FAITH AND FIDEISM

by

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Among philosophers of religion Soren Kierkegaard is often regarded as an archetypal fideist. In general terms, fideism is the view that religion is based on faith rather than reasoning or evidence. This study examines and critiques Kierkegaard's view of the nature of religious belief in light of his fideism. I argue that it is not useful to describe Kierkegaard simply as a fideist since this description applies to a whole host of philosophers of religion, some who are endeared by the term and others who are anxious to eschew it. Instead I critique Kierkegaard's efforts by identifying a species for the genus of his fideism, which I call "exclusivist".

In identifying a species of Kierkegaard's fideism I am able to distinguish him from other fideists as well as more clearly define the concerns of his enterprise. The term "exclusivist" describes Kierkegaard's fideistic concerns in two ways. First, it means to make something singularly important as in an exclusive news story. Secondly, exclusive means to bar or prohibit as in an exclusive country club that only admits members of a certain race and gender.

Kierkegaard's view of the nature of religious belief is an exclusivist fideism because it seeks to make his description of the path to faith singularly true and he bars all positive reasoning from the concerns of faith. I contend that the exclusivist nature of Kierkegaard's fideism has unfortunate consequences for the nature of faith itself. I support this claim by showing that the kind of religious experience Kierkegaard insists on does not parallel the religious experience of most ordinary believers. To support my case I examine several major themes in Kierkegaard's thought, which include his view of passion, his thorough rejection of positive reasoning for faith, the nature of the Christian Incarnation as an absolute paradox, and the subjectivity is truth thesis.

I counter Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism with a genus and species of faith that I call inclusivist fideism. Inclusivist fideism accepts the authority of faith in the life of the believer but rejects the notion that there is a fixed set of experiences that lead to faith and that reason is beyond faith's concerns. I suggest that the genus of Kierkegaard's analysis of faith is correct but that the species is wrong. Because inclusivist fideism does not essentialize a believer's pilgrimage to faith it has important advantages over Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is an exercise in philosophical criticism. The critique developed here is directed toward Soren Kierkegaard's view of faith, most prominently those elements in his thought that typically lead us to think of him as a fideist. When considering the list of thinkers classified as fideists Kierkegaard is perhaps the most often thought of example. He concurs with all other fideists that faith either stands against reason or is competent to stand on its own without the benefits reason purports to offer, and even that faith trumps reason.

While I want to approach Kierkegaard's views on faith and fideism in a philosophical manner I will not do so with the attitude of a dispassionate clinician. I come to Kierkegaard, first, as an admirer of his work, but, secondly, as someone who is genuinely bothered by his conception of faith. On the first count, I reject the widely held view that Kierkegaard, as Henry Aiken was told by an Oxford scholar, is not a thinker upon whom you can sharpen your philosophical wits.[1] This view is held by those who have not read Kierkegaard carefully, seriously nor, I dare say, fairly. Part of my reticence to be overly critical of Kierkegaard comes from his desire to create a meaningful faith, a faith that is held with conviction and brings existential

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[1]Henry D. Aiken, The Age of Ideology: The Nineteenth Century Philosophers (New York: The New American Library, 1956), 226.

impact to the life of the believer. While I think that Kierkegaard proposes steps which do not necessarily achieve these ends, I am sympathetic to the ends themselves.

An able Kierkegaard defender may cogently argue that my philosophical critique leaves Kierkegaard unscathed because his goals of religious devotion supersede whatever petty philosophical differences I have with him. While I have some sympathy for this argument I still believe a philosophical critique of Kierkegaard's ideas is in order.

So, on the second count, my worries about Kierkegaard center on his fideistic conception of faith. These worries will constitute the focus of my dissertation. Kierkegaard is not merely a convenient thinker to write a Ph.D. dissertation about. For me, Kierkegaard's efforts generate real existential problems connected, specifically, to the lived experience of religious belief.

If Richard Popkin's generic definition of fideism is right, then there is no difficulty in seeing why Kierkegaard is regarded as a fideist. Popkin writes:

> Fideism is the view that truth in religion is ultimately based on faith rather than reasoning or evidence. This claim has been presented in many forms by theologians from St. Paul to contemporary neo-orthodox, antirationalist writers, usually as a way of asserting that the fundamental tenets of religion cannot be established by proofs or by empirical evidence but must be accepted on faith.[2]

It can be readily seen that Popkin's generic definition of fideism tells us little about the specifics of Kierkegaard's fideism. Hence, to classify Kierkegaard as a fideist without qualification is not philosophically useful since many thinkers from many periods of history readily wear this label. Tertullian,

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[2] The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972 ed., s.v. "Fideism," by Richard Popkin.

Pascal and even Wittgenstein are some of the first to come to mind. But this does not mean they are just like Kierkegaard in their respective assessments of religious belief. To do Kierkegaard justice requires that I give attention to the unique features of his thought that are the basis for viewing him as a fideist. So as to properly critique his claims I will avoid the temptation to merely lump him together with other fideists.

In another work, Popkin recognizes the wide ranging meaning fideism has as it is applied to different thinkers. He says it covers a spectrum of views which extend from:

> (1) that of blind faith, which denies to reason any capacity whatsoever to reach the truth, or to make it plausible, and which bases all certitude on a complete and unquestioning adherence to some revealed or accepted truths, to (2) that of making faith prior to reason. This latter view denies to reason any complete and absolute certitude of the truth prior to the acceptance of some proposition or propositions by faith,....., even though reason may play some relative or probable role in the search for, or explanation of the truth.[3]

While I think there are many incongruities between Kierkegaard's fideism and the first description Popkin gives, I do think he is closer to it than the second description. I say this in light of his many attacks on probabilistic arguments in favor of faith. Using the poles Popkin gives us to cover the range of thinkers classified as fideists, I would place Kierkegaard well to the side of number one (1) versus number two (2). In general, Kierekgaard insists "there can be no relation between what is accepted on faith and any evidence or reasons that can be given for the articles of faith".[4]

At this point I would like to introduce a term that I will use with some

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[3]Richard Popkin, The History of Scepticism From Erasmus to Spinoza (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xix-xx.

[4]Ibid., xx.

frequency in this study. This term is "pistology". It simply means how any particular thinker conceives of faith or religious belief. Just as epistemology is constructed of the Greek terms episteme and logos to mean "theory of knowledge", pistology comes from pistis and logos to mean "theory of faith". As we might expect, Aquinas' pistology differs from that of St. John of the Cross while Anselm's pistology differs from the pistology of St. Paul. Just as different thinkers have differing conceptions of knowledge, philosophers have a variety of conceptions of faith. This study will be directed toward clarifying and analyzing Kierkegaard's pistology and its connection to his purported fideism.

While Kierkegaard surely upholds the most recognizable feature of all fideists, viz. the alleged disparity between faith and reason, I will endeavour to get a clear sense of the distinctive nature of Kierkegaard's fideism by describing it as exclusivist in nature. An analogy with the zoological terms genus and species will help explain what I mean by exclusivist fideism. In this case fideism is the genus of Kierkegaard's pistology while exclusivist is its species. Not only will the genus-species analogy help us see the distinctiveness of Kierkegaard's fideism, it will also assist in developing the focus of a critique of Kierkegaard's pistology.

Now, zoologists use the terms genus and species to distinguish the diversity of the earth's plant and animal life. For example, Ursus horribilus is the genus and species of the grizzly bear. This large, ferocious omnivore lives mostly in secluded regions of the North American wilderness. As with any species, what defines the grizzly bear as Ursus horribilus includes its size,

shape, body features, diet and habitat. The grizzly bear is easily distinguished from its cousin, the black bear (Ursus americanus), by the former's much larger size, humped shoulder, dish-shaped proboscis and the large ranges of undisturbed habitat required to maintain its existence.

If we were to suddenly remove all grizzly bears from their natural habitat to the desert of the southwestern United States we would insure the extinction of this species since what Ursus horribilus requires for its survival cannot be found there. Or, to make the point in a different way, if we were to conceptualize a species of animal along with its accompanying features and habitat demands, we would not give it gills while also making it a land dweller if we wanted it to be viable, i.e. to actually exist. Nor would we require that our conceptual animal needs salmon in its diet while limiting its range to the Rocky Mountains. To conceive of any species of animal in these ways subverts the viability of the species.

The point of the genus-species analogy is to show that what I call Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism parallels taking a species out of its natural habitat or giving it attributes which prevents its survival. I contend that Kierkegaard creates a species of fideism whose members either have no viability or are doomed to extinction. This means that there can be no actual believers of the genus and species, exclusivist fideist. My claim is that people of faith simply do not believe in the way Kierkegaard says they must in order to be true believers. Further, I contend that Kierkegaard draws the questionable conclusion that his view of faith provides the only adequate basis for the level of commitment and devotion faith requires, to the

exclusion of all other pistologies.

In short, faith does not and cannot exist under the conditions of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. While it might be true that Kierkegaard presents his readers with a seamless definition of faith, I argue that if faith is to be a lived faith, as Kierkegaard insists it must be, then faith is more than his definition strictly entails. While faith may be entailed by Kierkegaard's definition, his exclusivist fideism does not account for all that faith seems to be. In essence, this is a problem of theory and practice. Arguably, Kierkegaard develops a coherent pistology; but I claim that it has no practical viability. Hence, in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, when considering the members of the set of genuine Christians, the set is empty or a null class.

Another way to make my point is ask to questions about the relationship between the "knight of faith" Kierkegaard describes in Fear and Trembling and ordinary believers. Can ordinary men and women, people who are timberworkers, teachers, homemakers, bankers and business executives become knights of faith? Is there not a basic incongruency between these individuals and the knight of faith? If there is, then the exemplars of faith will be few to none.

One expression of Kierkegaard's pistology is found in the following excerpt from the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. He writes:

> The inquiring subject must be in one or the other of two situations. Either he is in faith convinced of the truth of Christianity, and in faith assured of his own relationship to it; in which case he cannot be infinitely interested in all the rest, since faith itself is the infinite interest in Christianity, and since every other interest may readily constitute a temptation. Or the inquirer, is on the other hand, not in an attitude of faith, but objectively in an attitude of contemplation, and hence not

infinitely interested in the determination of the question.[5]

In this passage faith is "the infinite interest in Christianity" which can be disrupted by outside interests. Here Kierkegaard uses the word "interest" in a special sense. He does not mean that if we have interests like the opera or hockey or in finding a good job that we cannot be people of faith. What he has in mind are interests outside the realm of faith that some are tempted to import to determine the truth of Christianity, viz. historical and philosophical truth. If we have an infinite interest in determining the truth of Christianity we cannot apply historical and philosophical truth to its determination since this shows that we are in an "attitude of contemplation" and not of faith. To be in an attitude of contemplation means that we are unconvinced of Christianity's truth and, therefore, we are not believers. While historical and philosophical truth may have an importance of their own, they cannot be employed in the interests of faith. To think they can is to relativize the interest in determining the truth of Christianity.

Kierkegaard locates the fully convinced believer on the "either" side of the dialectic he develops in this passage. On the "or" side of the dialectic is "all the rest" which is a kind of catch-all category for any other way of conceiving of faith. This latter category is a showcase of unbelief, according to the passage. Since the interest in determining the truth of Christianity is of infinite proportions all other interests, e.g. historical and philosophical truth, are excluded from consideration.

I think Kierkegaard's claim that someone is either convinced of the truth of Christianity or he is not is uncontroversial. As Kierkegaard says, either

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[5] Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 23.

people are believers or they are not. Either people have appropriated religion into their lives or they have not. I think believers and unbelievers alike would concur with Kierkegaard on this matter. However, what is controversial is Kierkegaard's further claim that anyone who employs reasoning in the interests of faith is actually an unbeliever. Against Kierkegaard, I take the position that it does not follow that a believer who values reasoning in religion shows himself to be unconvinced of Christian truth claims. So, for Kierkegaard to exclude what he calls positive ways of reasoning from religious reflection and to give an exclusive franchise to that range of reasoning that he frequently refers to as the negative way is central to the contention between Kierkegaard and myself.

Kierkegaard worries that if objective reasoning is seen as active in the lives of believers that reason will occupy the space that ought to be occupied by faith. For Kierkegaard, faith will then only reside in a peripheral area of one's existence. This causes him to develop a well-intentioned segregation of faith and reason. Kierkegaard thinks a proper separation of faith and reason as a defense of faith lives in the contention that faith cannot be derived from reason. But human beings may find it too difficult to come to the issue of faith without their reason since most human concepts and activities involve reason.

I think the value of faith's involvement with reason can be seen while being fully cognizant of reason's limitations. On this point there is a large area of agreement between Kierkegaard and myself. Like him, I recognize that faith and reason are incommensurable. The difference between us lies in

the fact that Kierkegaard thinks this should bring all reason based inquiries into faith to a halt while I do not. Unlike Kierkegaard, I do not reject all philosophical treatment of faith or God. Contra Kierkegaard, I think believers can afford to consider the promises and intellectual difficulties philosophy poses for faith.

Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism is an archetypal example of faith and reason being held apart. Hence, my rejection of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism is underpinned by the classic faith/reason dichotomy many fideists seek in order to protect the purity of faith. Usually, this dichotomy is created to protect the side of the dichotomy that is most highly esteemed, which, in this case is faith. Kierkegaard shows himself to be in the company of those who desire to keep faith and reason apart when he says in the Fragments, "If the Paradox and the Reason come together in a mutual understanding of their unlikeness their encounter will be happy. . . ."[6]

The problem with the faith/reason dichotomy parallels the difficulties found in the fact/value distinction Iris Murdoch describes in Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals. She says while the purpose of this well-intentioned distinction is to segregate fact from value in order to keep value pure and untainted, it ignores an obvious and important aspect of human existence, which is that any survey of facts itself involves moral discrimination. In our attempt to resist the view that value can be derived from or is mixed with empirical facts we force an unwarranted dichotomy on them.[7] Because

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[6]Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. David Swenson, fifth edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 61.

[7]Iris Murdoch Metaphsics as a Guide to Morals (New York: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1992), 25.

human beings (as moral agents) set up facts the concept of fact itself is complex and brings with it evaluation and moral judgment.[8] In the long run value becomes marginalized by the dichotomy that is designed to protect it.

Following Murdoch's model, faith faces the same fate as value if it is isolated from reason. Human beings, just as they bring moral judgments to their evaluations of facts, bring judgments of reason to their reflections on faith. Like value, faith too is complex. It is not easily broken down into the constituitive elements of faith and reason. A dichotomy which segregates faith and reason in order to maintain the purity of faith destroys the very thing it seeks to protect.

The exclusivist nature of Kierkegaard's fideism not only bars reasoning from the habitat of faith but it gives rise to several questionable themes which he considers to be essential to his pistology. I will investigate some of these themes in this study. Not only does Kierkegaard take away something (reasoning) that is important to faith, but he adds features (the themes in question) which threaten its survival. The former is analogous to taking habitat away from the grizzly bear and the latter is analogous to giving lungs to catfish. In both cases the extinction of the species is insured.

The questions and objections I wish to raise are not directed toward the genus of Kierkegaard's pistology as much as they are the species of his thought. If fideism in general recognizes a basic incommensurability between faith and reason then there may well be workable versions of fideism that are

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[8] Ibid., 25-6.

not entailed by my critique of Kierkegaard. But Kierkegaard claims much more than this in his exclusivist version of fideism. For Kierkegaard, reasoning in religion is not merely incommensurable with faith but it is faith's mortal enemy. Part and parcel to my critique of Kierkegaard are his views that lead him beyond the genus of fideism to its exclusivist species.

In part, exclusivist fideism fails because Christian theists do not hold their faith in the manner Kierkegaard says they must if they are to be counted as genuine Christians, i.e. the kind of believer Kierkegaard describes does not, in all likelihood, exist. But Kierkegaard wants to counter my claim by saying that the kind of believer he describes is found in the New Testament. In fact, he thinks his efforts reclaim what he calls "the Christianity of the New Testament". Kierkegaard himself sets this standard as representative of true faith, i.e. for Christianity to be genuine it must reflect what we find in the New Testament. In Attack Upon Christendom, Kierkegaard writes:

> The Christianity of the New Testament simply does not exist. Here there is nothing to reform; what has to be done is to throw light upon a criminal offense against Christianity, prolonged through centuries, perpetrated by millions (more or less guilty), whereby they have cunningly, under the guise of perfecting Christianity, sought little by little to cheat God out of Christianity, and have succeeded in making Christianity exactly the opposite of what it is in the New Testament.[9]

For Kierkegaard, the history of Christianity since the period of the New Testament is a showcase of how far removed we are from genuine faith. Kierkegaard goes on to discuss how remote "official Christianity" is from the Christianity of the New Testament. In other places in his works, Kierkegaard develops the theme of the disparity between Christendom and New

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[9]Soren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon "Christendom", trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 32-3.

Testament Christianity. For example, in the Journals Kierkegaard says, "That Christianity simply does not exist" because there are no Christians in the "most rigorous sense".[10] In Practice [Training] in Christianity, Kierkegaard says we have been duped either by others or by ourselves into thinking we are Christians.[11] Kierkegaard also writes in The Point of View of My Work as An Author:

> The content of this little book affirms, then, what I truly am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem of becoming a Christian, with a direct or indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom that in such a land as ours all are Christians of a sort.[12]

I presume Kierkegaard thinks that his description of a genuine Christian or a "Christian in the most rigorous sense" reflects the kind of believer we find in the New Testament. In essence, the above citations show the pervasiveness of Kierkegaard's claim that we must return to the Christianity of the New Testament.

If we do what Kierkegaard recommends, viz. look in the New Testament to find genuine Christianity, there is little support for his pistology. In the New Testament faith is described variously as something the righteous live by (Romans 1:17), a way to cleanse the heart (Acts 15:9), as the means of our justification (Romans 5:1), as coming by hearing (Romans 10:17), as the "assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) and when faith is tested it produces endurance (James 1:3). I do not see

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[10] Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds. and trans., Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, vol. 3 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 322. From this point forward I will quote from this version of the Journals by reference to the entry number used by the Hongs.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View of My Work as an Author (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 5-6.

that these and other descriptions of faith in the New Testament have anything in common with Kierkegaard's description of faith as "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness..." or as the infinite interest in Christianity.

The suggestion that Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism does not match the Christianity of the New Testament is not to claim that he does not know Christianity's doctrines nor scripture. He plainly does. In fact I find his breadth of knowledge of Christianity quite striking, so striking that I am left wondering why he does not take his own advice and simply look in the New Testament to find Christianity. Instead, he falls victim to the very critique he brings against his opponents (usually the Hegelians). In the long run, he does not return us to New Testament Christianity but casts the Christian message in a distinctly philosophical form, something he usually seeks to avoid. While Kierkegaard often portrays himself as an anti-philosopher who tries to show that a link between philosophy and Christianity leads to the latter's demise, he readily employs philosophical categories in his conception of religious belief.

The point of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism involves an attempt to revive a species that has long since dwindled or been brought to the brink of extinction. Kierkegaard thinks this species once thrived in the period of the New Testament. In depicting Kierkegaard as an exclusivist fideist I am saying the species of exclusivist is used in both its negative and positive senses. In the negative sense it means to exclude, i.e. to negate, eliminate, bar or forbid. Certain notions (such as reason), Kierkegaard thinks, must be excluded from

faith to have a pistology that is proper to Christianity. Exclusivist's positive side means to make prominent or singularly important as in an exclusive interview or exclusive news report.

What is wrong with this, it might be asked? Would not a singularly truthful, concise explicit, crystal clear definition of faith be a very useful thing to have? Is it not desirable to have a pistology that cuts the fat and develops lean muscle? Yes, such a definition of faith would be useful. However, my contention is that Kierkegaard cuts away more than fat and acutally cuts into the lean muscle of faith in his drive to find the Christianity of the New Testament.

I have created the following rejoinder from what I have gleaned from several of Kierkegaard's writings. I assume he might offer it to rebut my complaint that his exclusivist fideism causes him to stray from the descriptions of faith in the New Testament to the pistology he proffers: "The present state of Christianity is deplorable because its followers are under the illusion that they are genuine Christians. If this condition is to be corrected, it requires the strongest possible antidote. Afterall, a patient with a life threatening disease often requires intense therapy to insure his restoration to full health. Further, by claiming that I make faith's requirements too narrow, you seek to expand them which leaves you open for a relapse into Christendom. You do not make Christianity sufficiently difficult to be worth believing and you turn the religious pretenders of Christendom into true Christians. My definition of Christianity turns believers into hearty souls who understand the value and importance of faith while you make Christianity sloppy and loose. Your believers are religiously slothful and

without commitment. In the long run, you make faith relative rather than absolute. My depiction of Christianity makes faith emminently practical while what you offer makes faith merely contemplative. Granted, what I offer may be hyperbole but it must be expressed in hyperbolic terms if I am to gain the attention of those living under the illusion of being Christians."

It is not this rejoinder per se that is problematic. Even unbelievers often complain that they would like to see a higher level of devotion from believers. Assuming Kierkegaard would offer such a rejoinder, I can think of very few believers (or even unbelievers) who would have any quarrel with it. What is problematic is Kierkegaard's view that commitment and devotion can only come from his definition of faith. This is, in part, why I describe Kierkegaard's fideism as exclusivist in nature. My quarrel with Kierkegaard is over the underlying set of assumptions that Kierkegaard thinks leads naturally to his assessment of Christianity's present state. Success in this study depends largely on revealing the flaws in what lies behind the above imagined rejoinder, not in attacking the rejoinder itself.

