christian... All Christianity is rooted in the paradox, according to *Fear and Trembling* – yes, it is rooted in fear and trembling..." (CUP 105). The "desperation" of Abraham's faith must have something essentially in common with the modes of religious pathos described in the *Postscript* (CUP 106).

Yet despite a lot of very insightful scholarship on the *Postscript* in the last three decades, how Abraham's faith as described by Johannes de Silentio relates to the two kinds of religious life-views or existential attitudes distinguished by Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript* remains quite unclear. We remain unsure whether Abraham's faith should be classified as a species of religiousness A, or between A and B, or something else (since even sin is "far easier to explain than Abraham" – FT 112). More profoundly, the two books seem to approach their targets in radically different ways: the first uses a notoriously difficult biblical story to distinguish faith from the ethical will that is

¹ KIERKEGAARD, S. – *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. All subsequent references to this text are given parenthetically in the main text with the standard sigla, 'cup.'

² Id. – *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, referenced parenthetically with the standard sigla 'ft.'

faith's precondition; while the second uses the idea of an individual's "infinite interest in his own eternal happiness as *conditio sine qua non*" (CUP 16) to distinguish authentic religiousness in general from speculative claims to know objective religious truth (CUP 21) and goes on to distinguish Christian faith in an eternal happiness despite sin (B) from a more general trust in an eternal happiness as an objective uncertainty that remains possible after death (A).

We might wonder whether the resulting pictures are even consistent with each other, let alone mutually reinforcing. For rival accounts of *Fear and Trembling* interpret Kierkegaard's Abraham as infinitely interested in God's commands above social morality (*Sittlichkeit*), or in Isaac's living on to father a great nation "by virtue of the absurd:" but either way, Abraham hardly seems focused on *his own* eternal happiness, or even on *eternal* happiness at all (since his faith is for this life – FT 36). By contrast, the *Postscript*'s point of departure sounds remarkably classical, like Plato or Aquinas describing our soul's deepest longing for its own infinite, perfect, or total happiness as the final *telos* of human life. This is why Levinas thinks Kierkegaardian "thirst for salvation" starts from the same erosiac picture of human motivation as Hegel's idealism.³ But if the *Postscript* is just an existential version of the "Treatise on Happiness" emphasizing subjective appropriation of goods that lie beyond the boundaries of natural knowledge, then what can its vision of beatitude in union with the divine have to do with the perilous, terrible ordeal of Abraham on Mount Moriah? The problem for Kierkegaard appears to be serious indeed.

Yet there are many intriguing hints of a deep connection between these apparently so divergent texts. First, in the *Postscript*, there is extensive reference to "resignation" in connection with infinite pathos in the first section on the Issue in the *Fragments* (Ch.4, Div.2, A). In *Fear and Trembling*, faith cannot even be an issue for a person who lacks infinite passion (FT 43, 42 note*), and "infinite resignation" is the last stage before faith (FT 46), whereas faith involves a "teleological suspension of the ethical" in which the knight of faith stands in "an absolute relation to the absolute" (FT 62). Second, while the *Postscript* rarely refers to the "teleological suspension" except in Climacus's brief commentary on *Fear and Trembling* (CUP 266-267), it develops the closely related concept of an "absolute *τέλος*" and argues that any religious life-view requires one "to remain in the finite and simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute *τέλος* and relatively to relative ends" (CUP 422). This is closely related to the central formula for faith described in the second *Problema* of *Fear and Trembling*: namely that the single individual relates "absolutely to the absolute" and to the ethical *through* the absolute (FT 70).

³ LEVINAS, Emmanuel – "Existence and Ethics". In: RÉE, Jonathan; CHAMBERLAIN, Jane (ed.) – *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*. Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 26-38 (27).

Third, these texts are related through the *Fragments*,⁴ in which Climacus explains what it would mean (contra Socrates) for a "moment in time" to be essential to one's eternal happiness (PF 13) because in it the "teacher" provides the necessary condition for relation to that happiness – a condition that is missing from the human agent.⁵ Such a moment is "unique," or miraculous: it should be called "the fullness of time" (PF 18). In *Fear and Trembling*, the very same phrase is used in the Eulogy on Abraham for the moment when God's promise to Abraham and Sarah begins to be fulfilled (FT 18), i.e. the moment when Isaac is born.⁶ Here the "moment" of fullness is the *religious* analog of the aesthetic "category of the turning point" (FT 83), for it refers to a decisive change in which a divine promise is fulfilled beyond any rational hope. But in the New Testament, "the fullness of time" refers to the Incarnation when "God sent forth his son" (*Galatians* 4.4). Climacus uses the phrase this way in the *Postscript*, both for the time when the world was ripe for Christianity to enter it (CUP 590) and for the moment when a person really becomes a Christian – "if one becomes that" (CUP 591). We will return to the implications of this theme in the *Fragments*.⁷

Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, these three works are linked by the concept of religious paradox. *Fragments* introduces the famous term "absolute paradox" for that which human thought reaches towards, but "cannot think" (PF 37), i.e. the divine essence from which we are "absolutely different" in sin (PF 47), although "offense" rejects this because it is "absurd" (PF 52). The *Postscript* gives one (perhaps the only?) concrete historical instantiation

⁴ KIERKEGAARD, S. – *Philosophical Fragment and Johannes Climacus*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, referenced parenthetically with the standard sigla 'PF'.

⁵ See Anthony RUDD's insightful analysis of these concepts in "The Moment and the Teacher." In: *Kierkegaardiana*. 21 (2000), pp. 92-115. I differ only with Rudd's willingness to attribute a strong predestinarian view to Climacus (99); in fact, Climacus clearly rejects "the desperate arrogation of predestination" (CUP 582).

⁶ Silentio describes Abraham's and Sarah's faith "in the fulfillment of the promise" as preserving their spiritual "youth" beyond normal years (FT 18). This idea is clearly related to the discussion in the Conclusion of the *Postscript* about Christ's teaching that we have to become "like children" (CUP 593). This makes sense if we think of the child as representing immediacy (CUP 594), and faith as requiring a kind of "later immediacy" (FT 82). This teaching is one of several paradoxical *logia* in which "the entrance into the kingdom of heaven is made as difficult as possible, so difficult that teleological suspensions of the ethical are mentioned" (CUP 592). The close relation with *Fear and Trembling* is clear, and this discussion resembles another one on the Luke passage concerning hating one's family for God – a passage that Silentio applies to Abraham by saying that he continues to "love Isaac with his whole soul" although he *seems* to hate Isaac when he sacrificing him to God (FT 74).

⁷ There is also the strange fact that in *Fragments*, Climacus likens himself to "the man who in the afternoon exhibited for a fee a ram that in the forenoon anyone could see free of charge" (PF 21). Although this refers to the fact that what he is presenting is only Christian doctrine in an unfamiliar guise, the image of the ram obviously also alludes to Isaac's salvation.

of this abstract formulation of the paradox: "The thesis that God has existed in human form, was born, grew up, etc. is certainly the paradox *sensu strictissimo*, the absolute paradox," which is absolute precisely because God becomes human *despite* "the absolute difference" between human existence and the divine nature (CUP 217). *Fear and Trembling* also employs the term "paradox" repeatedly in relation to faith: Silentio cannot think himself into Abraham, as he can with ethical heroes, because "what is offered me is a paradox" (FT 33) which is specified later as

a paradox that makes murder into a holy and God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham again, which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops (FT 53).

It looks at first like there are two distinct paradoxes here, and a third is soon added: "Faith is the paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal... after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself above the universal" (FT 55). An adequate account would have to explain the underlying unity of these three characterizations of the paradox in *Fear and Trembling*, and connect them with the absolute paradox in Climacus's works.

Fifth and finally, a similar interdependence is suggested if we compare *Fear and Trembling* directly to the project of the *Fragments*, out of which the *Postscript* developed. In both texts, the central analyses employ the hypothetical-regressive approach: *Fear and Trembling* considers what it could mean for faith to be "higher" than the ethical-universal, as it must be if Abraham is a religious hero; *Philosophical Fragments* asks what our relation to eternal truth (the kind essential for salvation or blessedness) would have to be for Socrates to be wrong that eternal truth can be learned, or that the condition for it is latent in the learner and can be brought out by encounters that remain mere occasions inessential to the learner's (re)acquisition of this saving truth. The result almost looks like a transcendental deduction of Christian categories, though Kierkegaard did not really think that revealed concepts like sin, redemption by faith, and God-in-time could be discovered speculatively by simple negation of a theory of natural knowledge as including innate access to eternal truth. But given the regressive approach in both texts, Silentio clearly anticipates Climacus when he says that if the ethical or "social morality" is the highest, "then no categories are needed other than what Greek philosophy had or what can be deduced from them by consistent thought" (FT 55). Like Climacus, Silentio gives no direct argument for the truth of religious doctrine. His thesis is that if there is no life-view or existential attitude higher than the ethical, then Greek categories for heroism are adequate for human fulfillment. By contraposition, we get parallel conditionals:

FF: if Greek categories for heroism are inadequate for humans to realize their *télos*, then there can be an existential attitude higher than the ethical (a teleological suspension of the ethical, a singular relation to the absolute, justified silence, etc.).

PF: if Socratic categories for knowledge of eternal truth (or eternal happiness) are inadequate, then there can be a moment that is the fullness of time (a relation to historically revealed truth as essential, a teacher who is more than an occasion, etc.).

Given the similarity of the two antecedents in these parallel conditionals, there should also be important connections between the two consequents that an adequate reading of both texts would reveal. But what is the relation between the teleological suspension of the ethical and the moment of fullness in time?