My description of Kierkegaard's fideism as exclusivist in character emerges naturally from several of the central themes in his writings. It is these themes which go to the core of Kierkegaard's pitology and comprise the chapter divisions of my study. Chapter Two, entitled "Existence, Passion and Skepticism", is largely expositional as opposed to critical. It serves to set the stage for assessing and evaluating Kierkegaard's fideism. In this chapter I examine Kierkegaard's emphasis on skepticism, passion and the existing individual as a set of precursory elements necessary to faith. I discuss why

only the existing individual can have the passion faith requires and how Kierkegaard employs Greek skepticism to support these interests.

In chapter three I investigate Kierkegaard's rejection of the notion that historical and speculative proofs can be the epistemic cornerstones of faith. In this chapter I draw attention to Kierkegaard's double claim about reasoning in religion. First, he notes the philosophical failure of any sort of proof making in religion. Since proofs only provide approximations to the truth of the Christian revelation, compared to the appropriation of Christian truth that faith requires, they are to be rejected as facilitating faith in any way. Because proofs are merely probabilistic they cannot secure certainty for faith. Secondly, he insists that the employment of proofs in the interests of faith arises from sinful and prideful human beings. As we saw above, Kierkegaard claims that reasoning in religion is actually a sign of unbelief. True faith, as Kierkegaard puts it, brings reasoning to a standstill and believes against the understanding. Thirdly, I question the coherency of Kierkegaard's claim that the greater the risk the greater the faith. If faith is vouchsafed in the haven of subjectivity how is it possible for faith to be risky, as Kierkegaard insists it must be?

Chapters Four and Five delineate themes which draw us closer to the inner circle of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. The topic of Chapter Four is the Absolute Paradox which is Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Christian Incarnation. For Kierkegaard, the God-man constitutes the greatest possible contradiction because both God (the eternal) and man (the temporal) reside in a single person. The basis of his characterization of the Incarnation is that

God and man are so utterly different that to claim they are fused together in one person is absolutely paradoxical. Ironically, it is the Incarnation's contradictory nature that makes it worthy of belief. While Kierkegaard is certainly correct that the person of Christ is the proper object of faith for Christians it is not clear that his depiction of the Incarnation as an absolute paradox is philosophically as well as theologically sound .

Kierkegaard categorizes all other paradoxes as relative when compared to the absolute paradoxicality of the Incarnation. What he seems to mean is that a relative paradox is one which only appears to be paradoxical. A relative paradox can be resolved (or "mediated", to use Kierkegaard's term) via philosophical analysis. But the absolute paradox defies the understanding and is impenetrable to the work of philosophy. This notion is important to Kierkegaard because if philosophy was able to mediate the absolute paradox, faith would again become the hand-maiden of philosophy.

Kierkegaard is not particularly clear why faith must be directed toward this particular paradox when many other imaginable paradoxes are at least equally contradictory. If this is true then it seems Kierkegaard is stuck with an obvious arbitrariness in picking the particular paradox he does as the object of faith. Further, he is not clear why an absolute paradox yields a specifically Christian faith. His claims are made more problematic by the possibility that believing an absolute paradox to be true may constitue an act of self-deception.

This leads directly to the subject matter of Chapter Five which deals with Kierkegaard's claim that genuine faith is defined as a passion for the infinite,

maximal subjectivity or inwardness. Another way he puts this notion is that "subjectivity is truth". I note that subjectivity may be a useful way to address the important topic of the inner life of faith. Here the believer finds a way to express himself with regard to the the certainty of his faith and his walk with God. If seen as expressive of the inner life of subjectivity may prove to be a quite defensible notion.

But as useful as Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity is to the inner life of faith, it also raises some serious questions for the coherency of faith itself. For example, does infinite passion unwittingly allow that the object (or Being) of faith can be removed from the equation and yet the believer still have faith? Does maximal subjectivity do violence to Christianity by creating a kind of accidental atheism or what I call a theological non-realism? If what counts is the subjectivity of the believer could God not disappear entirely from the picture while genuine faith is retained?

To summarize, Chapter Two is largely expositional because it serves to clarify the pre-conditions Kierkegaard establishes for a genuine faith. Chapters Three through Five serve as showcases of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. In these chapters I to try and show why I think Kierkegaard's fascinating claims do not, in all likelihood, apply to believers. I am concerned, that for all its appeal, Kierkegaard's efforts do not serve the real interests of faith and that believers must look elsewhere to find a more adequate pistology.

Above I made the claim that reasoning is part of the natural habitat of faith. In a concluding chapter I will develop this claim around an inclusivist

version of fideism. I will argue that the basic impulse of fideism, as Popkin gives it, is correct in spite of its epithetical treatment by many thinkers. Inclusivist fideism, like all versions of fideism, recognizes a basic incommensurablility between faith and reason. Its genus is fideism which means that it ascribes to the view that the major tenets of religion are based on faith not reason. But its species is inclusivist because it allows that proofs and arguments are within the concern of faith.

The point of the distinction inclusivist fideism is to devise a more survivable version of fideism than the exclusivist sort I think is descriptive of Kierkegaard. Inclusivist fideism, for example, allows that reasoning can be important for religion without unduly tethering religion to reasoning. In this chapter, my argument turns on the view that Kierkegaard is wrong to think a believer cannot value reasoning in religion without betraying genuine faith. His tendency to classify all believers who show an interest in proofs and reasoning as member of Christendom actually turns many of the faithful into unbelievers. It seems incredible that thinkers with the spiritual credentials of Anselm or Aquinas are, on Kierkegaard's account, outside the community of faith along with myriads of ordinary believers.

Put in another way, this chapter works against the view that the commitment of faith and the holding of reasons for faith are mutually exclusive. In essence, I argue that for fideism to be a workable genus for faith, its species must be more inclusive than Kierkegaard allows. It is in this inclusiveness that we find actual "flesh and blood" believers or the real exemplars of faith. In my view, Kierkegaard's exclusivist practices are both unfortunate and unnecessary.

CHAPTER II

EXISTENCE, PASSION AND SKEPTICISM

> It is presumably the witchery of this ever-continuing process which has inspired the misunderstanding that one must be a devil of a fellow in philosophy in order to emancipate himself from Hegel. But this is by no means the case. All that is needed is sound common sense, a fund of humour, and a little Greek ataraxy. (Postscript, p. 34)

In the introduction to this study I described Kierkegaard as an exclusivist fideist. My purpose in doing so was to specify the nature of Kierkegaard's fideism and to begin my critique of him on that basis. This description serves three ends. First, it keeps me from falling into the trap of critiquing Kierkegaard simply as a fideist since this term is wide ranging in its meaning and is applicable to many thinkers. Secondly, I am able to carry my critique to the heart of Kierkegaard's thought. From my vantage point I hope to develop an argument which shows that if Kierekgaard is a fideist of the exclusivist sort, his pistology is not applicable to ordinary flesh and blood believers. Close scrutiny of Kierkegaard as an exclusivist fideist and his accompanying depiction of faith should reveal that the faithful do not generally hold their beliefs in the manner he insists on. Thirdly, by criticizing the exclusivist features of Kierkegaard's fideism I leave the door open for an inclusivist version of fideism which, hopefully, will prove to be a more suitable

explanation of religious belief. In this chapter I will lay down some important background to support my claim that Kierkegaard is an exclusivist fideist. Here I intend to discuss three central themes in Kierkegaard's thought, viz. passion, skepticism and the existing individual.

Why is it so important to discuss Kierkegaard's use of these themes? First, skepticism, passion and the existing individual comprise a set of concepts which are precursory to the condition of faith. That is, they must actually exist in a person before he can go on to faith in a Christian sense (religiousness B). Secondly, they foreshadow more definitive Kierkegaardian themes such as infinite passion, the absolute paradox, believing against the understanding and subjectivity, among others. To understand Kierkegaard's initial use of skepticism, passion and the existing individual yields some insight to Kierkegaard's larger program of thought. If Kierkegaard's ultimate goal is to help us chart a path to "an absolute relationship with the absolute", then skepticism, passion and the existing individual are themes we meet at the trailhead.

In the literature it is not uncommon to find Kierkegaard's interpreters dealing with the aforementioned themes independently of one another. They may even discuss all three themes in a single work. But rarely, if ever, do they give attention to the interconnection between them. In my view, a clear understanding of Kierkegaard's pistology is not forthcoming apart from grasping the interdependent relationship that passion, skepticism and the existing individual share. In one of his better known defintions, Kierkegaard says faith is "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of

the most passionate inwardness...."[13] What I propose to do is investigate the relationship between these themes with the purpose of getting a clear picture of the kind of person Kierkegaard thinks one has to be to hold this view of faith. If it is true that Kierkeggard's fideism leads to a pistology that does not describe any actual believers then an elucidation of the connection of these themes should make clear to us the kind of person who supposedly holds Kierkegaard's defintion of faith. It should also become clear to us if the person who aheres to this definition of faith can have concrete existence or is merely idealized, as I contend.

I intend for this portion of the study to be largely expositional as opposed to critical. However, I will attempt to develop an argument based in this exposition which should heighten the suspicion that there is, at base, something wrong with Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. I will discuss, in order, Kierkegaard's adaptation of skepticism in the supposed interests of faith, his view of passion and finally, the existing individual.

Skepticism

There is certainly plenty of room to criticize Kierkegaard's basic interpretation of the Greek skeptics. But if we are to make sense of Kierkegaard's use of the Greek skeptics in the supposed interests of faith, it is important that we allow him his own construction of their views. This is not to say I agree with his interpretation of them. For the record, I think there are many places he gets them wrong. But for the sake of argument I will proceed in a way that grants Kierkegaard most of his interpretation of the Greek

[13]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

skeptical tradition in the interests of faith.

It might seem that if there is a connection between faith and skepticism it must be of an antithetical sort. After all, has skepticism not been in the business of undermining whatever metaphysical or doctrinaire claims it encounters, especially religious belief? Is faith not the obvious counterpart of skepticism? If this is so, should we not expect to find Kierkegaard immediately involved in a quarrel with skeptics everywhere? Not necessarily.

For Kierkegaard, the essential insight of the Greek skeptics that is that they were suspicious of metaphysics and the sorts of ultimate truth claims made by the dogmatic philosophers. Terence Penelhum, for example, says that the fideist tradition Kierkegaard belongs to "...tries to enlist the doubts and questions of the philosophical skeptic in the supposed interests of Christian faith."[14] According to the skeptics, any attempt to resolve metaphysical questions does nothing to bring us closer to the truth but only produces a life of vexation. The skeptics thought that the best way to find a life of ataraxia (tranquility or unperturbedness) was through epoche (suspense of judgment).

Kierkegaard adapts skepticism's basic principles as a way to undermine a pretentious and haughty reason. Herein lies the genius in Kierkegaard's use of skepticism in the interests of faith. For Kierkegaard, skepticism is a handy way to attack the kind of reason he vilifies throughout his works. He thinks that when the potential believer looks into the philosophical toolbox of the

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[14]Myles Burnyeat, ed., The Skeptical Tradition, vol. 2 of Major Thinkers Series, gen. ed. Amelie Oskenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) , 288.

skeptic he will see that a reason based faith is impossible. Kierkegaard interprets the Greek skeptics as agents unaware of the assistance they give the project of dismantling the notion that reason and philosophy can provide epistemic surety for faith. Kierkegaard hopes to show that the kind of skepticism found in early Greek philosophy does some important work for faith. He writes:

> The study of Greek scepticism is much to be recommended. There one may learn thoroughly that it will always require time and exercise and discipline to understand ....., that the certainty of sense perception, to say nothing of historical certainty, is uncertainty, is only an approximation; and that the positive and immediate relationship to it is the negative.[15]

In part, Kierkegaard recommends the study of Greek Skepticism not because of what it establishes but because of what it dis-establishes. Skepticism shows that our common dependence on sense perception or history is unfounded because it delivers a tenuous and approximate knowledge. Hence, skepticism teaches us positive lessons but in a negative way. One of the first lessons skepticism teaches is that none of the "tried and true" methods of knowing work, at least when it comes to creating epistemological certainty. Skepticism shows just how inadequate our knowledge claims truly are. But Kierkegaard hopes that out of skepticism's negative teaching something positive will emerge. As an unwitting ally of faith, skepticism undermines the haughtiness of reason. If we come to see that skepticism rules out our reliance on the metaphysics of reason to discover our place in the universe then ultimately perhaps, we will turn to God with the empty hands of faith. For these reasons Kierkegaard wants to co-opt the skeptical tradition in the

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[15]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 38.

interests of faith.

For Kierkegaard, the skeptic is a cobelligerent in a war against the traditional enterprise of attempting to prove God's existence and attempting to show, by philosophical means alone, that some of the major tenets of Christianity are likely to be true.[16] Kierkegaard proposes to take away the metaphysical 'hand-holds' a believer may be tempted to use to secure a faith based on reason. Left with no metaphysical 'hand holds', the believer must find the kind of answers he seeks elsewhere. After skepticism has done its work one option left open to the potential believer is faith in God. Kierkegaard thinks skepticism supremely plays the role of faith's benefactor because it is instrumental in establishing his claim that for anyone to have faith he must first relinquish the idea that his common sense beliefs provide epistemic certainty when those common sense beliefs are used to support faith.

Since the central feature of Greek skepticism works against the surety of our most cherished common sense beliefs, Kierkegaard thinks he has found a philosophical paradigm which takes away our epistemological pride. Kierkegaard suggests that the achievement of faith requires that faith's obstacles first be removed. Analogously, skepticism is like a gardener whose prize roses are obscurred by an overgrowth of weeds. The gardener's job is to cut away that which hides the beauty of the roses to make them stand out. Kierkegaard thinks Greek skepticism can do this kind of work for faith since it is surrounded by the "weeds" of metaphysics and reason which clutters the landscape of faith.

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[16]Terence Penelhum, God and Skepticism (Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1983), 88

Kierkegaard has a distinctly religious purpose in mind in his analysis of skepticism. The unpretentious believer opens himself to some immediate religious practicalities, in Kierkegaard's view. He is humble, meek and devoid of vanity, everything we have come to expect from a person who lives the religious life. Though the alliance between faith and skepticism may seem to be unholy at best it is the first step in Kierkegaard's quest for a 'pure' faith, devoid of metaphysical trappings.

While Kierkegaard views skepticism as an ally of faith, it can only be an ally in the short term. This is because a central theme of Greek skepticism includes a call for a suspense of judgment (epoche`) with regard to any ultimate truth claims. In refusing to commit himself to any ultimate metaphysical claims, the skeptic thinks he achieves ataraxia ("unperturbedness", "tranquility"). Thus the skeptic avoids getting entangled in questions which have no apparrent resolution and are by nature disruptive to a peaceful and tranquil life. Greek skepticism is a conscious disengagement from irresolvable philosophical questions. Now the Greek skeptics did concede that they could not achieve total absence of disturbance. Instead, they settled for a "moderate affection", roughly the ups and downs of life, minus any cosmic significance. So, the sort of calm the Greek skeptics think epoche can get for them is not the utter Stoic apatheia. However, for the skeptics the logical terminus of philosophy is ataraxia and there is nothing better nor higher to be pursued beyond it.

But faith, on Kierkegaard's view entails an unreserved commitment and this is why its alliance with skepticism must ultimately be dissolved. While

Kierkegaard thinks the skeptic provides a service for faith because the skeptic makes us despair of ever finding a suitable demonstration of God's existence, the skeptic would never assent to the kind of commitment Kierkegaard's definition of faith requires. This would violate his principle of the suspense of judgment and keep him from living a peaceful, trouble free life, unencumbered by the sort of commitments he characterizes as vexations of the spirit.

If Kierkegaard's definition of faith calls for commitment while the Greek skeptic seeks to avoid it, is there not something inherently contradictory in Kierkegaard's desire to enlist skepticism in the cause of faith? Not if we understand the sense in which I think Kierkegaard sees faith and skepticism as co-belligerents. As co-belligerents faith and skepticism are combatting a common enemy. Yet faith and skepticism seek different results. Just as two disparite groups like the French underground and the French communists fought the Nazis during World War II, it is not really suprising to find the skeptic and the believer, as Kierkegaard construes him, battling a common enemy. The common enemy, of course, is the dogmatic philosopher.

Central to Kierkegaard's case is the importance of not seeing the believer and the skeptic as opposites. In the present day it is easy to associate skepticism with disbelief in the central doctrines of the Judeo-Christian tradition.[17] The skeptical philosophy of Hume has perhaps held the greatest influence in shaping this view. Thus, any tendency to view the believer and the skeptic as archenemies is understandable. But, Kierkegaard sees the real enemy of faith to be a dogmatist like Hegel just as the skeptics saw the enemy

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[17]Popkin, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza, p. xviii.

of a tranquil life lying in the dogmatics of the Stoics.

It is on the basis of this co-belligerency that faith can accomodate skepticism in a limited way. But this limitation becomes obvious when one crosses the line between the suspense of judgment and the commitment of faith. A Pyrrhonian skeptic says that to preserve a tranquil and peaceful life we should never commit ourselves to any philosophical, moral, religious or political position we must defend. The skeptic teaches us that such commitments lead to a life of frustration and conflict. He recommends that we follow the demands and expectations of local custom to promote ataraxia.

However, the skeptic's combination of easy outward piety and inner suspension of belief is a far cry from the dynamic faith Kierkegaard has in mind.[18] This is why it is initially puzzling to find him viewing skepticism as an ally of faith. But the alliance Kierkegaard seeks between faith and skepticism does not in itself constitute a contradiction. For example, suppose you and I walk across campus together to the Student Union building. However, our respective purposes in going there are very different. You want to get a sandwich and I want to mail a letter. After walking to the Student Union together we part company and see to our differring tasks. Analogously, Kierkegaard and the skeptic can travel on the same path a short while for entirely different reasons. Like the walk you and I take to get to the Student Union, Kierkegaard and the skeptic travel the same path to undermine the pretensions of human reason. While their arrival point is the same their reasons for being there are very different. So, the skeptic and

[18]Rorty, 293.

the believer are co-belligerents in the sense that both employ the same method to establish the conditions for more ultimate, though differing, ends. The skeptic hopes the undermining of reason and its accompanying suspense of judgment yields a tranquil life. Kierkegaard, however, hopes the undermining of reason will serve as a propadeutic to faith.

It is in this limited sense, I think, that Kierkegaard sees the skeptic as an ally of faith. He is aware that any extended relationship between faith and skepticism is problematic. Kierkegaard writes, "If doubt is capable of overcoming itself, if one may find the truth in doubt simply by doubting everything, without breach of continuity, and without an absolutely new point of departure, not a single Christian category can be sustained, and Christianity is ipso facto abolished."[19] Kierkegaard's point is that skepticism has some important work to do for faith but its work is not ongoing. It serves to prepare the ground for the believer but soon must be set aside in favor of an infinite decision leading to an eternal happiness.

I am still troubled by the alliance Kierkegaard wants to make between faith and skepticism. This is because the description of faith most religious people testify to has more obvious parallels to the skeptic's notion of ataraxia than Kierkegaard's picture of it as an ongoing conflict. But how is this possible since the believer clearly does not see his faith as a suspense of judgment? On the contrary, people of faith claim an assurance of God's existence, of salvation and providential activity in their lives, i.e. the kinds of transcendant realities a skeptic could never assent to. Though a person of faith does not begin with epoche` (suspense of judgment), the same ataraxic

[19]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 299n.

like results the skeptic seeks are produced in his life by faith. While the skeptic achieves the desired tranquility of life by refusing to become entangled in irresolvable philosophical conflicts, a person of faith may claim the same results through the religious life. A religious person might say that his faith relieves him from the cares of the world. It is his judgment that even in the face of all kinds of difficulties, whether they be finding satisfactory answers to the objections skeptics raise or the personal experience of evil and suffering, that faith always trumps these problems. There is a sense of quietude, unperturbedness based on the assurance that providence will ultimately resolve life's difficulties. But none of this seems possible with Kierkegaard's understanding of faith, which seems to require that it be borne and remain in agony. In short, many believers think their faith provides rest and a reduction of anxiety in contrast to Kierkegaard's view.

Kierkegaard knows he must ultimately let go of skepticism because we are unable to hold fast a suspension of the dialectical moment of faith.[20] While the principle of the suspense of judgment is lethal to Kierkegaard's view of faith, the interest of faith overwhelms the suspension of judgment that skepticism seeks. A perpetual state of disinteredness is simply not possible when the passion of faith is involved, in Kierkegaard's view. Kierkegaard recognizes that eventually one has to stop doubting and start believing.

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[20]Ibid., 280.

Passion

I have said that Kierkegaard views skepticism as an ally of faith because skepticism devotes itself to undermining the pretentiousness of reason. Through a process of systematic doubt skepticism works against the view that historical and philosophical truth can lead us to faith. Another common feature shared by faith and skepticism, according to Kierkegaard, are their respective emphases on passion. Skepticism performs a kind of double-duty for Kierkegaard-it both undermines reason and it is passionate. Kierkegaard remarks that it is impossible to exist without passion and therefore every Greek thinker was a passionate thinker.[21]

But in what sense does Kierkegaard view the skeptics as passionate? Afterall, one of the stated goals of the skeptics is to escape the kind of mental suffering generated by deep metaphysical commitments. The skeptic claims that the achievement of this goal requires a suspension of judgment which produces a tranquil life of moderate affection. This hardly seems to be in line with any familiar sense of the word passion.

However, I believe there are three senses in which Kierkegaard understands the role of passion in his view of faith. There is the sense in which passion is a boundless enthusiasm, ardent affection or strong devotion to something. To say I am passionate about the opera means I find personal joy and fulfillment when I attend its productions. Because of my passion for the opera, perhaps I support a local company with regular donations or chair an organization which raises funds to insure its continued existence. My

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[21]Ibid., 267.

passion for the opera is demonstrated by committed action which promotes operatic productions in my community and elsewhere. If I am passionate about the opera, I would consider my life to be empty if I had to live in a place where there was no opera. Kierkegaard uses this sense of faith as passionate when he rails against the members of Christendom, whose religion, according to him, is without depth and personal commitment.

Passion also plays a role in Kierkegaard's description of faith when he distinguishes between faith in an eminent sense and faith in an ordinary sense.[22] In the Fragments, when Kierkegaard makes reference to faith in the sense of genuine Christian belief he calls it "faith in an eminent sense". He regards this kind of faith as passionate because it has an essential passivity about it. Kierkegaard attributes passivity to faith in light of his saying both that faith is and that it is not an act of will. Faith in an eminent sense requires a miracle from God and to this degree is not an act of will. Eminent faith is something too hard for sinful human beings to perform. Hence, faith is passionate in a passive sense because the believer is acted upon by God who gives him the condition of faith. Faith is not something the believer achieves exclusively by himself. This is why Kierkegaard makes reference to "the martyrdom of faith".[23] I will say more about the distinction Kierkegaard is trying to make between faith in an ordinary sense and faith in an eminent sense in Chapter Four. At this time I am simply pointing out one of the senses in which Kierkegaard thinks faith is passionate.

The third sense in which Kierkegaard sees faith as passionate (and the

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[22]Kierkegaard, Fragments, 109.

[23]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 32.

one most important to this part of my study) lies in his interpretation of the Greek skeptics. He thinks of passion in terms of the intense emotions produced by suffering, as in the sufferings of Christ. Hence, passion is produced when one is acted upon by distressing or painful circumstances. It is analogous to faith in an eminent sense in that the passion is generated by something external. But in the case of the Greek skeptics the forces acting upon them are the circumstances of existence as opposed to God acting in a miraculous way to give the believer the condition of faith.

But these circumstances are created through the employment of the principle of epoche (suspense of judgment) which Kierkegaard describes as an act of will.[24] So, in this case, passion results from something active, viz. the will, as opposed to something passive. Kierkegaard thinks there is tremendous difficulty in becoming skeptical. It takes great effort to resist the temptation to draw unwarranted conclusions from our sense experience. It is not something anyone easily decides to do like having breakfast or putting on my favorite shirt. The effort required to suspend judgment must continually work against the passivity of forming hasty conclusions. The ongoing resistance to not give in to anything beyond the immediate experience of sense perception is the source of passion. This produces a conflicted existence where one is tugged and pulled in different directions. By stressing the ambiguity of our circumstances, and the intellectual uncertainty of common sense beliefs the skeptic sets up the conditions of passion. It this uncertainty which strains our existence and leads to a state of passion in the sense that one suffers because of this conflicted existence.

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[24]Kierkegaard, Fragments, 102.

Kierkegaard sees the Greek skeptics as passionate because they recognized the difficulties resident in being a skeptic in the first place. If one is going to be skeptical at the level of thinkers like Pyrrho and Sextus it is a serious project that he proposes to undertake. It is no easy matter to hold belief at bay. Kierkegaard says the skeptical freedom from affections sought after by the Greek skeptics was thought to be very difficult to attain.[25] The individual who succeeds in holding belief at bay accomplishes something great but he suffers in doing so and, therefore, is passionate. Becoming skeptical in the sense that the Greeks and Kierkegaard mean it is a serious spiritual undertaking. To become skeptical is not to be the belligerent person who doubts anything and everything just to frustate those he is in conversation with. Rather, the skeptic seeks the spiritual goal of ataraxia through epoche.

In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard writes about the difficult achievement in doubting as the Greek skeptics doubted. He says:

> What those ancient Greeks regarded as a task for a whole lifetime, seeing that dexterity in doubting is not acquired in a few days or weeks, what the veteran combatant attained when he had preserved the equilibrium of doubt through all the pitfalls he encountered, who intrepidly denied the certainty of sense-perception and the certainty of the processes of thought, incorruptibly defied the apprehensions of self-love and the insinuations of sympathy-that is where everybody begins in our time.[26]

Kierkegaard also attributes the same "dexterity in doubting" to Descartes, whom he calls "a venerable, honest, humble thinker,....." who saw "that his method had importance for him alone and was justified in part by the

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[25]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 358.

[26]Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), 23.

bungled knowledge of his earlier years."[27] So, the task of "getting skeptical," realizing there is a problem of life that ordinary belief does not even see, requires passion-a passion intensified as one sees that his life is at stake and that there is no obvious answer around to resolve the problem.

In a humorous example of how suffering might produce passion, Kierkegaard writes:

> I have often reflected how one might bring a man into a state of passion. I have often thought in this connection that if I could get him seated on a horse and the horse made to take fright and gallop wildly, or better still, for the sake of bringing the passion out, if I could get a man who wanted to arrive at a certain place as quickly as possible, and hence already had some passion, and could set him astride a horse that can scarcely walk..... Or if a driver were otherwise not especially inclined toward passion, if someone hitched a team of horses to a wagon for him, one of them a Pegasus and the other a worn out jade, and told him to drive-I think one might succeed.[28]

The anxiety one faces in trying to control a frightened horse, the urgency to get somewhere in a hurry on a broken down horse or trying to team up two totally ill-suited horses are examples of the strain of existence which produces passion.

One of the ways we can get clearer about Kierkegaard's notion of passion and why it is applicable to the Greek skeptics is to give attention to the distinction he makes between Greek skepticism and Hegelian skepticism. Kierkegaard says the former is like faith because it is passionate while the latter should be rejected because it is passionless. Kierkegaard recognizes in Pyrrho, Sextus et. al., a kind of skepticism which potentially assists faith. He also sees Hegel as developing a skeptical philosophy but one which is

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[27]Ibid., 22-23.

[28]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 276.

harmful to faith's cause. It is important to understand the subtle way in which Kierkegaard distinguishes between the two kinds of skepticism.

Though it is not common to view Hegelianism as a kind of skepticism, Kierkegaard describes it this way because there is something analogous to the skeptic's notion of suspense of judgment. He seems to mean something like the following: Our cognizance of the ongoing historical flux limits us to decisions of a contingent and finite sort. In essence we can make no decisions that are not subject to the unfolding and changing historical process. If faith involves an infinite decision (and I take this to mean one made for all time and without regard to the transitory nature of the world) then, according to Kierkegaard, Hegelianism by the nature of its metaphysics eliminates the possibility of the decision of faith. Greek skepticism, on the other hand, brings us to the brink of a decision of faith.

In several passages in the Fragments and the Postscript Kierkegaard cites the errors he thinks Hegelian skepticism makes. For example in the Postscript he writes:

> As soon as subjectivity is eliminated, and passion eliminated from subjectivity, and the infinite interest eliminated from passion, there is in general no decision at all, either in this problem or any other.... A contemplative spirit, and this is what the objective subject is, feels nowhere any infinite need of a decision, and sees no decision anywhere. This is the falsum that is inherent in all objectivity; and this is the significance of mediation as the mode of transition in the continuous process, where nothing is fixed and where nothing is infinitely decided; because the movement turns back upon itself and again turns back, so that the movement becomes chimerical, and the philosopher is wise only after the event.[29]

In a footnote to this passage Kierkegaard says, "The scepticism that is

[29]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 33-34.

inherent in the Hegelian philosophy, in spite of its much advertised positivity, may be understood in light of this consideration."[30] Kierkegaard interprets Hegelianism as a kind of skepticism harmful to faith because in a cascade effect it eliminates subjectivity which in turn removes passion from subjectivity, which removes the infinite decision from passion so there can never be the necessary decision of faith.

For Kierkegaard passion is the means by which the subject senses the urgency for the decision of faith. For Kierkegaard the decision of faith is aconditional and so transcends time. That is, the validity and truth quality of the faith decision is not affected by the flux of history. But Hegelianism undermines the finality of this decision because the relativism of the historical flux casts us into a state of skeptical uncertainty of any ultimate truth. If faith is a decision for all time, Hegelianism precludes the decision of faith because each generation or stage in the process only represents a moment of the truth. The only way around this problem, according to Kierkegaard, is to introduce a "dash of charlantry" which assumes Hegel's role as that of Imprimatur.[31]

By playing the role of Imprimatur, Kierkegaard means that Hegel must extricate himself from the world-process so as to stand outside its conditioning factors. This is the sense in which Kierkegaard thinks Hegel introduces "a dash of charlantry" to resolve the problem of faith as a final decision. He must step outside the metaphysical demands of his own system to accomplish it. Hegel must arbitrarily view himself as the point of reference

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[30]Ibid., 34n.

[31]Ibid.

outside the world-process. This, however, is to violate his own metaphysical rules since it is to say, "All is in flux, except me". But Hegel's own account of the world-process, on Kierkegaard's interpretation, does not allow us to take up such a position of final authority.

Kierkegaard thinks Hegelianism is committed to the principle that everything is relative.[32] Therefore, no final word or truth is possible by the System's own criteria. The best we can hope for from Hegel is a perpetual uncertainty which delays the decision of faith. Kierkegaard views the lack of the decision of faith as a kind of skepticism parlayed by the 'objective subject' who cannot comprehend the importance of an infinite decision. No infinite decision is ever possible for the Hegelian skeptic because of his involvement in a continuous process of mediation where nothing is fixed. In other words, for Hegel to make the kinds of claims he does about the dialectical process means he must take up a position outside its effects. He must claim for himself a place outside the realm of alteration, one that is fixed and unchanging.

In Kierkegaard's view, this makes Hegelianism self-refuting and incoherent. But more than this, "Hegelian skepticism" is dangerous because it does not even look like the skepticism that assists faith. It is a pretender or a skepticism in sheep's clothing because it purports to explain the whole of history and its meaning. But, because the unfolding of history is an ongoing flux, Kierkegaard thinks the decision of faith is permanently forestalled. According to Kierkegaard, Hegelianism is chimerical (composed of incongruous parts) because on the one hand it thinks it has explained

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[32]Ibid.

everything, but on the other, it can never settle on anything due to the ongoing historical flow.[33] It views pure thought as the highest truth for an existing individual but also thinks pure thought is commensurate with an ability to explain and understand the past. Thus, the Hegelian is deceived because he thinks the limited amount of historical knowledge he has yields the absolute knowledge of pure thought. There is only one proper response Hegel's skepticism, and that is to break with it.[34]

In the Fragments Kierkegaard contrasts Greek and Hegelian skepticism in order to show how the former can be compared to belief. He says that the Greek skeptic doubts by an act of the will, not by virtue of knowledge. According to Kierkegaard, Greek skepticism vis a vis Hegelian skepticism is the model faith must parallel because just as believers believe by an act of the will so skeptics doubt by an act of the will. Kierkegaard concludes that doubt can only be overcome by an act of the will.[35] Kierkegaard puts it, ".... the skeptic keeps his mind constantly in suspense, and it was this frame of mind that he willed to maintain".[36] Kierekgaard writes of the Greek skeptic, "By an act of the will he resolves to keep himself under restraint, and refrain from every conclusion".[37]

In contrast with Greek skepticism, Kierkegaard calls Hegelian skepticism a universal doubt. It goes beyond the bounds of being preparatory for belief and instead delays indefinitely the decision of faith. Hegelian skepticism is a

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[33]Ibid., 275

[34]Ibid., 292-3

[35]Kierkegaard, Fragments, 102.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., 105.

doubt provided by the System rather than the doubt which rises up in the individual by an act of will to becomes the source of passion. Unlike Greek skepticism, Hegelian skepticism cannot be broken with because it finds its source in a metaphysics that hopelessly ensnares the individual. Thus, doubting can never be an act of will with Hegelianism. Rather, the doubt of Hegelian skepticism is a matter of the logic of the System to which it is attached. This logic is so "tight-fisted" it does not permit the relinquishment of doubt. Because Greek skepticism lacks the deep metaphysical commitments that come part and parcel with Hegelianism it can be broken with by another act of will, viz. belief.

When talking about Greek skepticism Kierkegaard tells us that belief and doubt are not two forms of knowledge because neither of them is cognitive. Rather, they are opposite passions.[38] The similarity between doubt and belief is not that they are outside the domain of knowledge, but they are passions of a certain order which involve the will. What Kierkegaard seems to say is that Greek skepticism passionately maintains its will to doubt or suspend judgment. Though he thinks faith that is paradoxically accentuated has a maximum of passion, the Greek skeptic still requires a high degree of passion even though he seeks ataraxia.[39] In the long run, belief resolves and excludes doubt because it transcends immediate sensation and cognition. It wills to let go of the suspense of judgment. Belief no longer holds back from existence, but instead comes into it, says Kierkegaard.[40]

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[38]Ibid.

[39]Postscript, 316

[40]Fragments, 105.

An important point to note is that Kierkegaard rejects the traditional medieval contrast between faith and reason as two forms of knowledge. He does seem to rely on the medieval distinction between reason and passion, such that faith and doubt are both thought of as passions, not as rational. Rather, as distinct from reason, faith and doubt are opposing passions. Kierkegaard sets faith against doubt, but a specific kind of doubt, viz. the doubt of the Greek skeptics. The basis of this contrast is that both are acts of will, therefore they are passionate, but opposing acts of will.

The type of doubt he attributes to the skeptics is the "retiring" kind.[41] A retiring doubt is to be contrasted with the inquiring kind of doubt a scientist might have who, after years of unsuccessful experimentation comes to see that he will never succeed in knowing some scientific fact. The scientist continues to probe and examine seeking certainty before making a judgment. But in the mean time he remains doubtful. On the other hand, the Greek skeptic does not doubt because he fails to arrive at some truth, he doubts because he wants to doubt. The goal he seeks in being skeptical is ataraxia. Perhaps Kierkegaard sees the skeptic as similar to a stubborn child who decides not to give in to his parents wishes, e.g. to learn how to swim. On the negative side, retiring doubt involves a refusal to give assent. Or positively, an unswerving determination to suspend judgment.

Kierkegaard is drawn to Greek skepticism not just because it undermines the pretentiousness of reason; it also appeals to him because his conception of Greek skepticism is that it has a strong element of passion and in this sense is like faith. To uphold skepticism, according to Kierkegaard's interpretation of

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[41]Ibid., 102.

the Greek skeptics, one must expend a great deal of effort to maintain constant vigilance against the temptation to yield to "unwarranted beliefs", though our existential circumstances continually goad us into drawing conclusions beyond sensation and immediate cognition.[42] But this seems to imply that the person who is capable of becoming skeptical and acquiring the passion necessary to maintain his skepticism comes to an important crossroads in his life. One road leads down the path the skeptics want to take toward ataraxia and the other leads down the path toward faith, where Kierkegaard wants us to go.

Let us consider what the skeptic likely thinks with regard to where he hopes the path will end via a thought experiment. This thought experiment will give us a useful way to distinguish what Kierkegaard thinks about religious commitment versus the skeptic's avoidance of commitment. It will also make clear where any alliance between faith and skepticism must end. The thought experiment is as follows: Suppose Jones lives in a country where the predominant religion is one that worships Mr. Spock. In five years the Spockians expect Spock to return from his intergalactic voyage of "going where no man has gone before." Upon Spock's return his followers will experience great joy because Spock will bringz a wealth of knowledge which the Spockians can use to dramatically improve their lives. Jones is a devoted adherent of Spockism. He is steeped in its doctrines and regularly attends services at his local Spockist congregation.

But Jones works for an international company which intends to transfer him to another country. Upon his transfer he looks for a local group of Spock

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[42]Ibid.

worshippers but much to his chagrin cannot find one. Instead, in his new country Jones finds the predominant religion is one that worships Captain Kirk and considers Mr. Spock a lesser deity.

According to the skeptics, Jones' commitment to Spockism is potentially a source of trouble. He cannot possibly abide the apparent doctrinal disparity between Spockism and those who worship Captain Kirk since his commitments are to the former and he must live among those who worship the latter. He faces personal vexations because the truth claims he is committed to are in conflict with almost everyone around him. What does the skeptic recommend for Jones? According to the skeptics, Jones should withdraw his commitment to Spockism. In fact, he should never have formed it in the first place. Further, Jones should now willingly participate in worship with those devoted to Captain Kirk. To do this follows the skeptic's call to adapt to the prevailing values of local custom to further promote ataraxia.

If we step out of our thought experiment we can now see where the alliance between skepticism and faith, as Kierkegaard understands it must end. I think this experiment also is a better explanation of the real intentions of the skeptics. The skeptic's claim that commitments of any sort (including religious ones) lead to a life which lacks tranquility and can only be remedied by the suspense of judgment. Suspense of judgment is the skeptic's preventitive medicine against a conflicted existence. But Kierkegaard could not possibily go this far with skepticism since his view of faith demands a commitment of infinite passion. Kierkegaard would consider the skeptic's

advice to Jones as the ultimate betrayal of faith. If a skeptic of the Pyrrhonist variety were religiously inclined he could only aspire to the kind of religion Kierkegaard detests, viz. one without commitment.

Now a religiously inclined skeptic exhibits all the external characteristics of the religious life, while in his person he reserves judgment about the ultimate truth claims religion makes. Though some might claim that it is dishonest and unethical for the skeptic to do this, he sees it as preserving a higher and more important value, viz. ataraxia. Yet this is exactly the kind of religion Kierkegaard finds contemptible because it holds faith the decision of at arm's length. However, it is agreeable to the skeptic who sees the practicality of achieving a tranquil life, partially promoted by fitting into the conventions of local custom. While Kierkegaard sees the skeptic's doubts as handy ways of undermining reason's pretensions Kierkegaard must break his alliance with skepticism at some point since it seeks an easy, relativistic conformity as the way of dealing with the phenomenon of religion. In many of his writings Kierkegaard rails against such conformism and establishment thinking. So, it follows that Kierkegaard's use of skepticism in the interests of faith must be adapted in ways which avoids the obvious contradiction of the suspense of judgment and the commitment of faith.

Though skepticism is ultimately rejected by Kierkegaard he thinks the believer must feel its full weight because it provides the final rung in the ladder which the existing individual must climb in order to believe. This partially explains the role Kierkegaard wants skepticism to play in the development of his version of faith. But it seems there is nothing tranquil

either about the process or the resulting faith. In fact the believer, on Kierkegaard's view, is anxiety ridden and highly sensitized to the fact that faith is borne out of anguish. There is none of the easy passage through life a skeptic seeks.

But issues of some significance remain in interpreting Kierkegaard's use of Greek skepticism and its resulting passion in the interests of faith. First, if one goes through the process of becoming skeptical surely Kierkegaard sees the inherent danger in it for faith. For, if the potential believer first "gets skeptical" there is the distinct possibility that he may simply continue in his skepticism, never making the turn to faith. Perhaps, this is partly what Kierkegaard has in mind when he later describes faith as risky.

Secondly, it is not clear whether Kierkegaard intends the process of becoming skeptical to be one that everyone must walk through on his way to belief or not. If he does, is he now giving us this description from the point of view of someone who has been through the skeptical process and has made the turn to faith or as an unbeliever who has emerged from skepticism and now must either make the turn to faith or remain skeptical? Further, is the spiritual journey through skepticism and passion the one that everyone must follow? Is it the exclusive path that leads to genuine faith?

Thirdly, how does one find himself at the doorway to skepticism in the first place? Does it not seem likely that an appreciation for the skeptic's insight Kierkegaard thinks is so important for faith requires a familiarity with the philosophers to which the Greek skeptics are reacting? Does it not require a good deal of philosophical acumen to actually become skeptical? In order to

grasp the depth of what becoming skeptical entails does one not need to know the epistemic issues raised by such important thinkers as Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle? But awareness of these issues is problematic for Kierkegaard given his views of philosophy. Perhaps one has to be more of a philosopher than Kierkegaard thinks (or allows) before he can even broach skepticism and begin treading the path to faith. But this appears to compound Kierkegaard's problems since most ordinary believers are not aware of epistemological issues specifically or even philosophy generally. Most believers are ordinary folk who answer telephones, get their children off to school and go to work everyday. If am right, Kierkegaard's use of skepticism in the interest of faith amounts to a mistake and that most believers do not attend to the pre-conditions of faith Kierkegaard hopes to establish.