These five points of connection suggest that the right understanding of the paradox and related concepts in *Fear and Trembling* would provide a key to the *Postscript*: in other words, an adequate explanation of the absurd, the fullness of time, infinite resignation, the *télos* towards which the ethical is suspended, and Abraham's "faith" would shed new light on the hardest ideas in the *Postscript*, such as the distinction between Religiousness A and B. An interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* that had this result would (by reflective equilibrium) be confirmed because it revealed the deep harmony we should expect between the two books. In turn, no reading of the *Postscript* can be adequate unless it shows how Climacus's account of the religious stages agrees with the distinctive qualifications of faith developed in Silentio's interpretation of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Fortunately, it just so happens that we have a new interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* to which this exegetical test can be applied;⁸ I turn to it now.

2. The 'Absurd' as Eschatological Possibility: *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*

In a recent essay, I offer what I call an "eschatological" reading of *Fear and Trembling* that purports to resolve the most famous problems about this text by focusing on the second of the three "paradoxes" identified above. This is the paradox that Abraham receives Isaac back again (FT 53), which fulfills his faith in God's promise that Isaac will survive to father a great nation. This "marvel" is central to understanding faith in Kierkegaard sense, because this kind of event is precisely the "absurd" that is beyond all human power to bring about. This does not mean that faith is identical with the occurrence of the miraculous event. Abraham has faith, not because of the actual result that Isaac is saved (FT 62-63), but rather because he *believed* in this miracle: even in forming the intention to sacrifice Isaac (and in starting to do it before

⁸ DAVENPORT, John – "Faith as Eschatological Trust in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*," In: MOONEY, Edward F. (ed.) – *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: A Philosophical Engagement*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 196-233. See also my essay in SIMMONS, J. Aaron; WOOD, David – *Kierkegaard and Levinas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. The eschatological interpretation is not entirely "new," since it is indebted to past readings by Mooney, Evans, Hannay, Lippitt, and others.

the angel stops him), Abraham has faith "that God would not require Isaac" (FT 36). Thus,

Abraham makes two movements. He makes the movement of infinite resignation and gives up Isaac... but next, at every moment, he makes the movement of faith. This is his consolation. In other words, he is saying: but it [Isaac's death] will not happen, or if it does, the Lord will give me a new Isaac, that is, by virtue of the absurd (FT 115).

Abraham cannot say this to others, however, or "speak" about the content of his faith in a way that would be "understandable" (FT 115), because this miraculous possibility of Isaac's return transcends all natural understanding of what is possible by human prediction and human agency.⁹ We understand states of affairs as "possible" in different synthetic modal senses – such as epistemic possibility, nomological possibility, moral possibility (or permissibility), and social possibility – by relation to articulable conditions or regularities, such as a theory of knowledge, a set of natural laws, a set of moral laws, or the mores of a given culture. But there is no such condition for understanding the "possibility" of Isaac's living to father a great nation, as God has promised, *despite* the requirement that he also be sacrificed.¹⁰ The ethical *τέλος* for the sake of which various tragic heroes have sacrificed children dear to them can be articulated or made understandable, but if they added

... the little phrase: But it will not happen anyway – who could understand them? If they went on to add: This we believe by virtue of the absurd – who would understand them any better, for who would not readily understand that it was absurd, but who would then understand that one could believe it? (FT 59).

Still, to say that the return of Isaac, and the fulfillment of God's original promise, is "absurd" is not to say that it is just contradictory or conceptually impossible, nor that it is metaphysically impossible. As Kierkegaard makes clear in an unpublished reply to a reviewer, "When I believe, then assuredly neither faith nor the content of faith is absurd... but for the person who does not have faith, faith and the content of faith are absurd" (FT 262; JP x⁶, B 68, 75). Thus "the absurd" is the name that Kierkegaard's leading pseudonyms use for the *content* of faith, as it appears from the *outside*, i.e. a perspective in which *only* its opaqueness to human reason is salient.¹¹

⁹ This is the topic of Problema III in *Fear and Trembling*, which I do not address in detail in "Faith as Eschatological Trust..." This discussion extends the analysis in that earlier essay.

¹⁰ We can, of course, understand that it is *logically* possible that someone could live although they are sacrificed, or could return from death. But such bare logical possibility is not sufficient for "understanding" in Silentio's sense. God's fearsome and paradoxical command ensures that if Isaac still does somehow survive to father the nation that will bring news of the one true God to the whole world, then it cannot be by *human* accomplishment (e.g. by the most loving parental effort); nor can human prediction make such an outcome plausible in any other way. Thus it cannot be "understood" in the relevant sense.

¹¹ Of course this is usually the perspective of the skeptic or nonbeliever, but faithful persons can also look at in this light or consider this *prima facie* absurd aspect of what they trust in.

In summary form, my reading of *Fear and Trembling* explains "faith" in this existential sense as a willed commitment of absolute trust in a promised good that is possible only by divine power. This promise is revealed and faith in it is thus a direct response to a personal God. The paradoxical content of Abraham's faith shares the same fundamental structure as the salvation after death promised in other religions. This content is defined by two conditions:

- (a) The future state, outcome, or final upshot is a *victory of the good*, an actualization of the ethical ideal in some state of being. (In the strict or narrower sense, it is an actualization of the infinite ethical ideal in this finite, created world: in the outcome, temporal existence is transformed to fit with eternal essence, i.e. what ethically ought to be).
- (b) The human agents involved can see no way for this victory to result from natural processes, nor any way of bringing it about by their own powers. Access to it is blocked by some *obstacle*, which human reason can see no way to overcome. It is therefore possible only in some incalculable way by divine power, by 'miracle.'

Condition (a) explains the precise sense in which this state involves yet transcends the ethical, for it is a realization of some kind of ethical ideal in an actual state of affairs (for Abraham, in the time of this life); and as we all know, ethical ideals are not self-actualizing. Condition (b) explains the sense in which trusting in this future state can appear absurd, since it cannot be rationally justified as having even a low probability according to human knowledge: so a person can stake his ethical identity on it only if he is fully resigned to his own inability to bring about this state or to predict it on rational grounds. As Kierkegaard says of the analogy with the poor young lad and the princess in *Fear and Trembling*, "Johannes de Silentio proceeds on the assumption that, humanly speaking, it is impossible for the lover to get the princess" (FT 264; JP x⁶, B 68, 76).

I call a narrative outcome or *dénouement* meeting these two conditions (a) and (b) an *eschatological event*, and the propositional attitude of a human agent who trusts in such an event I call *existential faith*. Such an event cannot become the intentional object of faith without revelation as a source, for it transcends natural sense and reason. Thus, trusting that the very idea of such a transforming event has a divine source is inseparable from trusting that it has a divine truth-maker: the eschatological possibility of such an event can only be grounded in the miraculous agency of God as a free fulfiller of covenants. Hence existential faith involves an absolute or singularizing relation to God-as-Thou (FT 77), rather than simply to God as the ground of the universal-ethical, or as the metaphysical principle of being.

The other "paradoxes" in *Fear and Trembling* are explained by the idea that Abraham has existential faith, as defined here. In *Problema III*, because the God-relationship consists in existential faith, and such faith is the human

agent's trusting appropriation of eschatological possibility, which cannot be explained or communicated directly, "a person's God-relationship is a secret" (CUP 78), not accidentally but in an essential sense (CUP 79). In *Problema II*, existential faith is an absolute relation to the "Absolute," now understood as a proper name for the creative source of eschatological promises and eschatological possibilities, rather than as the maximal being of natural theology. "God" in this sense is a being whose existence can only be "verified" eschatologically.¹² In *Problema I*, the interhuman ethical category is "teleologically suspended" for Abraham in the sense that he can only fulfill his duty to Isaac through the eschatological event of Isaac's reprieve. Because some kind of *obstacle* makes it impossible for him to fulfill his ethical duty, the knight of faith knows that "he can be saved only by the absurd, and this he clearly grasps by faith" (FT 47).

On this reading, Abraham's case is extreme in that for him, the obstacle is God's command itself, which seems to contradict the promise of Isaac's birth and destiny in which Abraham and Sarah were earlier commanded to believe. Thus, as Kierkegaard wrote in the margin of one of his journals, Abraham's case "is not a collision between God's command and man's command but between God's command and God's command" (FT 248; JP I #908; Pap. IV B 67). This is a passage that has never been explained by readings of *Fear and Trembling* as a defense of absolute divine voluntarism or a divine command ontology of the right. It suggests that faith consists *not* in blindly obeying God's command, but rather in trusting to the miraculous possibility of the promised good despite the obstacle that in this case is created by God himself to test Abraham.