The Existing Individual

A central question which pervades Kierkegaard's thought is, "What does it mean to exist?" He tries to answer this question by positing a description of a person known as the "existing individual". What kind of person is the existing individual who seems to appear everywhere in the Postscript? Kierkegaard calls him a subjective thinker who is "essentially interested in his own thinking, existing as he does in his thought".[43] The existing individual is someone who reflects deeply about the nature of his existence and sees that ".... he is constantly in process of coming to be,.... because .... subjective thought puts everything in process and omits the result...."[44]

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[43]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 67.
[44]Ibid., 68

What is the meaning of these dark sayings about the existing individual? I believe the answer is to be found in Kierkegaard's description of human nature. In Sickness Unto Death Kierkegaard writes, "Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis".[45] Two comments in the Postscript seem to parallel this statement. In these passages Kierkegaard writes, "Existence is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, and the existing individual is both infinite and finite," and "For the finite and the infinite are put together in existence".[46]

Why does Kierkegaard think this description of human nature constitutes a problem for existence? And how does this description tell us anything about the meaning of "coming to be" and "being in process"? In thinking about the nature of his existence, the existing individual reflects about the disparity between the two constituitive elements of his being. One is infinite and one is finite, one is temporal and the other eternal. Kierkegaard thinks the problem of existence is created by the fact that the existing individual has his being in the temporal realm but is drawn to the eternal. He is ever mindful of his creatureliness and his inability to transcend this condition because he exists in time. In his dialectical reflections he senses that his existence is somehow unfinished and anguishes over how to become complete. Because the finite existing individual is a persistent striver for the infinite he is in a continual state of process or becoming, headed toward a goal he knows he can never attain. This is why the existing individual is

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[45]Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), 146.

[46]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 350 and 375, respectively.

constantly in a state of becoming rather than being. He continually feels the need to complete his existence but despairs because he is unable to do so.[47] In the Postscript Kierkegaard defines existence as "... the child born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore a constant striving".[48] In the same work he adds, "While aesthetic existence is essentially enjoyment, and ethical existence essentially struggle and victory, religious existence is essentially suffering, and that not as a transitional moment, but as persisting".[49] The existing individual persistently strives for the infinite from his finite point of existence. But he is confronted with the impossibility of achieving it.

The goal the existing individual seeks is the unity of the finite and the infinite. But he has only momentary glimpses of this unity and this feeds his passion for the infinite. He struggles to find the resources to bridge the gap between his own finiteness and the infinity which seems to be just beyond his reach. As Kierkegaard writes, "This unity (finite and infinite) is realized in the moment of passion".[50] The problem of existence for an existing individual is a passionate one because he craves something he cannot acquire by his own devices. As Kierkegaard says, it is impossible to think about existence without passion.[51]

The passionate, existing individual is like the person who views someone as the object of his love knowing full well she will never love him

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[47]Ibid., 79.
[48]Ibid., 85.
[49]Ibid., 256.
[50]Ibid., 176.
[51]Ibid., 313

back. Yet he feels he must have her as his love. It is an all consuming passion for him. But, because her social status is far beyond his own, she will remain unattainable for him. Yet he feels he cannot live without her and his suffering (passion) intensifies as he strives harder and harder to win her unattainable love.

The problem of existence becomes acute when the existing individual is lead into thinking that speculative philosophy provides the right tools to obtain an unobstructed view of the infinite from his finite viewpoint. Speculative philosophy deceives the existing individual because it attempts to provide an external foothold to mediate the problem of existence.[52] It promises to bridge the gap between the finite and the infinite so that the existing individual then sees his existence sub specie aeterni.[53] However, when the existing individual tries to philosophically mediate the problem of existence he becomes indifferent to it and, for him, no problem remains.

If to exist means to be caught up in the despair of being unable to find a mediating foothold outside of existence, then Kierkegaard has an interest in maintaining the tension between the existing individual's finiteness and his persistent striving for the infinite. For Kierkegaard, only the existing individual is properly prepared to make the step (or leap) into faith. His passionate striving for the infinite has made him keenly aware of the nature of existence. The problem with Hegelian skepticism is that it causes us to forget what it means to exist.[54] But the Greek skeptic is passionate and an existing individual and does not permit himself to forget this fact.[55]

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[52]Ibid., 357.

[53]Ibid., 274 and 293. "From the perspective of the divine".

[54]Ibid., 109.

In the Postscript Kierkegaard compares and contrasts what he calls the Greek and the Christian principles of existence.[56] He says the goal of each is to understand oneself in existence. But the Christian principle has the advantage of achieving a deeper determination of the nature of existence. By assessing the nature of existence we are confronted with a problem that complacent Hegelians are not even aware of, a problem which points to the essentially contradictory nature of our existence. The existing individual is not able to resolve or mediate this contradiction by philosophical analysis. The depth of the contradiction is greater for the believer than the Greek because Christian existence is paradoxically oriented. The kind of existence experienced by the Greek skeptic requires a high degree of passion even when connected to the tranquility he seeks. But Christian existence generates the maximum of passion because it is paradoxically accentuated.[57] Here Kierkegaard foreshadows the claims he makes with regard to the object of faith in the Christian tradition, viz. the absolute paradox.

It is important to see that the existing individual is not the person of faith, i.e. a believer, but he is the person prepared for faith. He has seen that if philosophy aids religious belief it does so, not by metaphysics and speculative means, but via a skeptical approach to these matters. The existing individual senses the inner tension of his dialectical existence. Planted squarely before him is the problem of existence where he sees the disparity between his own finiteness and his connection with the infinite. As the existing individual

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[55]Ibid., 274.

[56]Ibid. 315 and 316.

[57]Ibid., 316.

surveys the conflicting nature of his existence, he sees no way to resolve or mediate this conflict. He does not see the problem of existence as a mere intellectual puzzle which fades away under the auspices of speculative philosophy. This problem cannot be mediated by applying traditional philosophical categories ot it. Hence, the existing individual has a paradoxical existence.

The existing individual gives legs, as it were, to the concepts of skepticism and passion. He is the flesh and blood being in whom skepticism and passion reside. The existing individual has his senses attuned to what it means to exist. He is on the cutting edge of existence because he appreciates the difficulty of the entire project of becoming the existing individual via skepticism and passion.

Summary

My purpose in this chapter was to approach Kierkegaard's development of the themes of skepticism, passion and the existing individual in an expositional way and to note their interconnection. Seeing the link that exists between them should make it easier to understand the qualities Kierkegaard thinks a believer must have before he ever comes to faith. Penelhum succinctly describes the way Kierkegaard sees skepticism, passion and the existing individual as doing a service for faith. He writes:

> Although the skeptic sees the believer's situation without God more clearly than the dogmatic philosophers who try to justify faith, he is unable to provide the antidote to bewilderment and anxiety that he supposes. But this failure has the potential to spur us to recognize that human nature has resources other than reason which enable us to conduct our secular affairs in spite of our uncertainties. It should also

> help open us to divine grace and so prepare the way to faith. In this way it will help us indirectly toward the assurance that we have been mistakenly seeking through the exercise of reason.[58]

While I argued that Kierkegaard's use of skepticism, passion and the existing individual in the interests of faith is flawed in at least one important way, nevertheless they are precursors of the more substantive Kierkegaardian themes I will address in upcoming chapters. In my view, passion, skepticism and the existing individual are essential building blocks which provide an understanding of notions like the absolute paradox, the infinite passion of faith, subjectivity (inwardness), the approximative nature of natural theology and the claim that Christianity is an existence-communication. Hence, a familiarization with Kierkegaard's use of skepticism, passion and the existing individual provides a natural course to understanding the distinctive elements of his belief system. But they also tell us something about the conditions he believes must be resident in a person before he can be receptive to faith. In the long run, I think this will prove to be problematic for Kierkegaard.

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[58]Penelhum, God and Skepticism, 88.

CHAPTER III

EXCLUSIVIST FIDEISM AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

> If the rights of knowledge are to be given their due, we must venture out into life, out upon the ocean, and scream in hopes that God will hear-we must not stand on the shore and watch the others struggle and battle-only then does knowledge acquire its true official registration. To stand on one foot and prove the existence of God is altogether different from falling on one's knees and thanking him. The former is a delicate silk ladder which one throws up like a romantic knight of cognition and somehow uses in a curious manner to get aloft, simultaneously securing the ladder while standing upon it (unlike firemen who enter each floor to secure the shinning rope)-the latter is a solid stairway, and even if one advances more slowly, he is on the way and all the more securely. (Journals, # 2279)

> Interested knowing enters with Christianity (Journals, #2283).

> God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone's eyes. (Wittgenstein, Culture and Value, p. 63e).

The title page of the Philosophical Fragments contains a set of rhetorical questions which are a synthesis of Kierkegaard's long discussion of objective knowledge in religion. The questions are as follows: "Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a merely historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge"? The negative answers

Kierkegaard gives to each of these questions sets the tone for his attack upon the view that historical knowledge and speculative reasoning are legitimate ways to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. The argument that begins on the title page of the Fragments passes through this important work and culminates in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript.

In the last chapter I considered Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Greek skeptics as providing a propadeutic to faith. Their essential insight, according to Kierkegaard, establishes a necessary set of preconditions for faith. Kierkegaard sees the skeptics as unwittingly supportive of the themes of passion and the existing individual. In this chapter I pursue one of the natural results of Kierkegaard's adaptation of skepticism in the interests of faith, viz. his relentless attack against objective reasoning as a true form of religious knowledge.

I regard Kierkegaard's rejection of objective reasoning in religion as an important pointer to his exclusvist fideism. Within the context of his treatment of objective reasoning in religion I will examine and critique two important features of Kierkegaard's thought. The first is the peculiar relationship he sets up between religiousness A and religiousness B and the second involves the basis for his rejection of any sort of evidence or proof in support of faith. Especially revealing for the latter part of this discussion are the themes of the approximation-process, the possibility of our indifference to objective truth, human corruption and the claim that faith requires risk. I will argue that internal inconsistencies reside in each of these features of his thought.

Religiousness A

One of the most important distinctions Kierkegaard makes in his description of religious belief is between what he calls religiousness A and religiousness B. A clear understanding of this distinction is a prerequisite to proceeding with an analysis of Kierkegaard's claims about the nature of religious knowledge and its connection to exclusivist fideism. Without this understanding Kierkegaard's rejection of a certain kind of religious knowledge and the kind he proffers are unclear. Though Kierkegaard does not make specific reference to religiousness A and B until very late in the Postscript he clearly has them in mind much earlier in both the Postscript and the Fragments.

Kierkegaard's distinction between religiousness A and B shows that his rejection of a certain kind of religious knowledge is directly connected to the former, not to the latter. This does not mean that the kind of religious knowledge Kierkegaard thinks is inapplicable to religiousness A is applicable to religiousness B. In fact, it means just the opposite. I think Kierkegaard hopes to argue that if objective reasoning in religion cannot be connected to religiousness A, this is greater proof that it cannot be connected to religiousness B. Since B is a higher form of religiousness than A, Kierkegaard thinks objective knowledge is more obviously inapplicable to religiousness B.

Kierkegaard proposes that in the background of embracing religiousness B is a set of necessary precursors or stages that begin with an encounter with an

objective uncertainty, which passes to the subjectivity is truth thesis and culminates in the two kinds of religiousness. My argument in the first part of this chapter is as follows: if it is dubious that those who embrace Christianity (religiousness B) were formerly members of religiousness A (as Kierkegaard claims), then it is also dubious that the precursory stages that lead ultimately to religiousness B describes the exclusive path to faith. I contend that Kierkegaard's claim that religiousness A must first be present in the individual before the presence of religiousness B is possible is dubious because it is empirically false. If this portion of my argument is sound it provides an opening to show that Kierkegaard's complete rejection of objective reasoning in religion is also flawed. I will investigate this problem in the second part of this chapter.

In Kierkegaard's first specific reference to the two kinds of religiousness late in the Postscript, he distinguishes between them variously by describing religiousness A as "pathetic", not specifically Christian religiousness and as reflective of immanence. On the other hand, religiousness B is paradoxically dialectic, reflective of transcendance and specifically Christian. In the Fragments Kierkegaard distinguishes between religiousness A and B by referring to the former as "faith in an ordinary sense" and the latter as "faith in an eminent sense".[59] For the moment, I will not dispute the accuracy of Kierkegaard's notion of religiousness B. Whether it is accurate or not will be taken up in Chapter Four. In the mean time I will simply treat it as a general reference to that which Kierkegaard thinks is the uniquely or distinctly Christian religiousness. For now, I will make religiousness A the focus of my

[59]Kierkegaard, Fragments, 108.

critique.

A matter of some importance to my argument is the way Kierkegaard makes religiousness B depend upon religiousness A. He writes:

> Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any question of becoming aware of the dialectic of B. When the individual is related to an eternal happiness by the most decisive expression of the existential pathos, then there can be a question of becoming aware how the dialectic in the second instance thrusts a man down into the pathos of the absurd. One will therefore perceive how foolish it is when a man without pathos wants to relate himself to the Christian; for before there can be any question at all of merely being in the situation for becoming aware of it, one must first exist in religiousness A.[60]

In this passage Kierkegaard charts what I call an exclusive route to faith. Unless A has first been part of the individual's overall religious experience he cannot hope to achieve religiousness B, according to Kierkegaard. Without the presence of A the individual lacks the proper spiritual credentials to achieve the full realization of religion, viz. Christianity. Kierkegaard tells us what must happen in the lives of existing individuals for faith to obtain. Religiousness A is to religiousness B what an engagement is to a marriage. Like an engagement, religiousness A provides a foretaste to the ultimate stage of any person's religious commitment.

If religiousness A is a necessary stage in the assent to religiousness B, we must endeavor to become familiar with the person of religiousness A. Where do we find him? How will we know when we have found him? Kierkegaard gives us partial answers to these questions. He says, "Religiousness A can exist in paganism, and in Christianity it can be the

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[60]Kierkegaard, Postscript,. 494-495.

religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether he be baptized or no".[61] Or, as Kierkegaard also puts it, "Existing religiously, one can express one's relationship to an eternal happiness outside of Christianity, and this has surely been done;...."[62]

I take it that those who participate in religiousness A can be members of any religious tradition, including Christianity. The common feature they share, no matter what religious tradition they are from, is a passion motivated by the pursuit of an eternal happiness (immortality, eternal life). That is, when the members of various religious traditions seek an eternal happiness, they show themselves to be members of religiousness A. We can expect that those who call themselves Jews, Moslems, Hindus or Buddhists are examples of religiousness A. Conceivably, any person who is cognizant of the transcendant and hopes to derive an eternal happiness from it would also be classed as a member of religiousness A.

Since the pursuit of an eternal happiness is the key feature of the person who is in religiousness A, it is important to know something about the sorts of experiences Kierkegaard thinks this person must undergo in order to generate the passion necessary for an eternal happiness. If we turn again to the Postscript we find passages where Kierkegaard describes religiousness A in connection with an objective uncertainty. In a statement that Kierkegaard says defines both truth and faith we have "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness" and that this is the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.[63] According to

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[61]Ibid., 495.

[62]Ibid. 496.

Kierkegaard, it is the uncertainty of objective knowledge which increases the tension of the subject's infinite passion and this constitutes his inwardness.[64] For Kierkegaard, objective knowledge is a necessary catalyst for the tension of infinite passion which constitutes religiousness A.

In what way does Kierkegaard think objective knowledge is uncertain and why would this uncertainty work to generate passion? Kierkegaard has in mind the sorts of conclusions the subject might draw when he tests for God's existence via an examination of nature. At first glance the subject thinks he finds objective certainty of God's existence because he sees both omnipotence and wisdom in nature. Perhaps he reflects on the beauty of a meadow of wildflowers and notes the purposeful behavior of a squirrel as it prepares for winter. Is this not clear evidence that there is a wise and omnipotent creator who made the world? But a closer look shows him things that run counter to the wisdom and omnipotence he thought was so obvious.[65] He sees the cruelty and inefficiency of nature. It takes the birth of hundreds of sea turtles, out of which only a small fraction survive, to insure the perpetuation of the species. The strong prey on the weak; nature seems harsh and inefficient, it is "red in tooth and claw"; random catastrophes cause us to think the universe is indifferent to our suffering. Kierkegaard says the conflicting reflections the subject makes about nature "disturbs my mind and excites anxiety." When these reflections are totalled the sum is an objective uncertainty.[66]

Being in the throes of an objective uncertainty is important for

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[63]Ibid., 182.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.

Kierkegaard because it is in this condition that the subject becomes aware of a paradox since the available evidence required to establish or disestablish God's existence is underdetermined. It is the ambiguity of nature that is the source of the paradox of religiousness A. The conflicting characteristics of nature, that it exhibits wisdom and omnipotence while also exhibiting the opposite characteristics, creates the paradoxical situation. Via the objective uncertainty the subject experiences a pent up tension that he needs to resolve. But objectivity is too impoverished to provide the certainty needed for such a resolution.

According to Kierkegaard the subject must embrace the objective uncertainty with the entire passion of the infinite. The subject does this because he now sees that objective knowledge cannot spawn faith for him and it creates a situation for him to see that subjectivity is truth. Kierkegaard means that when the subject realizes that objectivity produces an irresolvable paradox, the believer will sleuth out the truth some other way and come to see that it cannot not lie in objectivity, but lies elsewhere, viz. in subjectivity.[67] The objective uncertainty serves as a negative example revealing the truth of subjectivity for the person of religiousness A. He accesses the necessary ingredient of subjectivity by first seeing that objectivity cannot provide certainty for faith. The objective uncertainty then becomes a subjective certainty because the existing individual appropriates it into his life. Hence, faith is "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness....."[68]

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[67]Ibid., 183

Louis Pojman effectively argues that there is a "logic of subjectivity" in Kierekgaard's thought. Subjectivity is driven by a kind of negative argumentation or rationality that first establishes the failure of objective truth in matters of faith. The conclusion Kierkegaard hopes the existing individual will readily draw is that the certainty of faith must be found via subjectivity. The reason that proofs and evidence are not acceptable bases for faith is that they are exemplars of the objective uncertainty Kierkegaard discusses at length.

The Journals hold an interesting entry which make this kind of argument clearer. He writes:

> Faith is quite correctly "the point outside the world" which therefore also moves the world.
>
> It is easy to perceive that what bursts forth through a negation of all points in the world is the point outside the world.
>
> The syllogism that there is no righteousness in the world but only unrighteousness and from that to prove that there is righteousness-this must indeed be outside the world. Here, then, is the point outside. This is the syllogism of faith.
>
> Consider the absurd. The negating of all concepts forces one outside the world, to the absurd-and here is faith.....[69]

In this passage Kierkegaard refers to his argument as a syllogism which implies an argument with rational coherency. He says "righteousness" and "faith" are proved in a negative way as points outside the world. Though we know that faith and righteousness exist we do not know this by finding examples in the world. The syllogism Kierkegaard refers to takes the following general form:

P_1: X exists.
P_2: No X exists in the world.

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[68]Ibid., 182.
[69]Journals, #2803.

Conclusion: X exists at a point outside the world.

Subjectivity's proof lies in the same kind of negative reasoning Kierkegaard uses to prove the existence of faith and righteousness. Kierkegaard's religious epistemology eschews positive reasoning because it is an activity which must take place in the finite world. Its finite nature limits it to results which only approximate the infinite. Therefore we must look outside the world to find the basis for faith. Pojman thinks that this negative reasoning typifies the way Kierkegaard argues for the "reasonableness" of Christianity.[70] Though Kierkegaard rejects proofs or evidence as having anything to do with genuine faith his use of negative reasoning leads him to build a case that is very much like a proof "... if not for the truth of Christianity, at least for the reasonableness of the leap into Christianity".[71] While Kierkegaard is often charged with being an irrationalist because he rejects the kinds of proofs and evidence that allegedly make faith rational, Pojman's insight shows us that such a charge is unwarranted. It is more accurate to say that Kierkegaard rejects a certain form of rationality rather than rejecting rationality out of hand. Penelhum puts it, "In the Fragments Climacus, by trying to deal with speculative philosophical questions, comes by stages to demonstrate that faith makes no speculative sense, and nothing that did make speculative sense could answer the questions".[72]

Now, the ambiguity of the objective uncertainty might lead us to a skepticism of the Pyrrhonian sort. Or, hopefully, this ambiguity creates the

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[70]Louis Pojman, The Logic of Subjectivity (University: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 25.

[71]Ibid., 26.

[72]Penelhum, God and Skepticism, 77.

possibility that one will turn to other resources to find truth in subjectivity. Kierkegaard's argument shows that since the objective uncertainty generates an irresolvable paradox which precludes the decisiveness of faith, faith's resolution must be found elsewhere. Kierkegaard says the objective situation is a tension producing paradox which repels us away from the objective uncertainty to embrace the truth of subjectivity. The amount of tension (or passion) corresponds to how much inwardness or subjectivity we have.[73]

The objective uncertainty cannot be the attracting force of faith because it is uncertain and not suited to provide the decisiveness faith needs. This is what Kierkegaard means when he says the objective situtation is repellent. The irresolute nature of the objective uncertainty drives the subject away from itself to find truth in subjectivity. In his quest for an eternal happiness, the existing individual is struck by the fact that an objective uncertainty cannot provide it for him. Hopefully, he is then compelled to see that subjectivity is the only path to his eternal happiness. This is how the existing individual is related to the objective uncertainty and why this relationship is paradoxical.

It is this relationship that constitutes religiousness A. Kierkegaard describes it when he writes, "But the eternal essential truth is by no means in itself a paradox; but it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relationship to an existing individual."[74] Or as he puts it in another way, "By virtue of the relationship subsisting between the eternal truth and the existing individual, the paradox came into being."[75] The key here is to recognize that the

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[73]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

[74]Ibid.

"eternal truth" is not of and in itself paradoxical but becomes so when it is evaluated by the existing individual. Kierkegaard writes:

> By virtue of the relationship subsisting between the eternal truth and the existing individual, the paradox came into being. Let us now go further, let us suppose that the eternal essential truth is itself a paradox. How does the paradox come into being? By putting the eternal essential truth into juxtaposition with existence.[76]

Kierkegaard reiterates the fact that the paradox exists because of the person who has embraced an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite. This relationship is religiousness A without which the subject lacks the right credentials to accomplish faith's second movement, viz. religiousness B.

What I have tried to do so far is trace the steps Kierkegaard gives us from the objective uncertainty, through subjectivity to religiousness A. For Kierkegaard, this is the singularly and required correct path to faith. But this, coupled with Kierkegaard's further claim that religiousness A must be present in the individual before religiousness B is possible, creates a double problem for him. First, is it true that all or even most believers make the transition to faith by confronting an objective uncertainty of the sort Kierkegaard gives us? Secondly, is it true that all Christian believers were once members of religiousness A? If the answer to either or both of these questions is, 'No', then it seems Kierkegaard is left with a significant weakness in his pistology because his definition of faith depends on the answer to these questions being, "Yes". In raising these questions I do not mean to say there are no believers whose faith experience does not match

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[75]Ibid., 187

[76]Ibid.

Kierkegaard's account. But I do claim that it is dubious that all or even most persons of religious belief have followed the path Kierkegaard describes. If this is true then it would appear that Kierkegaard's definition of faith is in some jeopardy at this point. Let us see why I think this is so.

Now, the "objective uncertainty" must accomplish two things for Kierkegaard's account of faith to work. First, it must be viewed as a paradox which generates a crisis laden passion. Secondly, it must cause the existing individual to see that the resolution of faith cannot be achieved objectively, but only subjectively. If Kierkegaard means to say that faith is often spawned in the midst of a crisis then this would be an accurate description of the experience of many ordinary believers. In this case the crisis arises (and passion is generated) because nature can only provide an underdetermined amount of evidence for faith. However, it is inaccurate to claim that this crisis must be the result of confronting the inadequacy of nature's attributes in forming the belief that God exists. It is empirically false that all Christians begin their journey to faith by assessing nature which they interpret as inadequate for belief in God because the conditions found there are too ambiguous to support such a belief.

Assuming that the faith of many believers is rooted in a crisis experience, it is more likely that we will find the following as the kind of examples that lead to faith rather than the "objective uncertainty" Kierkegaard cites. Think of the alcoholic who despairs over the emptiness and futility of his life and believes he finds in Christianity what he has long sought. We can hear him say, "Being a Christian has taken away my desire for drink. I feel like a new

man!" Or, think of the businessman who has invested his whole life in his work only to have it destroyed by unfortunate economic circumstances. Just when he thinks all is lost, Christianity changes his outlook on life. We might hear him say, "My new found faith makes life worth living and I see there are more important things in life than success at business".

If faith is built on a crisis or crises at all, these are the common kinds of examples which precipitate faith in believers vis a vis the "objective uncertainty" Kierkegaard thinks is so crucial. We can think of all sorts of passion-generating crises that are the catalysts of faith for many believers. It seems, then, that confronting the "objective uncertainty" has no exclusive franchise in creating the passion Kierkegaard says is necessary for faith. Further, an "objective uncertainty", as Kierkegaard describes it, is something that ordinary men and women are not likely to confront because it has a distinctly philosophical character, probably rooted in the debate over the argument from design. If passion is a necessary ingredient to faith, its generation can be accounted for in ways that not only do not involve the "objective uncertainty" but are unlikely to involve it. Given the fact that ordinary folk like shopkeepers, tax-collectors and aldermen rarely confront the "objective uncertainty" we are left wondering if the crisis of faith and its ensuing passion arises as Kierkegaard says it does.

The second difficulty arises from Kierkegaard's claim that religiousness A must be present before religiousness B is possible. But this claim falls victim to the same difficulty as the first. It is empirically false as well. As we saw above, members of religiousness A are found in all religious traditions,

including what Kierkegaard calls Christendom. Someone who is a member of religiousness A might be a Jew, a Moslem or a Hindu or anyone who is not decisively Christian, but is passionate about finding an eternal happiness. All of those who are part of religiousness A have experienced a "dialectic of inward transformation" which has brought them into a relationship with an eternal happiness.[77] Only those individuals who have undergone this experience are suitable candidates for religiousness B.

Perhaps Kierkegaard thinks that just as untrained soldiers are not suitable for combat neither are the religiously untrained suitable for Christianity. The way you get any soldier ready for combat is to put him through training exercises which recreate the real thing as closely as possible. For Kierkegaard, religiousness A is the essential training ground for religiousness B. In religiousness A the existing individual finds his passion for an eternal happiness so that he can discover its full realization in Christianity. Without religiousness A people can only become cheap editions of Christians in perfect comfort.[78] The logic of Kierkegaard's claim that religiousness A must precede B is that the latter is of such a different order and so difficult to achieve that it cannot be done without the aid of the former. Religiousness A performs a mediating role to bring the believer up to but just short of religiousness B.

But does it not seem clear that many people embrace Christianity without first being a part of any religious tradition, pagan or otherwise? Is it true that everyone who becomes a Christian first proceeds through the steps to

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[77]Ibid., 494.

[78]Ibid., 495.

religiousness A? Again, the sorts of cases we are likely to think of make the answer to the first question "yes" and the second, "no". If it turns out that they are the correct answers to these questions then I have shown Kierkegaard's pistology to be dubious since he insists that religiousness A must precede religiousness B.

If we return again to the example of the alcoholic who is subsequently converted to Christianity it is possible to account for his conversion apart from any experiences which resemble religiousness A. It is the condition of his own life that brings about his conversion. From the perspective of this person, the utter disparity between his life and that of being a Christian serves as the catalyst for embracing Christianity, not religiousness A. He achieves a relationship to the eternal happiness Christianity promises not by first experiencing religiousness A, but by wanting to change the paltry conditions of his existence.

A stronger case opposing Kierkegaard's insistence that religiousness A must precede B is the secular unbeliever who is converted to Christianity. The term "secular unbeliever" entail ordinary folk who live day to day thinking of nothing more ultimate than where to spend their next vacation or how to make more money[79] as well as sophisticated secularists like Hume who reject the religious life for philosophical reasons. When we find cases of secular unbelievers being converted it seems they go straight from their secularism to embracing Christianity. It is difficult at best to detect anything in secular unbelievers that resembles what Kierkegaard calls religiousness A

[79]Perhaps this is the aesthetic or sense-driven person, the one who lives at the lowest stage of existence, Kierkegaard has in mind.

since the life of the secular unbeliever to this point has had no passion for religion at all. The secular unbeliever, if he embraces Christianity, bypasses religiousness A and makes the transition immediately to religiousness B. In other words the secular unbeliever does not have his passion for an eternal happiness warmed by first being a member of religiousness A and then proceeding to B. He does not initially experience a relationship to an eternal happiness but perhaps he wants one and this draws him to Christianity.

I have made two claims in an attempt to show that key elements in Kierkegaard's pistology look dubious. I have challenged the idea that believers universally confront the sort of objective uncertainty Kierkegaard describes so as to arrive at the notion that subjectivity is truth. I have also challenged Kierkegaard's claim that religiousness A must be part of the experience of any believer before he can ascend to religiousness B. In both cases I have said that these features of Kierkegaard's pistology are empirically false. This simply means that we can find Christian believers whose religious experience falls outside the pistological parameters Kierkegaard attempts to establish.

What kind of rejoinder(s) would Kierkegaard offer in response to my charge that his pistology does not match the faith experience of most Christians? First, he would likely say that anyone who claims to be a Christian but has not experienced the steps to faith he describes is actually a member of "Christendom". This kind of "believer" is a pretender or perhaps is deceived into thinking he is a Christian because he thinks Christianity is a matter of geography. He views religion as a part of the fabric civility and

cultural politeness. The "Christendom" Christian has his name on the church rolls and considers himself lucky enough to be born in a Christian country but he has no appreciation of how difficult it is to become a Christian, according to Kierkegaard. Besides Kierkegaard's famous work entitled The Attack Upon Christendom, the Journals contain many scathing attacks upon the tepid faith of the members of Christendom. For example, in one passage he berates the members of Christendom for treating Christianity like a child's game. He calls it a Christian sentmentality that is in reality only a refined Epicureanism.[80] In another entry Kierkegaard says, "But the fact of the matter is: those people who want to be Christians are coddled, are spoiled by having and getting Christianity on conditions all too cheap, and therefore they are not able to resist".[81] In a passage in the Postscript Kierkegaard discusses the necessary difficulty in becoming a Christian. He writes:

> To become a cheap edition of a Christian in perfect comfort, is very much easier, ... My opinion is that religiousness A..... is so laborious that it is always enough of a task. My purpose is to make it difficult to become a Christian, yet no more difficult than it is, nor to make it difficult for stupid people, and easy for clever pates, but qualitively difficult, and essentially difficult for every man, for essentially it is equally difficult for every man to relinquish his understanding and his thinking, and to keep his soul fixed upon the absurd;.....[82]

The way Kierkegaard uses the term 'Christendom' shows us that his opponent is the religious sloth. So, becoming a Christian cannot be a matter of going through the motions of faith since these are easily feigned and are no guarantee of the commitment faith requires. More importantly, the path to faith is a difficult one to trod involving the laborious task, as Kierkegaard

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[80]Journals, #372.
[81]Journals, #393.
[82]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 495.

puts it, of religiousness A. One must assume, if religiousness A is difficult to achieve, then religiousness B is more difficult still. Kierkegaard might add that the difficulty in being a Christian must be commensurate with the steps needed to arrive at religiousness B. Without the steps to faith he prescribes we are left with a soft and easy path to the most difficult of all human decisions.

I do not mean to say there are no cases of becoming a Christian that are not difficult, even as difficult as Kierkegaard claims. It is conceivable that some people have even followed the same path laid out by Kierkegaard. But, while some people come to Christianity "kicking and screaming", for many, becoming a Christian may be among the most natural steps in their lives. For example, what of the person born in the household of committed Christians? For him, the pattern of life entailing Christianity is easily absorbed. He readily appropriates Christianity's doctrines into his life and the passion of faith burns within him as intensely as anyone. It does not follow that his relatively easy passage into Christianity diminishes his commitment, as Kierkegaard intimates. Another kind of case is the person who becomes a Christian because "it just makes good sense". He does not have a repertoire of philosophical or scientific reasons as to why he became a Christian, he simply did so. Still, others enter the world of faith because of a personal crisis or tragedy as noted above. As we saw personal crises and tragedies often facilitate one's passage to faith. For this person, faith helps him put his life back together and is, therefore, the appropriate response to the tragedy he has experienced.

If we observe people participating in the sacraments, attending services, living and espousing the teachings of Christ, this is evidence that they are genuine Christians. While they all claim the same Christian faith, they would cite varying experiences that brought them to faith. They do not necessarily recognize as part of their religious experience any of the antecedent steps to faith Kierkegaard discusses. Most who would call themselves Christians come to faith in a variety of ways. If this is true, it would be demonstration that Kierkegaard has not established the exclusive path to Christian faith. It would follow, then, that serious damage is done to his pistology. Kierkegaard describes how he thinks one must become a Christian if he is to become a Christian at all. But the pitfalls of this process become apparent when he absolutizes the antecedent steps to religiousness A as well as religiousness A itself. He does this by claiming these steps are the only steps that lead to religiousness B or Christianity. But if one does not confront the objective uncertainty as Kierkegaard has described it, then one does not experience the tension and passion required to see that subjectivity is truth and bring him to religiousness A. And if we do not experience religiousness A we can never get to religiousness B.

Yet nothing I have said prevents Kierkegaard from invoking the charge that the "believers" found in the cases cited above are members of Christendom. But such a charge relegates many faithful Christians to the status of being unbelievers. It raises the suspicion that the pistology of religiousness A can be likened to a weakly forged chain which is easily broken at any point. The chain is broken by the force applied from a single counter-

example to Kierkegaard's exclusivist path to faith. If the cases I have cited are relevant then it is conceivable that Kierkegaard's pistology of religiousness A not only does not account for every one but it may account for hardly anyone! Kierkegaard is left in the unenviable position of protecting a pistology that has little or no application to actual believers.

Secondly, Kierkegaard might complain that I have not read him fairly on his claim that religiousness A must precede relgiousness B, since on my reading I treat A preceding B as a matter of temporal priority where Kierkegaard could have in mind a logical priority. If Kierkegaard means that religiousness A is logically prior to relgiousness B this only suggests that A is necessary for B or that one cannot be in religiousness B without also being in religiousness A. The sense of this is that one cannot be a Christian (B) without also being a monotheist (A) just as my being a father necessitates that I also be a man.

The problem arises because of the unfortunate way Kierkegaard expresses himself in the passage quoted earlier from the Postscript. Here he uses the temporal language of "before" and "first" in such a way that he suggests a temporal priority. But if Kierkegaard actually means a logical priority then his case is more difficult to challenge. Construed as a logical priority he may be claiming that if one is going to be a Christian there are necessary conditions which must accompany this kind of belief. Seen as a claim about the logical priority of religiousness A to religiousness B means that while the former is not a sufficient condition for Christianity it is a necessary condition for it. Religiousness A preceding religiousness B as a logical priority expressed this

way implies that Kierkegaard need not even concern himself with exemplars of belief since every believer would of necessity fit the pattern he insists on.

C.S. Lewis serves as a good example of the kind of believer Kierkegaard has in mind. In Suprised By Joy Lewis describes his path from agnosticism to monotheism and ultimately to Christianity. He says, "In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God....perhaps the most dejected and reluctant convert in England". But he was not yet a Christian but rather someone who came to profess theism, a simple faith in God.[83] His assent to Christianity came some time later. Lewis' ultimate conversion to Christianity is built on the necessary foundation that he also be a monotheist of the sort that seems remarkably like Kierkegaard's notion of religiousness A.

However, if Kierkegaard escapes my objection by establishing the logical priority of religiousness A to religiousness B he should have cleared up the confusing language he uses that makes it look as though he claims a temporal priority for A and B. But let us allow for the moment that Kierkegaard means A is prior to B in a logical sense. If this is the case, then he says something uncontroversial, even blatantly obvious, since it is scarcely possible to think of a Christian who is not also a monotheist as in the man and father example above. However, Kierkegaard writes as though he says something that is significant and important in claiming that religiousness A must precede religiousness B by claiming that A is itself very difficult to achieve. In fact it is a cornerstone to his pistology. For the A precedes B thesis to be significant and important in the way Kierkegaard suggests, implies that it must have a

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[83]Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkein: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), 146.

meaning other than logical priority. The only other clear meaning available is one of temporal priority. This option, however, lands Kierkegaard in very serious difficulties, as we have seen.

I have argued that most Christians do not follow the steps to faith that are the backbone of Kierkegaard's pistology. On Kierkegaard's account they could not be Christians if they do not follow these steps. Edward Mooney shows concerns similar to my own when he discusses Kierkegaard's notions of "knights of infinite resignation" and "knights of faith". He wants to know if there can be any "shopkeeping knights of faith"? In other words, can ordinary folk like tax-collectors or serving maids be knights of faith?[84] Can they be people who have faith like Abraham? I think a more fundamental question for Kierkegaard is do all tax-collectors, serving maids and anyone else experience religiousness A, as Kierkegaard insists they must if they are to realize religiousness B? Is confronting the ambiguity of nature via an objective uncertainty par for the course for everyone who finds himself one step away from the decisive form of religiousness? If so, Kierkegaard outlines an exclusive pattern that must be followed by all who hope to achieve religiousness B. It seems clear that this is what Kierkegaard insists upon. If this is true, it appears that his pistology is fraught with problems from the outset.

The Basis for the Rejection of Religious Proofs

One of the best known features of Kierkegaard's thought is his vehement

[84]Edward F. Mooney, "Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling", an essay delivered at the APA meeting, Portland, Oregon, March 26, 1992.

rejection of any positive proofs or evidence that allegedly support faith. This rejection of proofs and evidence is also a place where his exclusivist fideism comes to the forefront. The foregoing discussion of religiousness A was necessary because it is the environment in which Kierkegaard proceeds with his attack on proofs and evidence or what he typically calls objective knowledge. His rejection of proofs and evidence takes on its exclusivist character because it first attempts to suspend their participation in the concerns of faith and, secondly, because their disbarment indirectly makes known to us faith's real ground, viz. subjectivity.

It is clear that Kierkegaard sees little or no value in objective reasoning in religion. For example, in the Journals he writes:

> Away with all this world history and reasons and proofs for the truth of Christianity: there is only one proof-that of faith. If I actually have a firm conviction....., then to me my firm conviction is higher than reasons; it is actually the conviction which sustains the reasons, not the reasons which sustain the convction.[85]

For Kierkegaard, the only proof which concerns religion is the "proof" of faith, not of reason. As Penelhum says, "Kierkegaard is outraged by the practice, typified for him by Hegel and his followers, of treating the Christian revelation as though it were a poor man's substitute for a properly worked out philosophical doctrine".[86] Objective reasoning in religion is a sign that faith is controlled by speculative philosophical theories. When faith has to be theorized about it is put under wraps. Kierkegaard wants to set faith free from such theorizing to enhance its richness for the believer. Further, the God of the philosophers (or reason) is not the God of religious belief. The

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[85]Journals, #3608

[86]Penelhum, God and Skepticism, 78.

kind of deity produced by reason is one to whom Kierkegaard thinks we can say, "So, what?!" or shrug our shoulders in response. The philosopher's God only generates a religious neutrality. Though objective reasoning seeks to defend Christianity it often does so at the price of dramatically altering essential Christian doctrines into something philosophically more palatable.

I will continue my critique of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism in the light of his rejection of any positive theistic proofs and evidence. I will not attempt to counteract Kierkegaard by arguing for a theistic proof or body of evidence as to why anyone should believe that God exists. Instead I offer an argument which suggests that there is a basic weakness in the logic of Kierkegaard's rejection of objective reasoning in religion. This weakness becomes more apparent in several sub-themes of Kierkegaard's larger project to show that objective reasoning is a pseudo-path to faith. If my argument follows then there are good reasons to suspect that Kierkegaard's out of hand rejection of objective reasoning in religion is unwarranted.

My argument does not claim that Kierkegaard's rejection of proofs and evidence, qua rejection, is in itself incorrect. But I do suggest that the reasons he rejects proofs and evidence are are too weak to support his view. In this exploration I try to show that Kierkegaard's attempt to exclude proofs and evidence from the domain of faith is dubious because the reasons he gives are not adequate for the task. It may indeed turn out to be true that proofs and evidence have nothing to do with faith, as Kierkegaard says. But Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism depends on reasons which are not adequate to support the claim that faith and objective knowledge are mutually

exclusive. While Kierkegaard might be right (though not obviously) that there is no religious value in, for example, classical natural theology, I try to show that his arguments do not dispatch it as surely as he thinks. My contention with Kierkegaard is that if it is to be shown that proofs and evidence are outside the sphere of faith, he must give more substantial reasons for why this is the case.

I will explore three sub-themes that are central to Kierkegaard's claim that faith and objective knowledge are thoroughly incompatible. These themes are the approximation-process and its relation to the claim that people are indifferent about objective knowledge, the theological precept of human corruption or sinfulness as a cause of unbelief, and the claim that faith must entail risk. Each of these themes will be explored in turn.

Faith, the Approximation-Process and Indifference

Kierkegaard begins the development of his arguments against proofs and evidence in matters of faith with some terminolgy I have already discussed, viz. "objective uncertainty". The import of this concept tells us what Kierkegaard thinks is wrong with trying base faith on evidence and proofs. By nature, proofs and evidence are objective and uncertain. By objectivity Kierkegaard means knowledge or information about which I can be entirely indifferent. It entails the kind of knowledge which has no existential impact on the fabric of my existence. That Oregon became a state in 1859 or that Aristotle was Alexander the Great's tutor is interesting and even important information. But these facts do not impact my life in any significant ways and they are clearly not an adequate basis for an eternal happiness.

Now, if it is assumed that proof-making and objective reasoning can supply the means to faith, Kierkegaard could make his point about objective knowledge with equal force simply by asking why everyone is not a believer. If the evidence is as compelling as the historical investigator or the speculative philosopher seems to think why is everyone not a Christian? What blocks the assent to faith if proofs and evidence are everything apologists think they are? Kierkegaard strengthens his point in the Journals when he says objective knowledge is nonsense in relation to the absurd and has gone "bankrupt down to its last shilling". He warns us about "foundering in objective approximation" which prevents us from clarifying the absurd and ultimately keeps us from having faith.[87]

Kierkegaard imposes a complete embargo on proofs and evidence as having anything to do with faith. Just as some countries do not permit the importation of certain raw materials to manufacture products that compete with their own, Kierkegaard blocks proofs and evidence from the dominion of faith so they cannot be used as the raw materials out of which the finished product of faith is manufactured. Anyone who tries to create faith from these raw materials operates, so to speak, on the black market. Kierkegaard's rejection of proofs and evidence does its exclusivist work by making them persona non grata in the life of the believer. Kiekregaard sets the exclusivist tone of his rejection of objective reasoning in religion when he writes:

> Suppose a man who wishes to acquire faith; let the comedy begin. He wishes to have faith, but he wishes also to safeguard himself by means of an objective inquiry and its approximation-process. What happens? With the help of the approximation-process the absurd becomes

[87]Journals, #2287.