Hence the *main point* of *Fear and Trembling* is not that Abraham's absolute duty to God is higher than human laws, or that divine commands trump *Sittlichkeit*; although Silentio's account certainly introduces these ideas as hypotheses incompatible with Hegel's system, the primary theme of this text is that our duty to God is to have existential faith in God's promise of ultimate salvation. And this promise is the *absolute realization of the ethical*, not its violation or surpassing in a higher allegiance to divine fiat. This one *direct* duty to have faith in God's promise transcends all ethical principles (including

¹² See Hick, John - "Theology and Verification," and "Eschatological Verification Reconsidered," reprinted in: Hick, John - *A John Hick Reader*. Edited by Paul Badham. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990. Unlike Kierkegaard as I'm reading him, Hick does not conceive God as *essentially* eschatological: Hick leaves open the possibility of other ways in which God's existence could be verified. Hick also has some difficulty defining what he calls an "eschatological situation" that confirms "to the full that the history of the universe has led to an end-state in which the postulated divine purpose for humanity can be seen to be fulfilled" (133). I think that my conditions (a) and (b) point towards a more adequate conception of Hick's "eschatological situation."

universal norms of natural law and even higher agapic ideals that in turn transcend mere cultural *Sittlichkeit*) because it looks towards an event requiring an absolute creative power that is not assured by the ideality of any ethical framework in itself. A pure ethical intention cannot be premised on any certainty of victory because the normative force of rightness does not actualize itself in temporal existence. But divine power may make the two coincide, in the end, when we cannot. Discharging our absolute duty to God means trusting absolutely (or staking everything on) in God's *ultimate fulfillment* of universal ethical ideals, rather than their abrogation. In the intentional object of existential faith, then, "the ethical" in even its highest agapic forms is *aufgehoben* in the eschatological miracle: because of his faith, Abraham "gained everything and kept Isaac" (FT 22).

When *Fear and Trembling* is understood this way, its continuity with the *Fragments* and *Postscript* finally becomes clear. For although Climacus demarks a specifically Christian type of existential faith, it consists in trust in a specific "eschatological possibility" in the broad sense defined above; this is precisely what distinguishes the religious from the ethical in Climacus's works. For example, in the *Fragments*, the "Absolute Paradox" is described in terms of the difference between the human and the divine marked by sin (PF 47), which functions in my formula as *the obstacle* to human fulfillment of ethical obligations and ideals. Thus Climacus describes sin as a more radical "teleological suspension" of the ethical: "the ethical is then present at every moment, but the individual is not capable of fulfilling it" (CUP, 266). Climacus describes this state as being "heterogeneous with the ethical" despite still being bound by it. In this case, the obstacle is *internal* to the agent's will, rather than external as in Abraham's case: he was able to fulfill the ethical "but was prevented by something higher" (CUP, 267), while the sinful individual has voluntarily made it volitionally impossible for himself to will the ethical wholeheartedly, or to fulfill his moral obligations. Because of this heterogeneity, "the god" must provide the essential condition to this individual, and such a divine act is a miraculous restoration - a work that only the god can do (PF 42).

Thus the "god" who makes possible this transformation that annuls the "absolute difference" (PF 47) cannot be an impersonal principle or "concept" like that derived from Anselm's ontological argument: rather, he must be a personal agent designated by "god" as a proper name (PF 41; note the connection to CUP 90). Hence *trust* in this unprovable divine agent and the equalizing (or overcoming of heterogeneity) that this god makes possible is an absolute relation to an eschatological possibility, just like Abraham's faith that Isaac will endure in *Fear and Trembling*. The similarity is not immediately apparent only because the *Fragments* looks at the human-divine relation more abstractly: when it discusses the perspective of the human agent, it focuses negatively on

the finitude of our understanding (PF 38), to which both sin and its forgiveness seem absurd, rather than positively on how, nevertheless, we can trust in a reconciliation possible only by virtue of the absurd.

3. From the *Fragments* to the *Postscript*: The "Issue" is Eschatological

The *Postscript* gives us both sides of this human-divine relation. It is similar to the *Fragments* in emphasizing the limits of historical and metaphysical understanding: roughly half of the text (before Part II, sec. 2, ch. IV) is mostly devoted to explaining the difference between truth-as-subjectively appropriated in the will and truth as objectively knowable in volitionally neutral or detached consciousness (or even as timeless form). As Merold Westphal has rightly noted, this distinction cuts across the existential stages or "existence-spheres" as Climacus calls them, because *both* ethical and religious truth must be appropriated or personally taken to heart, while aesthetic attitudes are compatible with objective distance from any deep engagement or volitional risk.¹³ In the ethical and religious categories, the adverbial mode or "how" affects the intentional object or "what": the practical aspect of their content is distorted or obscured if it is not apprehended with volitional passion, in the sense of an earnest interest in the worth of one's own agency, life-purposes, and fate. Thus Kierkegaard agrees with Kant's doctrine of the primacy of practical attitudes: while speculative and metaphysical knowledge are compatible with an aesthetic life-view or disengaged volitional orientation, ethical and religious existential attitudes do not depend on "knowledge" in the objective sense. Careful critical analysis has successfully explained these themes in the *Postscript*.¹⁴

¹³ WESTPHAL, Merold – *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996, p. 104.

¹⁴ There is a question, highlighted in James Conant's work on Kierkegaard, concerning whether these points about personal appropriation can themselves be directly communicated. After all, Climacus criticizes the "barkers" of inwardness who try to preach it with fundamentalist "zeal and enthusiasm" (CUP 77-79), as Conant has recently emphasized ("Reply to Critics," presented to the Kierkegaard Society session at the Eastern Division meeting of American Philosophical Association: New York, Dec. 29, 2005). But this is because the "town criers" of inwardness (Lowrie's better translation) make proselytizing and being understood, rather than taking to heart what they are communicating, their primary aim. It remains possible directly to frame second-order statements about inwardness and appropriation as first-order phenomena, and this can be valuable as long as one lets the way one goes about this second-order enterprise reflect taking to heart what is being said in it, e.g., "that the God-relationship of the individual human being is the main point" (CUP 77). Such an author would prefer to be misunderstood rather than to make the finite good of getting his point across his highest goal. Yet second-order statements about such matters, which can be evaluated philosophically because of their directness, remain valuable if employed this way: thus Climacus is not contradicting himself in framing direct

But the *Postscript* differs from the *Fragments* in two crucial ways. First, in this work, Climacus recognizes a vital distinction between (Socratic) religiousness A and (Christian) religiousness B that is obscured by the *Fragments*' simple dichotomy between Platonic reliance on the learner's immanent resources and absolute dependence on "the god." Second, while the *Fragments* emphasizes our powerlessness to bring about the knowledge or insight necessary for eternal happiness, making it seem at times as if the god does everything for us while we remain utterly passive, the *Postscript* is much more 'Arminian': for it describes religion A and the development towards B in terms of the existing human agent's passionate interest in the highest good, and his or her experience in striving towards this transcendent (and hence indefinable) good through ethically informed willing. Thus, unlike the *Fragments*, the *Postscript* portrays us as capable in principle of willing the infinite good, even if in practice we always fail to balance this with finite interest in worldly goods.¹⁵ As John Glenn says, while the *Fragments* seems to focus on "the 'objective' conditions for eternal happiness" (which explains this work's direct form as a transcendental deduction¹⁶), in the *Postscript*, "Climacus deals with the subjective conditions for the reception" of eternal happiness.¹⁷ In this respect, its perspective is much closer to *Fear and Trembling*, for the second half of the *Postscript* focuses on a typical human agent's route into the "existential

"theses" possibly attributable to Lessing, while Lessing's indirect mode prevents certain attribution to him. Likewise, the responsible commentator may frame theses attributable to Climacus, although Climacus revokes any final authority to assert them directly (CUP 619) in keeping with his thesis (stated directly to explain what Lessing communicated indirectly) that only God and the apostles have the authority to communicate religious truth directly (CUP 74). Finally, such theses may indirectly even be "attributable" to Kierkegaard himself when the balance of evidence warrants, as long as we remember that what matters most is how we respond to his texts, not the (ultimately just historical/speculative) question of what one 19th-century Danish man happened to think.

¹⁵ On this theme, see my commentary on Spielberg's masterpiece: "My Schindler's List: A Personal Kierkegaardian Reflection." In: *Religious Humanism*. 34 (2001), 2-3, pp. 13-23.

¹⁶ As I have said, I do not think that Kierkegaard really believes that Christian categories can be deduced from the hypothesis that the learner lacks the immanent necessary condition for saving knowledge. Rather, the apparent transcendental deduction in the *Fragments* is specious, and thus its direct form as an epistemological inquiry is misleading, although Kierkegaard does intend to show why any speculative philosophy that starts from the Platonic principle of immanent truth cannot reach Christian categories.

¹⁷ GLENN JR., John – "A Highest Good... An Eternal Happiness: The Human Telos in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*." In: PERKINS, Robert (ed.) – *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Mercer University Press, 1997, pp. 247-262 (248). Climacus marks this difference by noting that only Part One of the *Postscript* on the "Objective Issue of the Truth of Christianity" is the promised postscript to the *Fragments* that concretizes its objective question in terms of whether we can know that Christianity is true, whereas Part Two on the "Subjective Issue" of how the individual can attain faith is "really more than the promised sequel" (CUP 17).

pathos" that is religiousness A, and the obstacles that may ultimately bring her to the threshold of B. Here the positive effort of will meets the negative break or chasm of sin, which it cannot cross unless by virtue of the absurd. By considering A and B as two types religious *heroism* with the same basic structure as Abraham's, Climacus shows that they differ primarily according to the *kind* of eschatological possibility in which the hero puts his absolute trust. The two different eschatological *contents* require different levels of existential pathos for their personal appropriation in faith, in accord with the account of truth as subjectivity given in the first half of the *Postscript*.

If it seems strange to call all these intentional objects of existential faith "eschatological possibilities," that is probably because in western theologies based on biblical teachings, the term "eschatology" traditionally refers to doctrines about the end of time, or the final fate of souls, or the renewal of the physical cosmos (or some combination of these, depending on the religion). But if we try to understand what unites such doctrines and the kind of promised "end" that they concern, we find that the final state of the temporal world, or of free human spirits, or even the divine being itself according to eschatological doctrines is always an instantiation of conditions (a) and (b) above, i.e. a miraculous alteration of actual states of affairs by a personal creator, which brings about goods that it is beyond the power of the relevant human agents to achieve.¹⁸ This holds for familiar eschatological ideas, including beatific union with God, or hell as a self-destroying spiritual state of the evil will, or a new "kingdom" as a transformation of nature that eliminates all natural evil, or even the famous image of a last battle ending with a new life in God's direct presence. What distinguishes these familiar eschatological motifs from 'happy endings' like Abraham getting Isaac back, or Job getting his family back, is simply that the traditional eschatological events are pictured as *absolutely ultimate* divine actualizations of the Good, or *maximal* victories of the Right, which means that they leave no eliminable moral or natural evil standing. Thus they have an apocalyptic (time-concluding) and cosmic (all-encompassing) scope, relative to which the local miracles of narratives like the *Akedah* and similar "turning points in human time" seem only like anticipations, or mere foreshadowings, of a far greater "return" to come.¹⁹

Eschatology in this narrow or traditional sense, which also includes the kind of blessed state after death implied in Plato's eschatological myths, is

¹⁸ See DAVENPORT, John – "The Essence of Eschatology: A Modal Interpretation." In: *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 19 (1996), nr. 3, pp. 206-239.

¹⁹ See BUBER, Martin – *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970, p. 168. For examples of such narrative moments in fiction, see my essay on "Happy Endings and Religious Hope: The *Lord of the Rings* as an Epic Fairy Tale." In: BASSHAM, Gregory; BRONSON, Eric (eds.) – *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*. Chicago: Open Court, 2003, pp. 204-18.

encompassed in the idea of an "eternal happiness" discussed in the *Fragments* and *Postscript*. Note that this is *not* obvious merely from the use of the phrase "eternal happiness," because this term is sometimes used for an immortal state of beatitude allegedly deduced from natural reason, or for a state of bliss into which one enters by mystical transport through spiritual exercises. As my conceptual definition emphasizes, for a state of affairs *s* to be conceived by person *P* as an eschatological possibility requires that *s* is not thought by *P* to be inferable from natural sources without revelation, nor to be reachable by natural processes or human effort of any kind. However, that Climacus uses "eternal happiness" in neither of these ways, but rather as a miraculous outcome *beyond* all philosophical or mystical reckoning (which contrasts with its opposite spiritual state, as in traditional eschatology), becomes clear when we focus on the main problem in the *Fragments*.

On a first reading, this text may seem to be about how to solve the paradox of the learner, or about whether there is any innate knowledge. But Climacus takes up these issues only as means to answering his primary question: namely, what is required for an "eternal consciousness" on which an "eternal happiness" can be built (PF 1, title page). This phrase implies a good that is complete in the sense of being total and irreversible. If such a good fulfills ethical ideals yet is not within reach of our power or knowledge, and is accessible only through divine agency, it counts as an eschatological possibility in the broader sense defined by conditions (a) and (b) above. In the *Fragments*, "the god" is *defined* as the source of such a possibility: he is the teacher who provides the condition that makes the eternal possible for us. Such a teacher is really a "savior," and if the learner met him again "in another life," he could demand an accounting of the learner who had received such a decisive condition. Thus the god is more than a teacher: he is a "judge" (PF, 18). This allusion to the Last Judgment is no accident, for the "eternal happiness" at issue in the *Fragments* is a state of spiritual salvation, and its opposite is a state of eternal damnation.²⁰

This harrowing double-possibility of opposite final states is the real "issue" which the *Postscript* is supposed to "clothe... in historical costume," in fulfillment of a parting promise in the *Fragments* (CUP 10). This is not immediately apparent when that issue is stated objectively:

²⁰ Kierkegaard sounds a similar but even more ominous note in his final edifying discourse, "The Unchangeableness of God," which is included in *For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself!* Tr. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974. In his own name, he writes that God's will for us is absolutely immutable, and so we must be judged according to it: "This thought is *terrifying*, all *fear and trembling*" (231). The God to whom we have to render a final account is essentially eschatological: He does not *keep* a reckoning, but rather "He is Himself the reckoning" (237).

Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge? (see title page [of the *Fragments*]) (CUP 15).

In the *Fragments*, these three questions open an investigation of what would follow if Christianity were true, but as noted earlier, the *Postscript* subjectivizes this into the question of what it is for a given individual to relate herself in the requisite way to this promise of an eternal happiness (CUP 15). Climacus tells us that it requires an infinite or unconditional passion for this "highest good, called an eternal happiness" (Ibid). It follows that it is impossible for someone who lacks such an infinite interest ever to come into the promised good. As John Glenn rightly emphasizes, this suggests that the "highest good" at issue is "not a satisfaction, even a complete satisfaction, of the subject's given desires, but a state of spiritual fulfillment requiring a deepening of oneself and transforming of one's desires."²¹ Climacus explains this idea by way of the biblical image of the "foolish virgins," who "lost the infinite passion of expectancy" (the same term used for Abraham's trust) and did not keep their lamps burning for the bridegroom's arrival. When the bridegroom finally came, he declared to them, "I do not know you" (CUP 17). This story is a familiar allegory for the loss of faith in God (the bridegroom), whose arrival is analogous to the Last Judgment.²²

This figure is appropriate because the issue of the *Fragments* when subjectively reinterpreted concerns how, as existing moral agents, we relate to an eschatological promise that includes not only "eternal happiness" but also its opposite (damnation): for these two possibilities are dialectically inseparable. After rejecting the historical and speculative approaches to Christianity, which prevent the proper attitude to such a double-possibility, Climacus returns to this idea:

...the true dialectical relation is that whoever can think the one can *eo ipso* think the other, indeed, has *eo ipso* thought the other – if he has thought the one. Here I have in mind the quasi-dogma of eternal punishment. The issue enunciated in the *Fragments* is this: How can something historical be decisive for eternal happiness? When "decisive" is predicated, it is *eo ipso* said that when eternal happiness is decided, eternal unhappiness is also decided, whether as posited or excluded (CUP 94).

With the introduction of the term "decisive," the "issue" now appears in its fully eschatological form: can relation to something historical be decisive for the difference between salvation and damnation? Philosophical teleology from

²¹ GLENN JR., John – "A Highest Good...", cit., p. 253. As Glenn says, this means that the highest good is not "happiness" in any ordinary sense, but is more like Kant's notion of the purified or holy will.

²² It is also directly related to two of the sub-Abrahams of the "Exordium" in *Fear and Trembling*. They receive Isaac back, but without expecting this in faith, and so God does not "know" them as He knows Abraham.

Socrates through Hegel posits only a *single τέλος* for our nature, whose 'opposite' is merely lack, deficiency, or failure to realize it. Such a *τέλος* is immanent in its 'opposite,' or latent throughout the process that tends naturally towards it. This is what Climacus means in saying that, for the eudaimonist philosophical tradition, the individual "always has his eternal happiness behind him," and mediates its opposite away (CUP 95). By contrast, "Now Christianity enters and posits the disjunction: either and eternal happiness or an eternal unhappiness, and a decision within time" (Ibid). Thus the true issue in the *Postscript* is an absolute *either-or*, even more unmediable than the first *either-or* between the aesthetic and ethical life-views.²³

This formulation of the issue sheds light on a crucial passage in the "Truth is Subjectivity" chapter in which Climacus contrasts Christianity understood objectively as a "sum of tenets" with Christianity as the paradox that challenges the individual to the ultimate subjective response

... so that it can be for the existing person in the inwardness of existence by placing him decisively, more decisively than any judge can place the accused, between time and eternity in time, between heaven and hell in the time of salvation (CUP 215).

The emphasis is again on our encounter with the paradox as an eschatologically *decisive* situation the upshot of which is not determined by our species-being. If the eschatological promise is true, then the individual who is in the process of "becoming" toward one end or the other has an existence in which this *double-possibility* is constantly present until the moment of death. The existential anxiety of being-towards-death is thus properly understood as an eschatological anxiety.

This point is emphasized again in the first division of the long ch.4 on "The Issue in *Fragments*," where Climacus argues in §2 that we need "Preliminary Agreement about What Christianity Is" before we can adjudicate Hegelian claims about its mediation in speculative logic (CUP 369). The Hegelian assumes that Christianity is a positive doctrine and focuses on judging its truth (CUP 371), whereas in fact Christianity is a call to a subjective (i.e. volitional) relation: "it is the miraculous, the absurd, with the requirement that the individual is to exist in it" (CUP 378). In this sense, Christianity is not a set of factual claims, but rather the (infinite) task of relating oneself to its promise (CUP 377). We might say that Climacus's issue is Christianity in the

²³ Of course, plenty of philosophers and theologians today consider it impolite to speak of damnation, given its apparent disproportionality or cruelty. However, for Kierkegaard, its possibility is the correlate of freedom. It is crucial to understand that for Kierkegaard, this state is not an externally imposed physical torture; rather, it just is the spiritual state of the evil will assuming its final form as fixed in eternity. For such will is endlessly self-consuming (cf. KIERKEGAARD, S. – *Sickness Unto Death*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 18-19). Note that the possibility of damnation also fits my definition of an eschatological possibility, in that it is the divine realization of justice in an existing state of the spirit.

illocutionary mode of an *imperative* or call to let oneself be redefined in terms of what it promises. This requires the "utmost effort" or inward work of spirit (CUP 383). Yet this exhortation is not a pure imperative, since it also speaks in another illocutionary mode that is rarely distinguished but needs its own name: the *juridical* mode, implying the authority to render a verdict. For the issue is "Eternity in the next world and the solemn earnestness of the judgment (in which, please note, it will be decided whether I was a Christian)...," which cannot be determined by a ritual or sacrament like baptism (CUP 367). Rather, it requires the individual's active decision and striving to transform an "initial being-Christian... in order to become Christian in truth" (CUP 365). Thus the focus on "subjectivity" throughout the *Postscript* is really driven by Kierkegaard's recognition that eschatological possibilities can be apprehended as such only in the mode of an infinitely interested personal response to their revelatory source.