> something different; it becomes probable, it becomes increasingly probable, it becomes extremely and emphatically probable. Now he is ready to believe it, and he ventures to claim for himself that he does not believe as shoemakers and tailors and simple folk believe, but only after long deliberation. Now he is ready to believe it; and lo, now it has become precisely impossible to believe it. Anything that is almost probable, or probable, or extremely and emphatically probable, is something he can almost know, or as good as know, or extremely and emphatically almost know-but it is impossible to believe.[88]

In this passage Kierkegaard summarizes his notion of the approximation-process which is the result of an objective inquiry into faith. He tells us that faith cannot be acquired by this process which progresses from "almost probable" to "probable" and ultimately to "extremely and emphatically probable". The man who wishes to acquire faith destroys this possibility if he relies on an approximation-process of increasing probable proofs and evidence. In an equally powerful statement against proof-making in religion, Kierkegaard says proofs are sought by those who think faith is like an insufficient lover. The one who seeks proofs is like the young woman who is ashamed of her lover, so she tries to find something remarkable about him to reduce her shame. The proof-seeker thinks finding proofs will show faith to be remarkable.[89] It will take away his shame and command respect from unbelievers. But this only becomes necessary, says Kierkegaard, when faith begins to lose its passion and, thus, ceases to be faith.[90]

Kierkegaard thinks this approach to faith's acquisition is easily indictable because it sets off a cascade of problems that real faith cannot accommodate.

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[88]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 189. The topic of the absurd as it relates to the absolute paradox will be taken up in Chapter Four. For now, the main concern of this chapter are the reasons Kierkegaard's rejects objective reasoning in religion.

[89]Ibid., 34.

[90]Ibid.

For example, if faith is aquired by a process that is only approximate or probable then the believer can never hold his faith with conviction. An approach that relies on probability does not provide an adequate basis for the eternal happiness faith purportedly provides. For Kierkegaard, the approximation-process is and can only ever be incommensurate with the certainty faith requires.

Kierkegaard uses a host of terms which tend to obfuscate the distinctions he tries to make between objective and subjective knowing. In some cases he says objective knowledge is useless in determining an eternal happiness (which he defines as immortality or eternal life). In other contexts he refers to objective knowledge as "accidental knowledge" and as knowledge that is "essentially indifferent".[91] On the contrary, knowledge which is essential "has a relationship to the knower, who is essentially an existing individual", and this is the only kind of knowledge important to a believer. In another passage he refers to the believer as having "an infinite personal interest" in this kind of knowledge.[92]

Objective knowledge divides into two types for Kierkegaard, viz. historical truth and philosophical (speculative) truth. To determine the historical truth of Christianity means the historian involves himself in sifting and analyzing historical sources such as the Bible to confirm his religious claims. Such confirmations are then viewed as proof or evidence that Christianity is true. Aided by such compelling evidence any reasonable person should then come to believe, so the theory goes. But according to

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[91]Ibid., 176 and 177.

[92]Ibid., 30.

Kierkegaard this approach misses the point because it only raises a question of truth and not the question of subjective truth, the truth of appropriation and assimilation.[93]

In another passage about the two kinds of objective knowledge, Kierkegaard depicts it as illusory and deceiving because it dupes us into thinking we are objective subjects while failing to account for our existence as knowing subjects.[94] In the early part of the Postscript Kierkegaard discusses the aforementioned problems with grounding faith in the approximation-process. He says viewing Christianity from a historical standpoint produces an approximation of the certain truth of Christianity and, as an uncertainty, it cannot generate the required infinite interest in one's eternal happiness. In other words, the problem of uncertainty is compounded because the inquirer cannot have an appropriate interest in establishing a relationship to Christianity on such an inadequate basis. Further, a state of incommensurability exists between the absoluteness of a faith that is certain and the relativity of historical knowledge. Such uncertainty is inadequate for faith because it makes the decision of faith impossible.[95]

Kierkegaard also criticizes speculative philosophy's attempt to get at the truth of Christianity by objective means. He follows a line of reasoning which echoes Kant's critique of rational theology when he notes the "deceptive" style of thought involved in claiming the necessity of God's existence based on his possession of all perfections (which must include

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[93]Ibid., 23.
[94]Ibid., 75.
[95]Ibid., 25

existence). This kind of argument, says Kierekgaard, is left wanting because it can never make the conclusion of God's existence independent of the premises.[96] He says the argument cannot even get started if it is not first assumed that God already exists. Kierkegaard says, "Either the supreme being was non-existent in the premises, and came into existence in the conclusion, which is quite impossible; or he was existent in the premises, in which case he cannot come into existence in the conclusion." The best we are left with is an argument with a purely hypothetical conclusion, inadequate to support the certainty faith requires. Kierkegaard takes a similar tack in the Fragments when he says God's existence is not a matter for proof because before this process even starts the inquirer supposes God's existence to be certain rather than doubtful.[97] In other words, the inquirer does not begin by searching for God as an unknown entity since this not something which suggests itself to the tribunal of reason. Whether the inquirer sets out to prove or disprove God's existence he betrays the certainty of his convictions since he already holds one of these to be certain before the inquiry even begins.

In other places Kierkegaard refers to the Unknown as a limit which the Reason repeatedly comes up against. As Stephen Evans writes, "Insofar as arguments for God's existence are purely a priori .... they merely unfold the implications of our concepts; they do not tell us whether those concepts correspond to anything that actually exists".[98] With tongue in cheek, Kierkegaard says it is a rare man of wisdom who can prove God in this way.

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[96]Ibid., 298.

[97]Kierkegaard, Fragments, 49

[98]C. Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard's Attack on Apologetics," Christian Scholar's Review X, #4, (1981): 323.

He refers to this kind of inquiry as "....an excellent subject for a comedy of the higher lunacy".[99]

To make his point about objective knowledge, Kierkegaard (or Climacus) asks us to consider the following thought experiment. Imagine that a scholarly inquiry yields the results that a theologian hoped for. All of the evidence looks as though it supports the claim that Christianity is true because the Bible, for example, is shown to be trustworthy. Will an unbeliever suddenly be convinced of the veracity of the evidence and become a believer? "No," says Climacus, because "faith does not result simply from a scientific inquiry; it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in this objective inquiry, one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith".[100] This is the result of erroneously thinking that people are brought closer to the acquisition of faith by a historical inquiry into the Scriptures.

Climacus now asks his readers to think about the other side of the experiment. Suppose the scholarly inquiry demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that the scriptures were unreliable and contradictory and that the writers were not trustworthy. Should believers now do the "rational" thing and set aside their faith? Climacus again says, "No," for the same reasons that he said "no" to the positive side of the thought experiment. Faith does not find its support by objective reasoning. Climacus says, "Because these books are not written by these authors, are not authentic, are not in an integral condition, are not inspired (though this cannot be disproved, since it is an

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[99]Kierkegaard, Fragments, 54.

[100]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 30.

object of faith), it does not follow that Christ has not existed. Insofar, the believer is equally free to assume it".[101] This is why "Climacus believes that faith safeguards the believer from the uncertainties of scholarship, the ingenuity of the clever, and the luck of archeologists".[102]

Does Kierkegaard think no discovery nor any piece of evidence could show Christianity to be false and compel the believer to either give up faith or at least drastically modify it? Consider this example. Suppose a community of believers counts the resurrection of Jesus to be an integral part of its belief system (as many Christians indeed do). Then suppose that an investigator uncovers incontrovertible evidence that Jesus never existed, that he was merely the product of legend and rich imaginations. Does this not show the doctrine of Jesus' resurrection to be false since Jesus himself never existed? Would this community of believers not have to reconsider the basis of its existence?

Kierkegaard might say that finding some evidence that would compel believers to abandon their faith (as in the above example) is a mere supposition. To this date no one has shown that Jesus never existed nor proven any of the other major tenets of Christianity to be false. So, to make my charge stick I would either have to actually discover some evidence which undermines the very basis of Christianity or leave it in the realm of supposition. As long as this kind of objection is suppositional Kierkegaard escapes the complaint that there is conceivable evidence that compels believers to give up their faith.

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[101] Ibid., 31

[102] Louis J. Pojman, The Logic of Subjectivity, 42.

If proof-making or the marshalling of evidence in favor of the belief that God exists allegedly provides a straight, unobstructed path to faith then Kierkegaard's objections to such a procedure are understandable. And a fortiori, he is clearly right! The view that faith arises automatically from a considerstion of proofs and evidence is demonstrably false since it is clear that few if any people become believers via this route. While I think Kierkegaard rightly rejects the idea that faith simply arises by a consideration of evidence or proofs, it does not follow that proofs and evidence have no role to play in the believers life, as I will argue in Chapter VI. Now Kierkegaard introduces another element into his rejection of proofs and evidence. Not only are they mere approximations but if people depend on them they block the possibility of acquiring faith because it is impossible to make the decision faith requires if we cannot be absolutely certain about that decision.

Consider the following historical information as the kind of example Kierkegaard has in mind when he talks about an approximation-process. Our belief that J.F.K. was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas seems to be unshakable. The probablility that this particular event occurred as recorded in the history books and in the minds of eye-witnesses is extremely high. But probability, even of a very large magnitude, is not good enough for Kierkegaard in matters of faith. He says, "It goes without saying that it is impossible in the case of historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt could disturb it".[103]

But does it not seem extraneous to worry about the terribly small degree

[103] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 41

of probability that J.F.K. might not have met his death on that fateful day in Dallas? Not if your eternal happiness is at stake, according to Kierkegaard. If Kierkegaard were living in our own day he would not be in the business of doubting that J.F.K was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas. But he would try to convince us that this kind of historical information is not a suitable basis for faith because we have to have absolute certainty if we are going to make the infinitely important decision of faith and attain our eternal happiness. In a particularly poignant passage from the Journals Kierkegaard says that to treat Christianity as a matter of knowledge turns it into "bilge water".[104] He goes on to say that this reduces Christianity to the kind of knowledge we find in mathematics, history and other intellectual disciplines which make no existential impact on the character of people.

Part of what Kierkegaard worries about when someone thinks that God's existence can be proven is akin to the insights Wittgenstein offers in Culture and Value. In different two passages he writes:

> Believing means submitting to an authority. Having once submitted, you can't then, without rebelling against it, first call it in question and then once again find it acceptable.
>
> I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your life. (Or the direction of your life.) The point is that a sound doctrine need not take hold of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor's prescription.- But here you need something to move you in a new direction.- (i.e. this is how I understand it.) Once you have been turned around, you must stay turned around.[105]

Kierkegaard would agree with Wittgenstein. For him, at least two inherent dangers reside in any attempts to prove God's existence. First, when

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[104] Journals, #2303.

[105] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value ed. G.H. von Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 45e and 53e.

faith is based on proofs or evidence it sets up a condition where one potentially falls in and out of belief according to the pro and con arguments that are in vogue. Kierkegaard complains that an approximation, because it is objectively uncertain, cannot produce the conviction faith requires. Faith becomes corrigible to the prevailing winds of evidence, counter-evidence, proofs and counter-proofs. In this condition faith falls outside Kierkegaard's claim that "the conclusion of belief is not so much a conclusion as a resolution, and it is for this reason that belief excludes all doubt".[106] In another Journal entry he says the conviction of faith is over and above proof. A mathematical proposition needs proof because for every proof there is some disproof, or propositons that are pro and a contra. However, the man of conviction raises himself higher than the dialectics of proofs and is convinced by his faith.[107]

Kierkegaard thinks that confidence in God's existence declines in direct proportion in our efforts to prove it.[108] The person who stakes his faith on what can be proved is committed to the unenviable position of being pulled in and out of faith as he considers evidence and counter-evidence for the existence of God. But believers live by the conviction that their faith is true and will not be unsettled by opposing evidence. For this reason, believers simply do not need the excess baggage of proofs and evidence to support their faith.

Secondly, even if there was a body of convincing evidence or an airtight

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[106] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 104.

[107] Journals, #2296.

[108] Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, 2nd ed., trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 125.

proof of God's existence, Kierkegaard thinks such "objective knowledge" will be treated with indifference. He compares it to a mathematical proposition whose objectivity is apparent and for this reason it becomes an indifferent truth.[109] He worries that faith will be reduced to the level of the mundane, no more meaningful than working out a few algebra problems, when analyzed through the objective means of proofs and evidence. In such a condition, faith has no existential impact on the believer, it does not alter the course of his life. This kind of faith has its vitality and passion "bleached out" by the kind of objective knowledge proofs and evidence provide.

To make his point about the unimportance of historical information to being a Christian believer he says the believer who is an actual eye-witness (the disciple at first hand) to the life of Jesus is not in a superior faith position to the disciple at second hand since being an eye-witness does not make one a disciple. For the eye-witness, the life of Jesus may have only historical significance and this is something the eye-witness can be indifferent about.[110] Even if we were at Bethlehem when Jesus was born, at Cana when he turned water into wine, were present when he raised Lazarus from the dead or in front of the tomb at the moment of his resurrection, these events, in and of themselves, would not turn us into believers (or disciples, to use Kierkegaard's word). Unless this knowledge is appropriated by the believer he can never have the kind of passion saturated faith Kierkegaard thinks is so important.

I will illustrate Kierekgaard's claims with regard to the themes of

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[109] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

[110] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 73-4.

indifference and uncertainty in the following example. Imagine that you have a penchant for working crossword puzzles. You are not only very good at filling in the blanks of the puzzle but this activity takes up a lot of your spare time. On the latest puzzle you have an eight letter word for 21 across which has the clue, "Northern California bay city." Let us assume that your ability to work crossword puzzles is much greater than your knowledge of California geography. Without some help from the "down" clues which intersect with 21 across your chances of solving this part of the puzzle are perhaps very low. But the probability that you will be able to ascertain 21 across increases as the intersecting down clues are filled-in. That is, if you know that the fourth and eighth letters are "k" and "y", respectively, there is a greater probability that you will know what 21 across is than if none of the blanks are completed. But let us say you are having a fairly good day at solving crossword puzzles because you also know the intersecting clues for the first, third and fifth blanks are "B", "r" and "e". So far you have B _ r k e_ _y for 21 across.

Now, even an average crossword puzzle player with poor geography skills should be able to say with certainty that the remaining letters are "e", "l" and "e", respectively, to spell the word "Berkeley". You need no further clues from the down words that intersect 21 across in order to complete this part of the puzzle. But even if you can say with a high degree of probability that the answer to 21 across must be "Berkeley", the very small chance that you could be wrong is enough to render the solution uncertain, in Kierkegaard's view. Kierkegaard's complaint that historical and speculative

proofs provide only approximations are like crossword puzzle clues with some of the blanks not filled-in. Since historical and speculative proofs can only ever be approximations (maybe even very precise approximations), the amount of available evidence is always underdetermined for the decision of faith, which requires certainty.

Let us carry our crossword puzzle example one step further in order to clarify another important turn in Kierkegaard's thought on historical and speculative proofs. Imagine that you are having an unusually good day working your crossword puzzle. In fact, it is so good that you are able to fill in all of the letters to the down clues that intersect 21 across so as to leave no doubt that the answer to it is "Berkeley". You do not have even have to read the clue, "Northern California bay city" to get the answer for 21 across. In this case there is no speculating whatsoever about the answer to 21 across since the evidence is commensurate with the conclusion you draw. There are no gaps, so to speak, in your knowledge. You are able to claim with certainty that "Berkeley" is the answer to 21 across.

If you were able to fill-in the knowledge gaps that exist in historical and speculative proofs in the same way that we fill-in the blanks of a crossword puzzle would Kierkegaard allow that historical and speculative proofs are supportive of faith? The answer he would give is clearly, "no". Even though proofs that are like the second crossword puzzle case (if they existed) meet Kierkegaard's first objection that they are only approximations, they are still inadequate for faith. They are inadequate because they do not inspire an interested knowing. Such proofs are the kinds of knowledge we can afford to

be indifferent about or which lack existential impact, according to Kierkegaard.

We can see then, that historical and speculative proofs fail on two counts in Kierkegaard's view. First, they are inadequate because they cannot provide the certainty faith requires, they merely provide an approximation that inevitably delays the decision of faith. Secondly, even if historical and speculative proofs were not approximative in nature but could provide the certainty faith needs, the kind of knowledge they give us would be a matter of indifference, like mathematical truths or historical facts, to use Kierkegaard's examples.

To be entangled in the stuff of objective knowledge is a cause of a lack of concern for one's eternal happiness, according to Kierkegaard. It might be entirely accurate to say that the kind of objective knowledge Kierkegaard discusses cannot be used to determine an eternal happiness nor provide the certainty faith demands. Just as penecillin has no affect on a broken leg neither does objective knowledge affect our lives in a religious way, Kierkegaard might say. However, it seems that the exemplars Kierkegaard uses of an indifferent objective knowledge are distinct from other kinds of objective knowledge which likely do create an existential impact in our lives. For example, we might be very indifferent about the fact that the square root of nine equals three, the Taj Mahal took twenty-two years to build and Halley's Comet appears every seventy-six years. But there are other types of objective knowledge which clearly do have an existential impact on us. Consider the following examples: "Your child has been killed in a car

accident"; "You will be executed at dawn"; "Ten-thousand people starve to death everyday"; "A cure for cancer has been discovered", or "I learned about the real tragedy of the Holocaust through the movie, 'Schindler's List'". Clearly, people are not indifferent to this kind of objective knowledge in the same way that they could be indifferent to the solution to a quadratic equation or a bit of historical information.

In response, Kierkegaard might say that since he restricts himself to a discussion of an interest in one's own eternal happiness the sorts of cases I bring up against him do not apply. As striking as they are, they cannot lead to anyone's eternal happiness, therefore he is free to make his claim about objective knowledge. This rejoinder to my objection has some merit given his specific focus on the desire for an eternal happiness. But the way Kierkegaard describes this process is misleading because he claims that concern over objective knowledge of a certain kind leads to a general attitude of indifference. He does not specifically say that it is an indifference to an eternal happiness. It could be an indifference to my family, my career or life in general. What Kierkegaard needs to say is that this kind of objective knowledge (the kind he names) leads to an indifference to our eternal happiness since it is clear that all objective knowledge does not engender an attitude of indifference. Kierkegaard has not shown that objective knowledge per se is a matter of indifference to us, that it is unable to generate an existential impact on our lives. As a Christian, Kierkegaard would accept the objective truth of statements like 'Jesus died our sins' or 'God loves us' but he would deny that these are matters of indifference. It seems there are

certain examples of knowledge, that if they were true, would be objectively true and also have an existential impact on our lives. Kierkegaard invites this criticism because of his overly general picture of objective knowledge and his unqualified view of indifference. Kierkegaard has only shown one part of his thesis to be coherent, viz. that a specific kind of objective knowledge cannot be the basis for an eternal happiness.

Faith and Human Corruption

I turn now to a second theme that is part of Kierkegaard's argument against the compatibility of faith and objective knowledge. This second theme is the matter of human corruption or, in theological terms, sin.

In Kierkegaard's view, humans are blind to spiritual matters because of their fall into sin. An indication that this condition persists is the attempt to access a relationship with God by means of proofs or evidence because such an activity signifies human pride rather than submission to divine authority. Those who think God is accessible through proofs wrongly believe the infinite can be captured by the finite. In a strident condemnation of proofs Kierkegaard writes:

> So rather let us sin, sin out and out, seduce maidens, murder men, commit highway robbery-after all, that can be repented of,.... So rather let us mock God, out and out, as has been done before in the world-this is always preferable to the diaparaging air of importance with which one would prove God's existence. For to prove the existence of one who is present is the most shameless affront, since it is an attempt to make him ridiculous; but unfortunately people have no inkling of this and for sheer seriousness regard it as a pious undertaking.[111]

Earlier we saw that Kierkegaard assesses proofs to be failures on

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[111] Ibid., 485.

philosophical grounds. Now he says the attempt to demonstrate or argue for God's existence is more than just an innocent confusion or philosophical mistake. On the contrary, proof-making in religion is the height of impiety. Like many theologians, Kierkegaard thinks unbelief is not just a matter of error but is blameworthy: "that those who do not believe in God reject him for morally bad motives, and deceive themselves".[112] As Kierkegaard puts it, those who try to carry out such demonstrations to prove God's existence should be classed with the worst kinds of sinners. Kierkegaard's objection to proofs for God's existence is not that they try to make what is by nature uncertain to be certain but that they do the opposite, viz. they make what already should be certain look as though it is uncertain.

Kierkegaard's view of the contemptibility of proof making as a sign of human corruption is regarded by some as a cogent account of why many people are not believers. The reason is all-encompassing: they do not believe Christianity to be true because they are corrupted by sin. The depth of their corruption is a barrier to faith which blinds them to the plain and obvious truth of Christianity. Their corruption is further evidenced by trying to reason their way to God.

On the matters of sin and corruption, Kierkegaard's claims are in line with most of orthodox Christianity. For him, the resolution to a noetic structure impaired by sin is a divine miracle that penetrates the individual's resistance to belief and allows him to see and accept divine truth. Any attempt, says Kierkegaard, to prove God's existence by philosophical or evidential means merely signifies that the person has ignored the divine

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[112]Penelhum, Parity is Not Enough, unpublished essay, 25.

presence from the outset.[113] There is no question that human corruption or sinfulness is a central doctrine for many Christian theologians. Nearly all theological traditions in Christianity paint a picture of humans as in a degenerate state because of sin. The most familiar of these are perhaps the notions of original sin found in Augustine and total depravity in Reformers like Luther and Calvin. In many ways, Kierkegaard closely follows these important theologians. He suggests that corrupt motives driven by depravity are at work in the individual who thinks objective reasoning can create proofs for the truth of Christianity. They are signs of pride and pretentiousness. Kierkegaard thinks proofs find their source in spiritual insubordination not in a genuine desire to develop a God-relationship.