4. Ethical Striving and Infinite Resignation as Preconditions for Faith in the *Postscript*

Here is a likely objection my interpretation thus far: this way of understanding "the issue" may seem to risk reducing the *Postscript's* theme to enjoining a purely egoistic fear for one's soul. Indeed, as I noted above, this is exactly how Levinas understands it. I agree with John Glenn that this is *not* Climacus's intention in focusing on concern for one's "eternal happiness:" for as Glenn points out, Climacus critiques "eudaemonism" at several points, and he does not conceive our infinite interest in our highest good as "an attempt to earn or merit it."²⁴ His point is rather to focus on a good that *transcends* every finite value that we can help bring about, or that it can make sense to intend as a goal of our actions. Climacus calls this good our "absolute τέλος" (CUP 387), the same term used in *Fear and Trembling* to refer to that towards which the ethical is "suspended," which implies that in some sense we make it our purpose to seek this τέλος (a question to which I return below). But it is clearly not another first-order good in the list of ends that we can intelligibly will as final (CUP 391), and to regard it this way "converts an eternal happiness into a prize on a Christmas tree," or "an unusually fat livelihood" (CUP 392). Thus Glenn is right that Climacus's view is "close to that of Kant, who argues that conviction of the existence of God, of rewards for virtue and punishment for vice, can, and properly should, only *follow* moral commitment, not be its basis" or goal.²⁵ In other words, our own eternal good is not our aim in an ordinary sense.

²⁴ GLENN JR., John – "A Highest Good...", cit., pp. 251 and 254.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 257. Compare Merold Westphal's response to Levinas's critique in his essay, "The Many Faces of Levinas as a Reader of Kierkegaard" (in this volume). Westphal notes that the self

Similarly, Chris Arroyo argues that in *Works of Love*, "when Kierkegaard speaks of the hope of the lover for the eternal... this should not be seen as a motivation for the self's actions, but rather as an unintended consequence to participating in the authentic love relationship..."²⁶ Still, the good that is the object of faith is not merely a side-effect; it is intimately connected with the meaning of moral value. Our hope for the transcendent good that cannot be described in any aesthetic terms (precisely because it is eschatological) is not a *motive*, but it is an infinite trust in a final *confirmation* of the ethical, a proof that our ethical striving has an ultimate meaning that we cannot give it. Thus the "final fulfillment" or "ultimate meaning"²⁷ in which the religious agent trusts is not conceived as a private boon, but rather as the perfect *success* of all ethical ideality, the absolute vindication of goodness, the state in which *amor vincit omnia*. Kierkegaard might have made this clearer by calling this outcome "eternal meaningfulness" rather than using more eudaemonist terminology.

My argument for this interpretation is that, like Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, Climacus regards a *pure* moral will to the good for its own sake as the *precondition* for any faith-relation to the paradoxes of eschatological possibility. This theme is taken up at several different points in the *Postscript*, but first in a discussion of being-towards-death. In commenting on Lessing, Climacus notes that "existence-relation to the truth" requires a negative recognition that "trust in life" has no certain finite basis, since "the possibility of death is present at every moment" (CUP 82). In terms of my formula for existential faith, our mortality constitutes a *standing* obstacle to our power to realize the good even when we can and do will it. Keeping mortality in mind thus constitutes the maximal form of infinite resignation, saving me from the illusion that I have the power to guarantee any actual results in the world by my own effort. The ethical will purified by this kind of resignation regards right intention and motive, not the actual outcome, as the measure of its worth (CUP 136) – as in Kant's conception of the good will (compare *Groundwork* 394). Thus "[t]rue ethical enthusiasm consists in willing to the utmost of one's capability, but also, uplifted by divine jest, in never thinking whether or not one thereby achieves something" (CUP 135). For "ethical striving in itself" is not guaranteed to achieve anything in the temporal world, so success always involves an additional element of luck or "Governance" (depending on your life-view). Hence the pure moral agent's "earnestness is his own inner life,"

may benefit from motives that do not aim at the self's own good. I agree, though I would not describe Kierkegaard's position as a form of religious "eudaemonism."

²⁶ ARROYO, Christopher – "Unselfish Salvation: Levinas, Kierkegaard, and the Place of Self-Fulfillment in Ethics". In: *Faith and Philosophy*. 22 (2005), n. 2, pp. 160-172 (166-167).

²⁷ GLENN JR., John – "A Highest Good...", cit., p. 258.

which is independent of the result (CUP 139).²⁸ As Climacus comments later, the "enthusiastic" ethicist's infinite passion breaks with all "sagacious paltriness" or consequentialism (CUP 569).

The relation between such an ethical will and religiousness is made clear in the second division of ch. 4 in Climacus's discussion of the three "expressions of existential pathos." Before examining a few key passages, it will help to have a structural outline of this complex part of the text. Division two begins with the final restatement of the "issue," followed by the distinction of two components within it: (A) the individual's relation to the promise of an eternal happiness *per se*, and (B) this relation depending on the historical-absurd. This is Climacus's way of distinguishing the feature of Christian faith that is common to the structure of all authentic religiousness (element A) and the feature that is unique to Christian faith (element B). Thus all authentic faith is absolute pathos towards an eternal happiness (e.g. Socrates's staking everything on an uncertain immortality), but only Christian faith conceives this eternal happiness as depending on the eternal-in-time, or absolute paradox. Here is an outline listing the topics of the main subsections under each part:

Division 2

A. Existential Pathos as trust in an eternal happiness (transcending all finite ends)

1. The Initial Expression: The pathos of resignation as the first step in relating absolutely to the absolute *télos*.
2. The Essential Expression: Existential pathos as "suffering" in the religious sense of dying to immediacy (which is a continuation of resignation).
3. The Decisive Expression: Existential pathos as recognizing infinite or categorical guilt, i.e. the totality of our failure to fulfill ethical obligations in the world of time (the limiting species of infinite resignation).

The Intermediate Clause Between A and B: summarizes religiousness A and distinguishes it from aesthetic categories such as the "marvelous" (CUP 558).

B. The issue becomes "dialectical" because relation to the promised eternal happiness depends on relation in time to something that is "historical in such a way that its composition includes that which according to its nature cannot become historical and consequently must become that by virtue of the absurd" (CUP 385).

1. Faith in eternal happiness not directly, but conditional on a relation to something non-eternal.
2. Faith in eternal happiness based on faith in something historical or temporally existing.
3. Faith in eternal happiness based on faith in the absolute paradox, the eternal-in-time, the God-Man (or Incarnation).

²⁸ I am indebted to Eleanor Helms for pointing out the significance of these passages to me in a paper that she delivered at Fordham University during the fall semester, 2004.

Appendix to B: ties the discussion back to the *Fragments* by relating God-in-time as the condition to

- a. The consciousness of sin;
- b. The possibility of offense;
- c. The pain of sympathy (which relates to the exclusivist claims of orthodox Christianity).

This outline summarizes over two-hundred pages (CUP 385-586). The Intermediate Clause is helpful in confirming interpretative elements of this outline: in particular, that everything in the three expressions of existential pathos relates to "Religiousness A" rather than to "the specifically Christian religiousness" (CUP 555); that these three expressions are "resignation – suffering – the totality of guilt consciousness" (CUP 559); that Religiousness A is "the relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned" by anything outside the individual's inward attitude towards this possibility (CUP 556); and finally that "Religiousness A" is the precondition of B (CUP 556). It follows that any conditions of A are also conditions of B or "faith" in the narrower Christian sense. As described in the "Initial Expression," one of these conditions of A is ethical willing: for the religious "has passed through the ethical and has it in itself" (CUP 388), meaning that religious attitudes still *include* ethical striving, choices, or "the moment of taking responsibility" (CUP 389, note**). At its extreme, ethical inspiration leads an individual to give up everything great or aesthetically valuable if necessary to save himself from wrongdoing (CUP 391). This purity of will is *also part* of the absoluteness of the highest *télos* which must "absolutely transform his existence" in the sense that he would be willing to give up every other finite good for it (CUP 393). Thus, part of the reason why Climacus says that "the highest *télos* must be willed for its own sake" (CUP 394), as if it were a targetable goal, is that the ethical *can* be willed for its own sake purely without our moral motivation being conditioned on outward success or results in temporal actuality (and we can form a higher-order intention to achieve this purity). Such a volitional resolve is not enslaved to the "outcome" (CUP 398). In *Fear and Trembling*, infinite resignation is the test of such purity, for it requires that ethical willing continue even without *any* aesthetic hope of success.²⁹ Relating absolutely to the absolute *télos* involves the same condition:

The individual can then easily examine how he relates himself to an eternal happiness or whether he relates himself to it. He needs only to allow *resignation* to inspect his entire immediacy with all its desires etc. If he finds a single fixed point, an obduracy, he is not relating himself to an eternal happiness (CUP 394; my italics).

²⁹ Similarly, Anti-Climacus tells us that the most common form of "despair over the earthly" does not reach infinite resignation, the "total break with immediacy," because the agent lacks "the self-reflection or ethical reflection for that." Cf. KIERKEGAARD, S. – *Sickness Unto Death*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 55.

which is independent of the result (CUP 139).²⁸ As Climacus comments later, the "enthusiastic" ethicist's infinite passion breaks with all "sagacious paltriness" or consequentialism (CUP 569).

The relation between such an ethical will and religiousness is made clear in the second division of ch. 4 in Climacus's discussion of the three "expressions of existential pathos." Before examining a few key passages, it will help to have a structural outline of this complex part of the text. Division two begins with the final restatement of the "issue," followed by the distinction of two components within it: (A) the individual's relation to the promise of an eternal happiness *per se*, and (B) this relation depending on the historical-absurd. This is Climacus's way of distinguishing the feature of Christian faith that is common to the structure of all authentic religiousness (element A) and the feature that is unique to Christian faith (element B). Thus all authentic faith is absolute pathos towards an eternal happiness (e.g. Socrates's staking everything on an uncertain immortality), but only Christian faith conceives this eternal happiness as depending on the eternal-in-time, or absolute paradox. Here is an outline listing the topics of the main subsections under each part:

Division 2

A. Existential Pathos as trust in an eternal happiness (transcending all finite ends)

1. The Initial Expression: The pathos of resignation as the first step in relating absolutely to the absolute τέλος.
2. The Essential Expression: Existential pathos as "suffering" in the religious sense of dying to immediacy (which is a continuation of resignation).
3. The Decisive Expression: Existential pathos as recognizing infinite or categorical guilt, i.e. the totality of our failure to fulfill ethical obligations in the world of time (the limiting species of infinite resignation).

The Intermediate Clause Between A and B: summarizes religiousness A and distinguishes it from aesthetic categories such as the "marvelous" (CUP 558).

B. The issue becomes "dialectical" because relation to the promised eternal happiness depends on relation in time to something that is "historical in such a way that its composition includes that which according to its nature cannot become historical and consequently must become that by virtue of the absurd" (CUP 385).

1. Faith in eternal happiness not directly, but conditional on a relation to something non-eternal.
2. Faith in eternal happiness based on faith in something historical or temporally existing.
3. Faith in eternal happiness based on faith in the absolute paradox, the eternal-in-time, the God-Man (or Incarnation).

²⁸ I am indebted to Eleanor Helms for pointing out the significance of these passages to me in a paper that she delivered at Fordham University during the fall semester, 2004.

Appendix to B: ties the discussion back to the *Fragments* by relating God-in-time as the condition to

- a. The consciousness of sin;
- b. The possibility of offense;
- c. The pain of sympathy (which relates to the exclusivist claims of orthodox Christianity).

This outline summarizes over two-hundred pages (CUP 385-586). The Intermediate Clause is helpful in confirming interpretative elements of this outline: in particular, that everything in the three expressions of existential pathos relates to "Religiousness A" rather than to "the specifically Christian religiousness" (CUP 555); that these three expressions are "resignation – suffering – the totality of guilt consciousness" (CUP 559); that Religiousness A is "the relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned" by anything outside the individual's inward attitude towards this possibility (CUP 556); and finally that "Religiousness A" is the precondition of B (CUP 556). It follows that any conditions of A are also conditions of B or "faith" in the narrower Christian sense. As described in the "Initial Expression," one of these conditions of A is ethical willing: for the religious "has passed through the ethical and has it in itself" (CUP 388), meaning that religious attitudes still *include* ethical striving, choices, or "the moment of taking responsibility" (CUP 389, note**). At its extreme, ethical inspiration leads an individual to give up everything great or aesthetically valuable if necessary to save himself from wrongdoing (CUP 391). This purity of will is *also* part of the absoluteness of the highest τέλος which must "absolutely transform his existence" in the sense that he would be willing to give up every other finite good for it (CUP 393). Thus, part of the reason why Climacus says that "the highest τέλος must be willed for its own sake" (CUP 394), as if it were a targetable goal, is that the ethical *can* be willed for its own sake purely without our moral motivation being conditioned on outward success or results in temporal actuality (and we can form a higher-order intention to achieve this purity). Such a volitional resolve is not enslaved to the "outcome" (CUP 398). In *Fear and Trembling*, infinite resignation is the test of such purity, for it requires that ethical willing continue even without *any* aesthetic hope of success.²⁹ Relating absolutely to the absolute τέλος involves the same condition:

The individual can then easily examine how he relates himself to an eternal happiness or whether he relates himself to it. He needs only to allow *resignation* to inspect his entire immediacy with all its desires etc. If he finds a single fixed point, an obduracy, he is not relating himself to an eternal happiness (CUP 394; my italics).

²⁹ Similarly, Anti-Climacus tells us that the most common form of "despair over the earthly" does not reach infinite resignation, the "total break with immediacy," because the agent lacks "the self-reflection or ethical reflection for that." Cf. KIERKEGAARD, S. – *Sickness Unto Death*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 55.

Moreover, this resignation must be continual (CUP 396), and it is a volitional movement "of collecting oneself, of choice" (CUP 400). This corresponds to Silentio's description of the resigned will as unified in its purpose.

Yet in *Fear and Trembling*, infinite resignation is clearly the last stage before faith, whereas relating absolutely to the absolute τέλος is part of the "ethico-religious" stage or religiousness A. There is no inconsistency here, though, because infinite resignation as the limiting state of an ethical will is not a stable stopping-point, in Kierkegaard's view: the human person in this state really needs eschatological hope. Thus, according to Climacus, this individual would say that "I have transformed my existence in such a way that, if I hoped for this life alone, I would be the most wretched of all people" (CUP 389, note**). So while resignation is not itself religiousness A, it naturally orients the individual agent towards the religious: "Resignation has made the individual face or has seen to it that he faced toward an eternal happiness as the absolute τέλος" (CUP 400). As Anti-Climacus puts the same point, the fatalist who achieves resignation but who cannot trust that "the being of God means that everything is possible" is in despair.³⁰ So to "venture everything" for the "highest τέλος" (CUP 404) should be understood as having the will-power to resign every finite good if necessary to will rightly or remain just,³¹ relying on another world or eternal life to bring the happiness sacrificed here. Socrates, who is one of Kierkegaard's primary exemplars of religiousness A, illustrates this idea very well.

Thus we may say that the absolute τέλος is "willed" by willing all finite/temporal goods *only* to the extent that they can be pursued ethically. To make the absolute τέλος our highest "end" means precisely that we are willing to choose the ethical even at the price of all happiness that has a worldly basis in the goods of this life. So the "highest τέλος is not a something" (CUP 394), a distinct good directly willed in the ordinary first-order sense; the subjective thinker's devotion to this highest good does not mean that "in the finite sense, he has a goal towards which he is striving" (CUP 91). One cannot relate to it sometimes, like the determinate valuable ends that we pursue during different periods; one has to relate to it *in* relating to all other goods (CUP 408). The highest good is like a deontic side-constraint on the way that all directly targetable finite goods are valued and pursued.³² This constraint is absolute, for the resigna-

tion *within* the absolute relation to the absolute τέλος is performed for the sake of its rightness alone, not as a means to "earning eternal happiness" (CUP 404). Thus our absolute devotion to the highest τέλος consists not in a maximal erotic longing for our own total eudaimonia, but rather in our principled resolve to let our happiness depend on the truth of an eschatological promise. Otherwise, Kierkegaard thinks, considerations of our own happiness will dominate our practical judgments about earthly affairs and prevent us from making progress towards a moral will.³³

This explains the 'otherworldliness' of religiousness A. Resignation cuts the individuals' "roots" to this world: "He lives in the finite, but he does not have his life in it... He is a stranger in the world of finitude," though without the outward distinction of monasticism (CUP 410).³⁴ This idea of ethical striving in resignation is further developed in the "Essential Expression" section, where it becomes religious "suffering" because the individual recognizes that resignation itself is an infinite task that he can never perfectly perform (CUP 433). Yet he wills this suffering as essential to maintaining his absolute relation to the absolute (CUP 443). In the "Decisive Expression" section, we also see that our ethical will always fails to meet the infinite demands of the ethical. At this limit, the human agent is infinitely resigned not just about the impossibility of guaranteeing outward results by her own power, but also about her own capacity to sustain a good will inwardly (CUP 533). It is clear here that resignation in this form, as the totality of guilt-consciousness that cannot be directly expressed and for which no adequate restitution can be made (CUP 538-539), is the absolute *limit of ethical consciousness*, for it requires infinite obligations or perfectionist ideals that transcend all "comparative, conventional, external, bourgeois conception[s] of the ethical" (CUP 546). This supports my claim that for Kierkegaard the religious adds something even to the highest form of ethical consciousness (i.e. agapic duty). The totality of guilt-consciousness is beyond mere *Sittlichkeit*, yet still within resignation. It is not faith, though it does propel the existing individual towards faith: for now "the absolute τέλος has become for him absolutely the only comfort," yet the rational probability of attaining eternal happiness is "reduced to its minimum" (CUP 560) (though it is not yet blocked by sin, which adds a further level of tension).

³⁰ KIERKEGAARD, S. - *Sickness Unto Death*, cit., p. 40. This is also related to Climacus's critique that in *Eiðher/Or II*, "the ethical self is supposed to be found immanently in despair... by despair the individual would win himself." The problem is that "I can indeed despair of everything by myself" (which is resignation), "but if I do this I cannot come back by myself"; for that I need "divine assistance" (CUP 258).

³¹ This is the sense in which "the absolute relation can require the renunciation" of all finite goods (CUP 405).

³² This agrees with Merold Westphal's argument that Climacus does not mean that my death and immortality should be "before me at all times as the object of each intentional act," but

rather that these thoughts should be 'co-present' with every thought". Cf. WESTPHAL, Merold - *Becoming a Self*, cit., p. 110.