Kierkegaard develops this notion further in the Journals when he says philosophy and Christianity can never be united because the latter seeks the redemption of the whole man while the former assumes it is exempt from it.[114] The "yawning abyss" between Christianity and philosophy is made evident when the former posits "man's cognition as defective on account of sin, which is rectified in Christianity;..." In this passage Kierkegaard does not allow that human beings can have defective moral powers and sound cognition too. For him, the cognitive powers of human beings are just as tainted as their moral powers and are, therefore, equally in need of redemption. Because philosophy (the place human cognition operates) is as impaired by sin as human moral powers philosophy cannot serve as a transition to Christianity since it would be stopped by a negative result which

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[113] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 405.

[114] Journals, #3245.

points to man's need of redemption.

Kierkegaard defines sin as "a decisive expression for the religious mode of existence".[115] Apart from this distinction the existing individual has not made the transition from the ethical stage of existence to the religious stage. Kierkegaard goes on to explain that "the inwardness of sin is the greatest possible and most painful possible distance from the truth, when truth is subjectivity."[116] He says, speculative philosophy comes close to understanding Christianity but only as a speculation. It cannot understand Christianity decisively "where the decision comes to be in the moment" so that it becomes related to the eternal truth or from the prospective of the existing individual.[117]

For Kierkgaard, sin is an all encompassing condition that affects human morality as well as human cognition. Sin is not reducible to simple moral failure. Rather, it involves moral failure as well as cognitive failure. It follows, on this view, that just as humans are not perfectly moral neither do they have perfect knowledge. Sin is a systemic condition which impacts every part of human existence, including the cognitive powers. For Kierkegaard, an important cause of unbelief is rooted in the human condition. Unbelief is not simply the result of a conscientious appraisal of rational arguments judged to be inadequate, but depends on the view that human existence is permeated with sin and in need of redemption. Philosophy, as a human endeavour which relies on speculative thought, is

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[115] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 239.

[116] Ibid., 240.

[117] Ibid., 243.

corrupted and cannot provide a transition to Christianity. Kierkegaard thinks that attempts to use philosophy beyond its obvious limits is further demonstration of our corruption.

In the Fragments Kierkegaard discusses at length how the problem of human corruption is resolved by divine interdiction as a gift of grace which pulls back the veil to the understanding so that we can become participants in Christianity rather than mere spectators.[118] This gift of grace occurs in the "Moment" and it is a condition which God must grant for believers if they are to discover the truth of Christianity. I will reserve the at length discussion of this topic for Chapter Four since it is specifically connected to the Absolute Paradox of Christianity or religiousness B. For now I simply want to emphasize Kierkegaard's claim that human corruption is the real cause of our unbelief. Moreover, a sign of our corruption is the pretentious way in which some think proofs and evidence undergird faith. For Kierkegaard, philosophy is useful only if it first kneels before the redemptive power of Christianity.

It might be argued that Kierkegaard actually gives us two causes for unbelief. On the one hand, proofs and evidence are to be rejected as faith building because they cannot generate the certainty faith requires. This is due to their philosophical shortcomings. Secondly, the employment of proofs and evidence in the cause of faith is a sign of our uncured corruption. While Kierkegaard does not actually cite the first of these as a cause of unbelief, he thinks it is impossible to generate faith from proofs and evidence.

If we have two causes for unbelief (the outright failure of the proofs and

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[118] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 71-2.

human corruption) this suggests that humans can have both pure and impure motives for not believing in God. In other words, some people may not become believers because of the philosophical shortcomings of any known proofs or evidence. They accept the judgment that proofs and evidence fail on the grounds philosophers have established. We have seen that Kierkegaard also accepts and espouses this treatment of proofs and evidence. But he also says some people do not believe because their corrupted natures act as a barrier to believing. He seems to make this latter point in the Journals when he says that there has never been an atheist, only those who have been unwilling to let the fact of God's existence get control of his mind.[119] According to Kierkegaard atheists are really those that have resisted belief in God even though they really know that He exists. For Kierkegaard, there are no unbelievers who are motivated by good conscience. Their rejection of belief in God is motivated by their sinful corruption which is proven by their refusal to allow what they innately know about God to have influence in their lives.

However, one phenomenon of modern society which may show that unbelief does not necessarily arise from the impure motives of sin is the wide variety of religious and secular options which claim to be definitive in terms of understanding the world. Not only is there ambiguity between religions but also between secular systems of thought, such as Marxism, Freudianism, and Sociobiology.[120] The great array of competitive worldviews (religious and non-religious) raises the possibility that there are conscientious doubts,

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[119]Journals, #3606.

[120]Penelhum, Parity is Not Enough, 25

not necessarily corrupted ones, about the truth claims of Christianity. As Penelhum puts it, "A religiously ambiguous world is one in which unbelievers have good excuses for their doubts, even if their doubts are not conscientious ones".[121] To insist that disbelief in the Christian revelation arises from corrupted motives and not from the ambiguities in various religions as well as secular systems of thought is extremely unrealistic. Given this ambiguity in the world, there is no way to know if the cause of disbelief in Christianity arises from pure or impure motives.

One way to test a person's motives for unbelief would be to discover a proof or piece of evidence that makes God's existence indubitable. A natural theology which had this quality would demonstrate that unbelief is the product of sinful corruption if the unbeliever persists in his unbelief even after God's existence has been proven to him. An airtight proof makes it more obvious that corruption is the cause of unbelief if a skeptic continues to reject belief in God after such a proof is made known to him. This implies that Kierkegaard should incorporate the pursuit of a successful body of natural theology in his pistology. He should seek a proof that is airtight so that the skeptic cannot appeal to conscience to reject belief in God.

But Kierkegaard's rehearsal of the failings of natural theology, especially in the early part of the Postscript, opens the door to the unbeliever who can consistently claim that his lack of faith is based on good reasons, reasons Kierkegaard himself supplies. If we were to ask skeptics like Hume, Neilsen or Russell, they would likely say the unbeliever's rejection of faith is

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[121] Ibid., 28.

grounded in a conscientious appraisal of the philosophical failings of natural theology. Penelhum writes, "if an unbeliever has not had God's existence proved to him, then even though his doubts about God's existence may still be sinful ones, there is less reason to suppose them to be".[122]

Kierkegaard allows (perhaps unintentionally) for the viability of the honest doubter when he asks his readers to accept his negative appraisal of arguments typically used to demonstrate the rationality of faith. Pointing out that all proofs fail philosophically gives credence to the view that there are few good reasons to believe in God, as the skeptic claims. To accept Kierkegaard's appraisal of natural theology implies that there are individuals whose unbelief is not funded by spiritual corruption at all, but by reasons of conscience. Hence, the skeptic is within his epistemic rights when he rejects belief in God and does so out of good conscience. Kierkegaard makes it more difficult to press the claim that people do not believe in God because they are spiritually corrupt. To say proofs cannot give enough epistemic certainty to sustain the claim that God exists gives license to the skeptic's rejection of belief in God. On the other hand, the condition of sinfulness or corruption, which Kierkegaard views as vital to his pistology, is more readily sustained if a successful body of natural theology can be found. This kind of natural theology would indeed show that continued unbelief in God is generated by corrupt motives. But Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism places the pursuit of a successful natural theology outside the interests of genuine faith.

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[122] Ibid. 27.

Risk as a Necessary Condition of Faith

Another important detail which arises in the midst of Kierkegaard's discussion of religiousness A in the Postscript is the necessity of risk for faith. He says, "Without risk there is no faith".[123] He repeats this claim a few pages later when he writes:

> When the eternal truth is related to an existing individual it becomes a paradox. The paradox repels in the inwardness of the existing individual, through the objective uncertainty and the corresponding Socratic ignorance. But since the paradox is not in the first instance itself paradoxical ..... it does not repel with a sufficient intensive inwardness. For without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk the greater the faith; the more objective security the less inwardness ..... and the less objective security the more profound the possible inwardness.[124]

Not only is faith without risk impossible, but faith is made greater by increasing the amount of risk. Kierkegaard sets up an inverse relationship between the amount of faith and the amount of objective security sought by the existing individual. As the level of objective security increases the intensity of faith ebbs. The way to intensify the passion of faith is to shun objective security. As objective certainty decreases more favorable conditions for greater subjectivity (inwardness) and greater faith are established.

Kierkegaard uses two examples to tell us what he means by the risk of faith and its connection to an objective uncertainty: 1) the ambiguity of nature and, 2) the Socratic "if" with regard to his own immortality. In light of these examples we might understand the way in which faith entails risk in at least two ways. Kierkegaard could mean faith is risky because the believer

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[123] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

[124] Ibid., 187-88. The emphasis is mine.

continually struggles to hold the objective uncertainty fast which puts faith at risk if he is not successful. The believer appropriates the gospel into his life instead of trying to discover it through an approximation-process. By appropriating the gospel, the believer holds the objective uncertainty in its place, not allowing it to do any further work in the supposed interests of faith. But he must continue to resist the temptation to allow objective reasoning from re-entering his life and destroying faith. The believer's faith is at risk because the objective way always lurks nearby enticing him to return to a descent into error. The believer could lose his faith because he may yield to the ever present temptation to secure it by objective means.

Another gloss of Kierkegaard's take on the risk of faith is that faith is risky because there may come a time when the objective uncertainty is actually resolved through philosophical analysis, with the result that the side of the uncertainty which "disturbs the mind and excites anxiety" proves to be the right one, i.e. that side of the uncertainty which suggests that God does not exist. At the present time it is an objective uncertainty because the evidence for and against faith is more or less equipollent. But there is one side of the objective uncertainty which could cause us to think that nature reflects neither order nor omnipotence and faith turns out to be a sham. Hence, faith is at risk as long as there is the potential that the objective uncertainty might be resolved in favor of the side which shows that God does not exist or, by implication, that there is no immortality.

It is likely that the first interpretation is the one Kierkegaard has in mind, although the second is supported by an earlier passage in the Postscript. Here

Kierkegaard writes:

> When one man investigates objectively the problem of immortality, and another embraces an uncertainty with the passion of the infinite: where is there the most truth, and who has the greater certainty? The one has entered upon a never-ending approximation, for the certainty of immortality lies precisely in the subjectivity of the individual; the other is immortal, and fights for his immortality by struggling with the uncertainty. Let us consider Socrates. Nowadays everybody dabbles in a few proofs; some have several such proofs, others fewer. But Socrates! He puts the question objectively in a problematic manner: if there is an immortality.... On this "if" he risks his entire life, he has the courage to meet death, and he has with the passion of the infinite so determined the pattern of his life that it must be found acceptable-if there is an immortality.[125]

Socrates is Kierkegaard's example (as he often is) in illustrating the important issues of faith. According to Kierkegaard, he risks his life on an objective uncertainty, in this case the "if" of immortality. Socrates has no objective means of determining whether we are immortal or not, but because of the risk he takes he gives the best possible proof for the immortality of the soul. This is the kind of case, which if proven one way or another, would resolve the objective uncertainty into one of certainty. But it requires a Hickian eschatological verification in order to put it to the test. The one condition which could tell us that there is an immortal soul is our own death. Of course, we would only know it if it turned out the soul were indeed immortal.

At any rate, whether the first or second interpretation of the objective uncertainty is correct, it is difficult to see how Kierkegaard can mesh his description of faith as being subjectively certain, excluding doubts and requiring risk. When something is certain, then there is no real risk in

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[125] Ibid., 180

believing it. Risk is only descriptive of a situation where what I stake my life on can potentially turn out to be a bad gamble. The description of faith as certain militates against it entailing any risk.

Kierkegaard wants to keep believers in a state of conflict by having them simultaneously certain and uncertain. The believer, as Kierkegaard describes him, lives in two worlds as it were, being both objectively uncertain and subjectively certain. This purportedly makes the life of faith passionate and tension filled. Overall, however. Kierkegaard's project is to make faith certain given the way he rails against the approximative and uncertain outcomes of objectivity. This makes subjectivity the only sufficient ground for the certainty of faith.

What is it to make something certain? If I were able to rig a roulette wheel so that it always stops on number five I would be more than willing to bet my life's savings on five before the next turn of the wheel. Or, if I can convince a boxer to "take a fall" in an upcoming title bout there seems to be little risk in placing all of my money on the boxer's opponent. In these cases I can control the circumstances surrounding specific events and, thus, be certain of their outcomes.

What is it for something to be uncertain? Perhaps it is like the fireman who knows his life is at risk when he rushes into a burning building to save a child. He cannot be sure of the outcome of his actions. The possibilities include his death as well as the child's or that both will emerge unharmed. This is an objective uncertainty with no guarunteed outcome. Yet the fireman risks his life even in the face of the uncertain outcome of these

events. Even if the fireman's training and years of experience give him confidence that he will save the child's life as well as his own there is the possibility that he will fail. The point of these examples is to show that making faith subjectively certain is to rig the outcome in such a way that no risk is actually involved. Hence it is confused to claim that a necessary condition of faith is risk but also to claim that it is founded on certainty. Faith is risky only if it is uncertain.

Yet there is a deeper problem for Kierkegaard. Though he gives a role to the objective uncertainty in his pistology, it is something that must be held fast or subdued because it is dangerous to faith. The role of objective uncertainty is to lift the veil, so to speak, that we might see that truth is to be found in subjective certainty. Kierkegaard says the person of conviction is cognizant of these doubts but the strength of his conviction overwhelms them. But an active objective uncertainty, with its equipollent evidence for and against God and immortality would engender occasional doubts in the mind of the believer, something Kierkegaard says faith cannot afford. This implies that the doubts that arise offer only token resistance against such powerful resolve. If the resistance is only token, why does faith entail any real risk?

Let us consider a familiar example related to Kierkegaard's claim that faith is risky. He writes, "If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith".[126] But there is nothing inherently dangerous or risky

[126]Ibid., 182.

about this situation for a strong swimmer. Perhaps the water is calm, a comfortable 70 degrees and our strong swimmer is only two hundred yards from shore. But for someone who could not swim it would not matter if he were over two fathoms or seventy-thousand fathoms of water. In both cases he would surely drown apart from a rescue. Now we can increase the risk for the strong swimmer if we put him five miles from shore over water with twenty foot swells, a temperature of 50 degrees and a strong current. But again, the depth of the water would matter little since under these conditions he would surely perish no matter how well he could swim. Only as we increase the risk factors for the swimmer does it become more likely that he is in peril.

Kierkegaard's attempt to connect the paradoxes he discusses to the risk of faith is confused. His desire is to increase the amount of risk involved since this allegedly includes an increase in faith ("the greater the risk the greater the faith", pages 187-88 of the Postscript). Perhaps this confusion can be brought to light by considering the following example. Making faith risky might be like borrowing money from the bank. My banker's first order of business is to determine whether I am a good credit risk or not. If I have a history of bankruptcy, unpaid loans and unresolved debt I am considered a bad risk and it is unlikely the bank will loan me any money. On the other hand, if my credit history is such that I have paid my debts on time and have sufficient colateral, the bank considers me a good credit risk. Then it is likely the bank will loan me money because there is a high probability I will repay the loan in a timely manner. But if my banker wants to show himself to be a person of

great faith he ought to loan money to me especially if I have a bad credit rating, because it is a greater risk to do so. On the other hand, if I have a good credit rating he should not loan me any money at all because there is minimal risk in doing so. This kind of example should make us suspicious of Kierkegaard's claim that faith requires risk, at least in the way he outlines it.

The propositions that nature reflects God's design and that the soul is immortal are ambiguous (objectively uncertain) because they have a potential for being true or false. The risk is that the believer, like Socrates, stakes his faith on one side of the ambiguity. It could turn out that the believer is wrong and that his faith is in vain, i.e. he is not immortal. But this makes faith look like a 50-50 proposition and not all that risky or at least as risky as Kierkegaard would like it.[127] In fact a 50-50 probability might be considered a good bet by some gamblers. What Kierkegaard really needs to do is find ways in which the risk of faith can be increased since this brings about the increase of faith.

If I were at a gaming table at the local carnival placing bets on my chances of finding a pea under one of two shells I would always have a fifty-fifty chance of being right. But my chances of success are reduced (or the risk increased) if I now am required to find the pea under one of three shells. The risk could be increased further if the gamemaster adds another shell which potentially hides the pea and so on. It is this increased risk that enhances faith by making it less probable that what one believes to be the truth is

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[127]This sounds something like Pascal's wager argument. It would certainly be prudent to believe in God or one's immortality if it only entailed this much risk.

actually true.

In other words, the risk of faith does not increase by holding the objective uncertainty fast as Kierkegaard says must be done in his definition of faith.[128] In this state we have an irresolvable ambiguity which neither increases or decreases the risk of faith. To increase the risk of faith one must attempt to tip the balance of the ambiguity to the side of the objective uncertainty which denies the existence of God and immortality. One must try to break the log jam that exists in the ambiguity of the objective uncertainty. What Kierkegaard needs to make faith risky is not an increased equipollence of ambiguity, e.g. that proponents from either side of the proposition "God created the world", interminably heap up evidence and counter evidence in support of their respective claims, since this equipollence is at best 50-50. To substantiate his claim that increased risk produces increased faith, Kierkegaard needs a greater uncertainty about the truthfulness of the side of the ambiguity which affirms God's existence and immortality.

This leaves Kierkegaard in a peculiar predicament because breaking the impasse of the objective uncertainty is done to enhance the probability that what a believer hopes to be true is actually less likely to be true so that the risk of faith, and faith itself, will be increased. As opposed to the traditional practice of natural theology, Kierkegaard's claim that faith requires risk leads to the conclusion that genuine faith needs to practice a natural atheology.

Using Kierkegaard's examples, we should try to show that there is no immortality and that God did not create the world so as to increase the risk of believing these things. In these conditions faith reaches its maximum pitch

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[128] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

since the maximum of risk is involved in believing something you have shown to be likely untrue. And is it not the maximum of faith that Kierkegaard seeks? But to seek these ends would involve believers in a very ironic practice, indeed.

Summary

In this chapter I have argued that Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism produces a pistology that is not tenable for believers. My first step was to show that the program of religiousness A in general is not one that is discernible in the lives of most, let alone all, believers. Kierkegaard's insistence that believers proceed to religiousness B from the ladder provided by religiousness A is not evidenced in the lives of all believers. I also tried to show that Kierkegaard's claim that objective truth could only generate a spirit of indifference for believers was false. Further, I argued that the themes of human corruption and the risk of faith produce inconsistencies that make us suspect there is something deeply wrong with Kierkegaard's pistology.

CHAPTER IV

THE ABSOLUTE PARADOX AND EXCLUSIVIST FIDEISM

> He (Christ) is the paradox. Social inferiority belongs to him absolutely, essentially; he is this very paradox, the compounding of God and a socially insignificant man. (Journals, #321)

> Paradox is the real pathos of the intellectual life, and just as only great souls are exposed to passions, so only great thinkers are exposed to what I call paradoxes, which are nothing other than rudimentary majestic thoughts. (Journals, #3070)

> Philosophy's idea is mediation-Christianity's, the paradox. (Journals, #3072)

> .....because all Christianity is rooted in the paradox, one must accept it (i.e. become a believer) or reject it (precisely because it is paradoxical), but above all one is not to think it out speculatively, for the result is definitely not Christianity. (Journals, #3083)

> I know nothing so contemptible as a mere paradox; a mere ingenious defense of the indefensible. G.K Chesterton

Industrial engineers commonly construct a mock-up or a proto-type as a preliminary step to building a facility such as a factory. The proto-type or mock-up tells the engineers whether the real factory will work or not. In many ways religiousness A is a mock-up or proto-type for religiousness B. Most of the central themes that are the fabric of religiousness A reappear in

religiousness B but in their mature and complete form. Just as passion, paradox, subjectivity and a rejection of objective reasoning underlie religiousness A they are at the center of Kierkegaard's development of genuine Christianity. In religiousness B we get an opportunity to see if the factory actually works or not. To this point I have argued that even the proto-type of religiousness A fails. If so, this implies the failure of religiousness B because of the way Kierekgaard links them together. As when the industrial engineer discovers that his proto-type factory cannot manufacture the product for which it was designed, the failure of religiousness A suggests the same fate for religiousness B.

However, let us assume for the moment that religiousness A is not a failure or that religiousness B is not so closely linked to A. This will give us an opprtunity to explore two remaining themes that are key to religiousness B. These are the absolute paradox and subjectivity. In Chapter Five I will discuss subjectivity in the context of religiousness B. In this fourth chapter I will focus on the object of faith in religiousness B or what Kierkegaard calls the absolute paradox. My focus will be on the paradox that emerges because "the eternal truth has come into being in time....."[129] That is, for Kierkegaard, the object of faith proper is that: God is eternal and God became temporal. The absolute paradox is supremely paradoxical, then, because it contains a 'contradiction', as Kierkegaard says, a tension between the truth of two propositions. If it is true that God is eternal, then it cannot be true, in reason, that God became temporal and, therefore, we have an absolute paradox.