³³ That resignation is the limit of a good will understood in something *close* to Kant's sense is also indicated by the fact that Climacus describes it as intimately connected with preserving the freedom of others (CUP 260).

³⁴ Note, however, that this root-cutting is not the "break" introduced by sin in Religiousness B. It is the expectation of happiness based on achievement of temporal goods in this life that is cut here, not the volitional possibility of willing the good.

5. A and B: The Absolute Paradox as the Most Radical Kind of Eschatological Possibility

Thus infinite resignation, whose highest form is the totality of guilt, remains the transition-point from the ethical into the religious in the *Postscript*. As Anti-Climacus says, the idea that "with God, everything is possible" cannot be properly appreciated "until a person is brought to his extremity, when humanly speaking, there is no possibility."³⁵ The difference from *Fear and Trembling* is only that in the *Postscript*, Climacus recognizes that the consolation that meets resignation first takes the form of an eternal good outside of time, or beyond this life. Given infinite resignation over the temporal world and all earthly goods, it seems that the individual and eternal happiness cannot possibly be joined "in time" (CUP 397). Thus faith takes the form we see in Socrates: absolute trust in the eschatological possibility that death leads to an *immortality beyond time* (CUP 201), held fast as an "objective uncertainty" (CUP 203). This outcome remains "absurd" in the generic sense that I defined earlier, since it is a realization of the good in some order of being that is possible only by divine power beyond our knowledge.

But Climacus introduces an important refinement to the model found in *Fear and Trembling*: the eternal life in trust of which Socrates risks all is "not at all paradoxical in itself, but only by being related to an existing person" (CUP 205). The "paradox" in religiousness A lies in the fact that as a finite temporal agent, I trust in an absolute restoration of the good for which I have no rational grounds. As we have seen, this *relational* paradox reaches its maximum in the totality of guilt, where immortality appears not merely "uncertain" to my cognitive powers, but maximally unlikely for me. However, even here the outcome in which I trust is not intrinsically paradoxical, for in virtue of my ethical knowledge and volitional capacities, is still possible in principle for me to will flawlessly from now on. This is what Climacus means by his enigmatic refrain that "even the decisive category of guilt-consciousness is still within immanence" (CUP 570) and that religiousness A retains the possible escape of "withdrawing into the eternal behind it" (CUP 572; also see 582).³⁶ The code-

³⁵ KIERKEGAARD, S. – *Sickness Unto Death*, cit., p. 38.

³⁶ A word about the term "immanence," which is different from "inwardness." Because ethical knowledge is universal in application but is found only within individuals, ethics forms a crucial part of the category of "immanence" (and the only part of immanence that Kierkegaard believes has significance beyond speculative philosophy). For example, Climacus emphasizes that *Two Upbuilding Discourses* are not sermons because "...they use only ethical categories of immanence, not the doubly reflected religious categories in the paradox" (CUP 256). As a process that takes the individual out of the changing temporal world into inwardness, recollection is also understood by Kierkegaard as a principle of immanence. For the humorist, "withdrawal through recollection into the eternal is continually possible and gives immanence a touch of humor as the infinite's revocation of the whole in the decisiveness of the eternity behind" (CUP 270). And

phrase "eternity behind" is meant to indicate a relation between the content of eschatological hope and the ethical-universal. Although eternal life after death requires a divine power that is not essential to the "eternal" in the sense of universal ethical ideals, they share the quality of transcending time, and so they are assimilated in Socratic religiousness. Otherwise put, in religiousness A, immortality in an eternity above time is conceived as a *return* to an eternity that was already immanently accessible in one's essence (or innately "behind" one, accessible to recollection). Relatedly, in religiousness A the universal is only temporarily suspended towards the absolute τέλος of immortal life and they never become fully heterogeneous or disconnected. Religiousness A thus has no preconditions beyond the immanent ethical knowledge and volitional powers that make possible infinite resignation. This is what Climacus means in the Intermediate Clause in saying that Religiousness A could have existed in paganism because "it has only universal human nature as its presupposition" (CUP 559).

By contrast, sin-consciousness is the key to religiousness B, because sin is a more radical teleological suspension of the ethical (CUP 267), going beyond the totality of guilt (which is a *de facto* universal condition) to a particular offense in time that makes our immanent ideal of ethical purity absolutely inaccessible to us (CUP 532). Consciousness of sin is the "break" that prevents "immanence by way of recollection through regression into the eternal" (CUP 583), i.e. the eternal-as-universal that lies behind or above. In sin, I have placed myself outside the ethical in time (CUP 267), for "the individual is not a sinner from eternity" (CUP 583) (referring here to the eternal-as-origin behind me). Due to this choice in the time of my own life, my *unmediated* return after death to the eternal "behind" me is no longer an objectively uncertain eschatological possibility: it is spiritually impossible, since sin is an essential change in time by which "the back door of recollection is forever closed" (CUP 208). In another enigmatic phrase, Climacus describes this state as one in which "existence is accentuated a second time" (CUP 224): this means that in addition to the general metaphysical difference between any finite existing agent and the eternal, there is now a specific opposition between this individual and the source of eschatological possibilities, a volitional opposition chosen in the particular agent's life. So it is now *doubly-paradoxical* that she could enter into an eschatologically perfect state.³⁷ To overcome this radical heterogeneity, the divine cannot be merely an atemporal source of eschatological possibilities

"humor terminates immanence within immanence, still consists essentially in recollection's withdrawal out of existence into the eternal" (CUP 291). In sum, Kierkegaard usually treats the ethical, the universal, the process of recollection, immanence, and the eternity that is "behind" a person as closely allied concepts.

³⁷ As Westphal puts it, "there is a double moat separating me" from moral and cognitive autonomy: "my finitude and my sinfulness". Cf. WESTPHAL, Merold – *Becoming a Self*, cit., p. 124.

that converges with the eternal *qua* ground of universal norms;³⁸ it must enter into time itself to restore the agent's ability to will ethically, resign infinitely, and trust in the eschatological promise of eternal happiness.

This explains why Climacus sometimes describes the break in terms of the form of divinity that can overcome it: "If a break is to establish itself, the eternal itself must define itself as temporality, as in time, as historical, whereby the existing person and the eternal in time have eternity between them."³⁹ (CUP 532). The radical nature of the obstacle and the corresponding absolute absurdity of its overcoming is why the "absolute paradox" *has* to take the form that it does: only God's coming into time can amend the "absolute difference" of sin (CUP 217). Of course the "absolute paradox" is also specifically identified with the Incarnation in a few passages, but it is crucial to see that Kierkegaard does not just assume the Christian teaching of the Incarnation and define Religion B as belief in this teaching. Rather, he starts from sin as a revealed ontological difference arising within time, and from this *derives* the need for God-in-time. Christ is a specific token of this *type*, and the term "absolute paradox" stands for the *type*.⁴⁰

Thus the term "absolute paradox" has two senses that are more fundamental than the Incarnate Christ. First, it stands for that which can make possible *doubly-paradoxical* eschatological events, such as the salvation of a sinner. Second, it stands for a state of affairs that does not merely appear to be "absurd" because of our finite understanding, or *relative* to the human agent (as immortality is uncertain for Socrates, and maximally uncertain in the totality of guilt). Rather, this possible state appears to be paradoxical *in itself* as well (and thus doubly absurd),⁴¹ because it involves the God-in-time; this seems to be a *metaphysical* paradox, since the divine is by nature eternal and unchanging (CUP 579). "The absurd" in the strict sense (limited to B) is used the same way to describe the quasi-fact "that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, grown up, etc." (CUP 210). The salvation of the sinner is absolutely paradoxical in both these senses because it is possible only given "the power to annul the past" and this in turn is "bound up with God's having existed in time" (CUP 224).

³⁸ For in that case, as Climacus says, one does not "base the relation to an eternal happiness upon one's existing" (or events in time) "but has the relation to an eternal happiness as the basis for the transformation of existence" (CUP 574). Such an underlying basis must be accessible to the agent, but this is what sin blocks.

³⁹ At this point, a parenthetical note indicates that this is the Absolute Paradox described earlier.

⁴⁰ On my reading, then, it is consistent with Kierkegaard's analysis that there could be other tokens of this type besides the alleged birth of the God-Man approximately 2008 years ago. But I do not pursue this question here.

⁴¹ This is what Climacus means in saying that "instead of objective uncertainty, there is here the certainty that, viewed objectively, it is the absurd" (CUP 210).

This does not mean that the absolute paradox is a sheer logical contradiction. Concern to avoid this implication leads Westphal to argue that "for Climacus as for Silentio, the absurdity of the Christian paradox is relative to the human point of view..."⁴² because there might be a divine point of view from which it is not paradoxical.⁴³ The problem is that on this reading, we can distinguish A and B only by saying that the Incarnation is absurd to our rational comprehension, whereas an atemporal/spiritual life after death is *not*: "Climacus seems to think that from the human point of view, the idea of human immortality is inherently unproblematic... while the idea of divine incarnation is inherently problematic."⁴⁴ Yet, while the object of B-faith is qualitatively more baffling to our reason than the object of A-faith,⁴⁵ the latter is still beyond our power and knowledge as a kind of eschatological possibility. The difference in their relation to our understanding is due to an intrinsic difference in the *object* of absolute trust: in A-faith, the agent trusts in a good whose realization is possible only for the eschatological-god in general, but in B-faith, it is possible only for a God whose nature surpasses the god of Socrates, who can enter into time and overcome sin. This shows the connection between two senses of "absolute paradox": only the most radical form of the divine makes possible the achievement of a good that is not only "improbable" given our powers and what we know, but temporally closed to us, given our past.

This explains why the absolute paradox answers the question developed from the *Fragments*: namely, how can the eschatological possibility of eternal happiness (or its opposite) be "decided in time through a relation to something [that is] historical" despite also being divine (CUP 385). As Climacus says, "It is indeed just possible that Christianity is the truth; it is just possible that someday there will be a judgment in which the separation will hinge on the relation of inwardness to Christianity" (CUP 231). Consequently, it is this *eschatological possibility* that must, first and foremost, be "absurd" *sensu strictissimo*, or absolutely paradoxical.⁴⁶ Its promise is "revelation *sensu strictissimo*," which is essentially mysterious (CUP 213). The absolute paradox stands for the highest type of eschatological possibility, the kind made possible by God-in-time.

⁴² WESTPHAL, Merold – *Becoming a Self*, cit., p. 124.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 126.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁵ Climacus says that "Socratic ignorance is an analogue to the category of the absurd" in the strict sense, since the latter carries "the objective certainty that it is absurd" (CUP 205).

⁴⁶ As we move into Religiousness B, we find that Climacus starts to use the terms "absurd," "paradox," and also "faith" in a strict sense that is exclusive to B. For example, in §3 of B, Climacus says "This is the paradoxical-religious, the sphere of faith" (CUP 579 note**, also see 569 note*). This does not mean that there is no "faith" in the non-strict or generic sense. Religiousness A still involves a leap of faith, in the sense of trusting absolutely in an eschatological promise.

Thus the content of the absolute paradox can be restated in terms of the model used in explaining *Fear and Trembling*. In sin, the *obstacle* to the ethical ideal to be realized through the creative power of God is of a special kind:

- (i) it makes the ethical good temporally impossible until the obstacle itself is removed in time;
- (ii) the obstacle can be removed in time only if the divine power that makes eschatological goods possible itself enters into created time, synthesizing time and eternity into a new order of being.

Notice that (ii) fits not only the Incarnation, but also the idea of heaven as a hereafter existing not outside of time, but in a new temporal order beyond the *end of time* as we know it.

Several passages in the final sections of the long chapter IV suggest that Kierkegaard had precisely this in mind. In particular, the first section of B is titled: "The Dialectical Contradiction that Constitutes the Break: To Expect an Eternal Happiness in Time, Through a relation to Something Else in Time." Thus the absolute paradox is not simply that our eternal happiness depends on faith in an incarnate divinity: it is also a reconception of the highest *τέλος* as coming "in Time." What this means is indicated by Climacus's subsequent description of "the distinction between here and hereafter" as the "paradoxical accentuation of existence." In other words, salvation does not occur in a purely spiritual state outside time, but in a hereafter that is both spiritual and *physical/temporal*. The image in Christian doctrine that best corresponds to this absolutely paradoxical kind of eschatological state would be resurrection of the body. However, such a hereafter is not located some finite distance off in the simple future: it is a new order of time beginning out of an already-temporal existence – a new state that is *doubly temporal* or stamped a second time with existence, as Climacus says. Heaven in this sense is a new eternity *in front* of us, rather than behind: thus instead of returning to the god immanent within, in the individual in faith type B "now moves forward in order to become eternal in time through the relation to the god-in-time" (CUP 583-84). Earlier in the text, the absolute paradox is described the same way: although the subject is prevented by sin from returning by his own power to his Original nature, "now the eternal, essential truth is not behind him but has come in front of him by existing itself..." so that he has to relate himself to it as historical (CUP 209). The implication is that the eternal itself becomes more than it was, or *progresses*, in the eschatological state to come: "with regard to the conception of God, this means that he himself is moved, changed" (CUP 432, note**). The Christian symbol for this idea would be the Kingdom of God on Earth, i.e. the "New Jerusalem."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ I have explored this radical idea in my essay, "Eschatology and the Best Possible Hereafter." In: *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 25 (2002), pp. 36-67.

In sum, Kierkegaard's conception of the Incarnation as absolutely paradoxical is meant to bring out its eschatological implications, in particular the idea of the hereafter as a blessed state in which the life of this world is unified with the being of God. This is the real meaning of the "second immediacy" or higher aesthetic that follows ethical resignation. As Westphal notes, although Climacus gives us no graven images of the highest good, his text implies that "it will involve transformation into a new immediacy to which one will not need to die..." Thus the *content* of the eschatological possibility in which the faithful person trusts is different in religion A and B.⁴⁸ In A, the person trusts in the incalculable/improbable possibility of an immortal blessedness outside time; but in B, the person trusts in an intrinsically paradoxical possibility of an eschatological perfection that still occurs in time – time redoubled beyond the apocalypse – which appears absolutely absurd to human reason. A-faith is "a relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned" by any historical particularity, whereas in B-faith, it is conditioned by "a definite something that qualifies the eternal happiness more specifically... not by qualifying more specifically the individual's appropriation of it but by qualifying more specifically the eternal happiness" (CUP 556). Thus the nature of the eternal happiness itself, and not just our faith-relation to it, has altered in religiousness B.⁴⁹

Thus the formula for existential faith in *Fear and Trembling* turns out to apply best to Religiousness B, which is trust in an absolute actualization of the cosmic good *in time* despite the maximum obstacle. Three key conclusions should be drawn from this finding. First, there is one unified conception of religious faith in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, although it covers absolute trust in two different kinds of eschatological possibility, one of which is more radical than the other. Second, the only divine command essential to the "absolute paradox" of the *Postscript* is the command to have faith in its revelation. Since we have shown that the paradox of the absurd in *Fear and Trembling* shares the same general structure as the absolute paradox, it follows that the only divine command essential to the teleological suspension of the ethical is the command to have existential faith, i.e. to make eschatological possibility one's absolute *τέλος*, pursuing the ethical in the light of eschatological hope.

Third, Abraham's faith anticipates Christianity in a way that is neither merely symbolic nor anagogical. Although Abraham's particular obstacle is peculiar to this case, and is even more mysterious than sin, Abraham's faith is in a good that will be miraculously fulfilled in time. It now seems likely

⁴⁸ Glenn notices passages in which Climacus clearly means that "eternal happiness itself is temporally qualified due to the distinctive Christian conception of God in time," but he says this remains without explanation (GLENN Jr., John – "A Highest Good...", cit., p. 259). Although Climacus's meaning is elusive, I hope to have explained it here.

⁴⁹ WESTPHAL, Merold – *Becoming a Self*, cit., p. 163.

that Kierkegaard chose the example of the *Akedah* because the content of Abraham's faith resembles the content of the absolute paradox in its temporality. The difference is that Abraham's faith is in the fulfillment of a specific promise for his lifetime, rather than in the ultimate or all-embracing actualization of the Good that we used to call the Apocalypse. Kierkegaard's portrayal of Religiousness B in the *Postscript* suggests that the eternal happiness that Christianity promises is similarly connected with the temporal world. It should not be imagined as a disembodied Platonic heaven, but as a hallowing of time itself in a perfected state of the created cosmos, whose ultimate reality we can imagine only through a glass darkly. That is a possibility for which we might risk everything, a hope worth embracing with absolute pathos.

Kierkegaard and the Phenomenality of Desire: Existential Phenomenology in the First Edifying Discourse

JEFFREY BLOECHL *

ABSTRACT: Against expectations, Kierkegaard turns out to have sometimes been a phenomenologist. Specifically in his "Edifying Discourses," though perhaps elsewhere, one finds a style of thinking and the interpretive rigor both close to some features of Husserlian and Heideggerian thought, and more capable of handling religious phenomena. Where is a matter of purity of heart and willing one thing, it is of course a matter of desire. One may read the first of the "Edifying Discourses" as a phenomenological approach to various modalities of Christian life – the paradoxical, the enigmatic, and the oblique – by which what cannot be contained solely within being and appearing nonetheless enters there and upsets its conventions. But to pass from Husserl and Heidegger to Kierkegaard is to arrive at a perspective from which the security of the starting point is no longer evident.

KEY WORDS: *Desire; Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976); Husserl, Edmund (1859-1938); Kierkegaard, Søren (1813-1855); Phenomenology; Purity of Heart; Religion.*

RESUMO: Ao contrário daquilo que normalmente se espera, Kierkegaard revela-se frequentemente um verdadeiro fenomenólogo. Particularmente nos seus "Discursos Edificantes", ainda que talvez noutros lugares também, podemos encontrar um estilo de pensar e o rigor interpretativo próximos de algumas características do pensamento quer de Husserl quer de Heidegger, e capaz de lidar com fenómenos de índole religiosa. Ora onde quer que se trate da pureza do coração e de querer apenas uma coisa, o assunto tem a ver com desejo. Nesse sentido, o autor do artigo sugere uma leitura do primeiro dos "Discursos Edificantes" como sendo uma abordagem fenomenológica a diversas modalidades da vida cristã – a paradoxal, a enigmática, e a oblíqua – mediante as quais aquilo que não pode ser contido apenas dentro do ser e do aparecer, contudo, aí aparece e subleva as suas convenções. Mas passar de Husserl e Heidegger para Kierkegaard, diz o autor, é chegar a uma perspectiva a partir da qual a segurança do ponto de partida não é mais evidente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Desejo; Fenomenologia; Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976); Husserl, Edmund (1859-1938); Kierkegaard, Søren (1813-1855); Pureza de Coração; Religião.*

* Boston College (Chestnut Hill, Mass. – USA). The main reference of this article is the following: KIERKEGAARD, Søren – *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*. Trans. D. Steere. New York: Harper, 1948.