The absolute paradox is Kierkegaard's take on the Christian Incarnation,

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[129]Ibid., 187.

the central doctrine of Christianity which says God (the eternal) is revealed in human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth (the temporal). Kierkegaard is not as direct as one hopes he would be in equating the absolute paradox with the doctrine of the Incarnation. For example, in the Postscript he writes:

> What now is the absurd? The absurd is-that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals.[130]

For Kierkegaard, what merits the description, absolute paradox for the Christian Incarnation is the fusing of God and man in a single human being. Why is such a fusing an "absolute" paradox? According to Kierkegaard, it is because "between God and a human being there is an absolute difference".[131]

To this point Kierkegaard has lead us on a journey which purports to show us that faith cannot be the result of historical evidence nor speculative philosophy. The most poignant example of Kierkegaard's project is his reflection on the Absolute Paradox. If there is any place in Kierkegaard's thought where we expect him to carry out his exclusivist project it would be in his discussion of the Christian Incarnation. As Kierkegaard recognizes, the defining feature of Christian religious life is the person of Jesus Christ. For Christians he is the object of faith, the litmus test, if you will, distinguishing Christians from non-Christians. Given this, it should come as no surprise that Kierkegaard should have an extensive discussion of the Incarnation.

My difficulties with the issue of the Absolute Paradox do not arise because Kierkgaard thinks the Incarnation is the definitive doctrine for Christianity.

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[130]Ibid., 188.

[131]Ibid., 369.

It clearly is. They arise because of the way he thinks he must frame the Incarnation in order to keep it at the center of the Christian faith. Why does Kierkegaard think the Incarnation needs to be described as an absolute paradox or even a paradox at all? Is there support for such a description in the New Testament? In seeking answers to these questions, I will largely ignore the multifarious Christian confessions which attempt to resolve the mysterious nature of the Incarnation. It is evident that Kierkegaard would regard them as bunk anyway since they are representative of Christendom. Instead, I will focus on the difficulties that emerge because of Kierkegaard's view on the absolute paradox.

Kierkegaard puts it that the paradox of religiousness B is paradoxical in and of itself. Though Religiousness A has dialectical features that are passion-producing, it does not have the essential characteristic of being paradoxically dialectic.[132] "Religiousness A is the dialectic of inward transformation;..." that seeks or has as its pathos an eternal happiness not yet realized. But Religiousness B is genuine religiousness because it is paradoxical and yields a more precise definition of the eternal happiness.[133] Hence, the paradox of religiousness A and B are differentiated by their respective relationships. Kierkegaard writes:

> By virtue of the relationship subsisting between the eternal truth and the existing individual, the paradox came into being. Let us now go further, let us suppose that the eternal essential truth is itself a paradox. How does the paradox come into being? By putting the eternal essential truth into juxtaposition with existence. Hence when we posit such a conjunction within the truth itself, the truth becomes a paradox.[134]

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[132]Ibid., 490.

[133]Ibid., 494.

[134]Ibid., 187.

In the second instance (religiousness B) the paradox does not depend on a relationship with an existing individual for its paradoxicality. Of religiousness A Kierkegaard writes, "the eternal and essential truth, the truth which has an essential relation to an existing individual because it pertains essentially to existence....is a paradox. But the eternal essential truth is by no means itself a paradox; but it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relation to an existing individual."[135] The paradox of religiousness A depends on a relationship to an existing individual for its paradoxicality, while the paradox of religiousness B is paradoxical apart from a relaitonship to an existing individual.

Beyond the clear religious concerns, the depiction of the Incarnation as an absolute paradox is deeply embedded in Kierkegaard's larger philosophical project, especially his claim that Christianity is an existence communication not a doctrine. I take it that the discovery of genuine Christianity supports Kierkegaard's existentialist enterprise, which is to help us rediscover the true nature of existence. He says (via Climacus), that his goal is to remind us of something that we once knew, viz, existence, but have forgotten.[136] As Kierkegaard sees it, the task of finding the meaning of existence is in some way equivalent to becoming a Christian in the sense of religiousness B (vis a vis Christendom). Genuine Christianity is the answer to the question, "What does it mean to exist?"

Kierkegaard makes this clear as he unfolds his theory of existence and his view of the Christian Incarnation as an absolute paradox. Kierkegaard says,

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 216.

"Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite".[137] He also refers to existence as a ".... synthesis of the infinite and the finite" and a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal.[138] Now, Kierkegaard describes the Christian Incarnation in nearly identical terms. He says that it is the "....the eternal essential truth which has come into being in time."[139] However, my real concern is not to discover if there is a basic confusion between Kierkegaard's theory of existence and his description of genuine Christianity. But I do think it is important to see if Kierkegaard's understanding of existence is a suitable underpinning for Christianity. Can the object of faith be religiously adequate in the form of such a peculiar philosophical construction?

But why must the Christian Incarnation be framed as an absolute paradox in the first place? There are several plausible answers to this question. First, as an absolute paradox, the Incarnation cannot be discerned or mediated with reasons and evidence. It must be believed by faith not turned into something accepted because it is probable on the basis of sufficient reasons or evidence. To treat the Christian Incarnation as something like a historical belief undermines what Kierkegaard thinks is its natural and required paradoxicality.[140] Secondly, in describing the Incarnation as an absolute paradox Kierkegaard may also be looking for a way to denote the uniqueness of this central Christian doctrine. The Incarnation is able to claim for itself

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[137]Ibid., 85.

[138]Ibid., 350 and 85 respectively.

[139]Ibid., 190.

[140]Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 256.

the description of absolute paradox. Thirdly, described as an absolute paradox that is beyond the range of any philosophical analysis requires the highest passion possible to believe it. The understanding must be put on hold when it comes to believing the Incarnation to be true. He says to be a Christian I have "to learn precisely to give up my finite understanding and therewith the custom of discrimination which is natural to me."[141] Faith in the absolute paradox is an effective counter-measure against the religious sloth Kierkegaard perceived in his own day.

This is important because in the previous chapter I discussed Kierkegaard's vehment rejection of objective reasoning in religion and showed why I think this rejection fails. A key element of that discussion revolved around Kierkegaard's distinction of religiousness A and B. In his view, the expulsion of objective reasoning from the religious realm is done most effectively in religiousness A. Perhaps Kierkegaard thinks, if the problems of proofs, evidence and reason are put to rest in the initial stage of religiousness A then we will clearly see how they are resolved in the mature religiousness of B. Importantly, Kierkegaard's discussion of religiousness B is an extension of his deconstruction of the metaphysics of objective knowledge.

For Kierkegaard, the Incarnation is not just a matter of course or historical expectation. Rather, it is a "wrinkle in time", the very thing we would not expect by the light of reason. Religiousness A's role is to incite the believer to the new and higher pathos of religiousness B. But it does not follow that Kierkegaard's conception of the Incarnation as an absolute paradox is correctly framed. It is one thing to say that the defining feature of

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[141] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 126.

Christianity is the Incarnation but quite another to say that the Incarnation itself is an absolute paradox. It may be true that in embracing the Incarnation a believer recognizes the object of his faith as something unique or mysterious but this does not make the Incarnation an absolute paradox. If this is true, then a genuine Christian believer does not become so by embracing an absolute paradox at all. He becomes a believer by embracing the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation into his life, which may or may not be an absolute paradox. So the question that comes to the forefront is, has Kierkegaard correctly described the incarnation as an absolute paradox? In the Journals he refers to the notion of paradox as follows:

> It is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are..... The paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological definition which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth.[142]

As a category or an ontological definition the paradox has a status of its own and in this case is best suited to explain existence. The paradox is not under the purview of other categories such as reason, for example. Paradoxes in general show us that there are some things human understanding cannot penetrate and describe with precision. When our understanding reaches its limits we are reminded again of our inherent finitude and that the approach to the infinite occurs in ways other than the natural light of reason.

Our first inclination when we encounter a paradox of any sort is to wrap our minds around it to resolve its basic paradoxicality, something Kierkegaard calls mediation. Any paradox where this can be achieved he

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[142] Bretall, 153.

describes as a relative paradox. For example, if I say, "Martha is a loving mother and she hates children", you would say this is a lot of foolishness since you cannot be a loving mother and hate children. There is a logical tension between the purported truth of contradictory propositions. But I might say, "Well, Martha is a loving mother to her own children, its everybody else's children she hates." What at first looked like a paradox is resolved by my further explanation. That Martha shows love to her own children but shows hate to all other children takes the sting out of the seeming contradiction that Martha is both a loving mother and hates children.

Kierkegaard refers to this paradox and all others as "relative paradoxes", which present a difficulty for thought.[143] That is, they are the kinds of paradoxes that with cleverness, close scrutiny or philosophical expertise we can show that they are not the contradictions we first thought they were. Against these relative paradoxes, he classifies the Christian Incarnation as an absolute paradox. However, the absolute paradox is not waiting for the ultimately clever thinker to crack it open. It is not simply a highly perplexing paradox which reason has not yet mediated. Kierkegaard does not think that if we bide our time a person of sufficient intelligence might appear to resolve the mystery of the paradox for us. Kierkegaard says Christianity declares itself to be the Paradox, not something that has come into the world to receive an explanation.[144] Kierkegaard means that Christianity's essential nature is one of paradox. To say that Christianity is the Paradox offers the most complete

[143] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 498.
[144] Ibid., 191

explanation we could expect to give of it.

In light of these general reflections of Kierkegaard's description of the Christian Incarnation as an absolute paradox, I will proceed by analyzing three problems which arise in the midst of Kierkegaard's basic claim that the Christian Incarnation is an absolute paradox. These are the difficulties of the language of "absolute paradox", Kierkegaard's notion of the "Offended Consciousness" and his distinction between the "How" and "What" of Christianity. I will take these in order.

The Language of the Absolute Paradox

Kierkegaard tells us that the Incarnation is an absolute paradox because it amounts to the blending of God and man or the bringing together of the infinite and the finite or the contingent and non-contingent in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In part, this language is confusing because Kierkegaard also says human beings by nature are a synthesis of the infinite and the finite.[145] But he also says the unity of the finite and infinite is what makes the God-man an absolute paradox. But clearly, Kierkegaard does not want to say that all people are the Incarnation of God as the object of Christian faith.

The lack of clarity in Kierkegaard's conception of the Incarnation arises with the use of the word 'absolute'. Above, we saw that the Incarnation is an absolute paradox vis a vis all other paradoxes which are merely relative in nature. The term absolute as it is tied to the term paradox is especially misleading because it can be taken to mean that anything which can be predicated of God cannot be predicated of man. For example, if I take the

[145]Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, 146.

word absolute to be a term of ultimacy and to mean 'utterly different' so that the set of predicates describing God never intersect with the set of predicates describing man then it seems we have a genuine paradox of absolute proportions if we also say that God and man reside in the person of Jesus. If the predicate X is found in the set of predicates truthfully referring to God and X is also found in the predicates truthfully describing man then it is hard to see how God and man are different in an absolute sense. But if some of the predicates desribing God and those describing man are shared then it is problematic to maintain the absoluteness of the paradox.

What makes the Incarnation absolutely paradoxical is that, allegedly, two opposite beings exist in the same person. This oppositeness is not like noting the difference between men and women as members of the opposite sex. It is more like saying that matter and anti-matter can co-exist in the same universe while also knowing that such a co-existence is an impossiblity. If anti-matter and matter are brought together the resulting explosion is mutually destructive. If the example of matter and anti-matter clarifies what Kierkegaard means by the absolute paradox it would also mean that all of God's attributes and human attributes are polar opposites. Kierkegaard understands the Incarnation as an absolute paradox based on the co-residency of the temporal and eternal in a single person. However, such an account falls short because it is not sufficient to encompass the term absolute. For the Incarnation to be understood as an absolute paradox requires that all which can be predicated of God and human beings must be utterly different and mutually exclusive if one also wants to say that between God and man there is an absolute difference.

But is it true that everything that can be predicated of God cannot be predicated of man and vice versa? Well, people are not omnipotent nor omniscient while God clearly is, according to Christian theology. God is infinite, man is finite; God is non-contingent while man is a contingent being; man is temporal while God is atemporal, etc. However, we might say that God and man both have personhood, that they are rational and free. But beyond these predications of God and man, there is scriptural support which seems to undermine the claim that God and man are utterly different. In the creation account of Genesis 1:26 we are told that man is created in God's image. This passage indicates that God Himself has given human beings some of His properties. While Genesis is not explicit about the properties that make up the Imago Dei and hence, the attributes that God and man share, the passage does seem to support the view that God and man are not utterly different. In other words, the Genesis passage implies that there is an intersection of attributes between God and man, whatever they happen to be.

If man and God can share any predicates at all then it seems we do not have an absolute paradox if we say God and man reside in Jesus of Nazareth. If it turns out that the Incarnation is not an absolute paradox then it can only be a relative one. But according to Kierkegaard a relative paradox cannot generate sufficient passion to be the object of Christian faith.

This argument might be undercut by a clearer explication of the term 'absolute'. It may turn out that Kierkegaard has something in mind other than what I have attributed to him. If this is true, then he may escape my complaint that the absolute paradox is actually a relative paradox. But this

can only be resolved by a clearer understanding of the term 'absolute'.

The Offended Consciousness

Chapter Three of the Fragments is entitled The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Crotchet. The absolute paradox is a "crotchet" because by the light of reason and the understanding it is an outlandish construction that stops you in your tracks. It is "something that thought cannot think".[146] But, as Kierkegaard puts it, we should not disparage the paradoxical because it happens to be something that hangs us up. In fact the opposite is true. He writes:

> ..... one should not think slightingly of the paradoxical; for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling; a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing. The supreme paradox of all thought is to discover something that thought cannot think. This passion is at bottom present in all thinking of the individual, in so far as in thinking he participates in something transcending himself.[147]

While the paradoxical presents obstacles for reason and the understanding, it works positively to arouse passion within the thinker. We must not try to escape the offence the absolute paradox brings to our consciousness by mediating the paradox or looking for reasons, since this constitutes a vitiation of faith. Faith must confront the 'offence' to reason that belief in the eternal-become-temporal poses.[148]

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[146] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 46.

[147] Ibid.

[148] James Kellenberger, The Cognitivity of Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 7.

As in Chapter Two, Kierkegaard understands passion in its etymological sense of suffering. Paradoxes generate a kind of suffering within the understanding of the thinker because they are contradictions he cannot resolve. We saw how Kierkegaard employed the Greek skeptics to energize his understanding of passion as suffering. Here, when the thinker encounters the paradoxical he finds his existence conflicted because his reason and understanding cannot mediate the paradox. Within himself the thinker reaches a kind of critical mass that threatens to explode his reason and understanding. He must either remain repelled by the paradox or find a way to embrace it. The inability to mediate the absolute paradox of Christianity sets up a necessary pre-condition for faith that Kierkegaard calls the "Offended Consciousness".[149]

An offended consciousness is not the usual puzzlement or wonder or the reaction, "I don't get it" when we are asked to accept as true the incompatible propositions of a paradox. It is more than just being mildly irritated or put off. For Kierkegaard, an offended consciousness is comparable to mental anguish or deep frustration. Having an offended consciousness is like being compelled to believe something very important that you know is not true or on the contrary, to stop believing something that you highly esteem.

For example, my consciousness may be offended if my closest friend, whom I consider to be of high moral character, is being dismissed from school for cheating. Or suppose I hear on a news bulletin that Charles Manson is about to be paroled from prison because officials no longer regard him as a

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[149]On page 61 of the Fragments Kierkegaard says, "All offense is in its deepest root passive". In his commentary on this passage, Thulstrup says Kierkegaard uses the Danish word lilende which means 'suffering' (223).

danger to society. I am bound to be more than just baffled or puzzled by such an event. Offense is a more apt description of my mood if I were to hear these things.

The Offended Consciousness arises when people who are used to trafficking in Reason suddenly encounter the Paradox. It is a kind of "reaction phenomenon."[150] Kierkegaard writes:

> Whenever one reasons in this fashion: "One cannot stop at the paradox because this is too small a task or too easy and indolent," then one must reply: "No, on the contrary, it is exactly the opposite, it is the most difficult thing of all, day in and day out, to relate onself to something upon which one bases one's eternal happiness, holding fast to the passion with which one understands that one cannot understand, especially as it is so easy to let this go in the illusion that now one has understood it.[151]

Kierkegaard seems to say that coming to understand that the paradox cannot be understood is no cause for relaxation. The believer must continually maintain an infinite passion of faith against the understanding, which threatens to intervene at any time and take away faith by duping the believer into thinking that he now understands the paradox. The paradox is then seen through the eyes of reason rather than the eyes of faith and becomes something objective, of only passing interest. He says that to be a Christian I have "to learn precisely to give up my finite understanding and therewith the custom of discrimination which is natural to me".[152]

The amount of mental suffering we might expect to endure when dealing with paradoxes depends on the degree of paradoxicality or level of inherent absurdity the paradox contains. Because the Christian Incarnation is defined

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[150] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 222.
[151] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 496n.
[152] Ibid.,159.

as an absolute paradox we should expect to experience an absolute degree of offense when we consider it and, hence, an absolute degree of passion. Being offended by the paradoxes of life puts us in the admirable position of having our passion aroused. And if it is the absolute paradox that offends us we are the most fortunate of all, since the passion it arouses can lead us to an eternal happiness, according to Kierkegaard.

Assenting to the truth of the absolute paradox clarifies the notion that Kierkegaard is perhaps best known for, particularly among those who have even the slightest acquaintance with this work, viz. the leap of faith. In spite of its common interpretations, this leap does not constitute jumping over the chasm separating epistemic uncertainty from certainty. It is a mistake to view the leap of faith as gaining the ground of epistemological certainty by a singular objectivity defying act. It is not like Lessing's 'broad ugly ditch' or some version of resolving Kant's problem of gaining knowledge of the noumenal by imprudently hopping over a fence because it provides a convenient short cut to the truth. The leap of faith for him is a leap into a paradox, specifically, the absolute paradox.

An initial reaction to the absolute paradox is to reject the entire notion because it sounds like what Kierkegaard says is that a genuine believer must believe in nonsense. If the Incarnation is an absolute paradox, a contradiction and absurd, then it surely sounds as though believers are being called to screw up their passion to such an intensity that it is possible for them to believe a piece of unqualified nonsense. Kierkegaard is sensitive to this kind of attack and responds to it in the following way:

> ..... the believing Christian not only possesses his understanding.....; but in relation to Christianity he believes against the understanding and in this case also uses understanding.....to make sure he believes against the understanding. Nonsense therefore he cannot believe against the understanding, for precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it, but he makes so much use of the understanding that he becomes aware of the incomprehensible, and then he holds to this, believing against the understanding.[153]

Kierkegaard attaches a high degree of importance to his claim that a believer never lose sight of the understanding because its ongoing role is to serve as a sounding board or template to remind him that he is actually believing the paradox since he must do this against the understanding. What a Christian believes does not call for the eradication of the understanding. Instead, his consciousness is offended because he is asked to believe something that is against the understanding. Kierkegaard says in the Journals, "If the learner does not collide in the moment in the collision of understanding, as we have shown, then the paradox thrusts him away and he takes offense or is "scandalized".[154]

John Cook thinks a possible rejoinder to the charge that believing the Paradox is just believing nonsense is to distinguish between the paradox as metaphysical description and in terms of logical appraisal.[155] In the above passage Kierkegaard seems to recognize that if the paradox is to be subjected to logical analyses, i.e. appraised on its logical merits it will be deemed to be nonsense. But viewed a a metaphysical description of the Christian Incarnation it can possibly avoid this charge. This is why, in the Journals,

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[153]Kierkegaard, Postscript., 504.

[154]Journals, #3802.

[155]John Cook, Kierkegaard's Christianity, unpublished essay, 19.

Kierkegaard proclaims the paradox to be a category. More explicitly he says:

> It is customary to say something like this: To say that we cannot understand this and that does not satisfy scholarship and science, which insist upon comprehending. Here is the error. We must say the very opposite, that if human scholarship and science refuse to acknowledge that there is something they cannot understand, or, more accurately, something that they clearly understand that they cannot understand, then everything is confused. It is specifically the task of human knowing to understand that there is something it cannot understand and to understand what that is. Human knowing usually has been occupied with understanding and understanding, but if it will also take the trouble to understand itself, it must straightway posit the paradox. The paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological qualification which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth.[156]

It is an error, according to Kierkegaard, to stay within the parameters of science and scholarship when trying to comprehend the Paradox. To do this is to logically appraise the Paradox and come up with the conclusion, "I cannot comprehend this!" Kierkegaard thinks we must resist this temptation. According to him, we should see our task as knowing that we cannot understand the Paradox.

For Kierkegaard, the Paradox is a category that has an ontological status of its own. By its very nature or essence we should understand that the Paradox is paradoxical. It is innately opaque and will not become transparent to the understanding no matter what logical analysis is applied against it. If the Paradox is subject to logical appraisal we are justified in our claim that it is indeed nonsense. For Kierkegaard our recognition of the paradox as a contradiction is not meant as a logical appraisal but a reflection on how this teaching affects us, viz. it dazzles the understanding and has a repellent effect

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[156]Journals, #3089.

upon us.[157] Kierkegaard writes:

> With the understanding directly opposed to it, the inwardness of faith must lay hold of the paradox; and precisely this struggle on the part of faith, fighting as the Romans once fought, dazzled by the fierce light of the sun, constitutes the tension of the inwardness.[158]
>
> Our first reaction to the Paradox when we hear it is one of repulsion.[159]

But through the inwardness of faith we are able to lay hold of the Paradox as expressive of absolute truth. Therefore, to recognize the Incarnation as a paradox or contradiction is not to judge it logical rigor, but rather to note the existential impact it makes on us. In recognizing the Incarnation as a Paradox and not nonsense Kierkegaard thinks we avoid the problem of a rational assessment of the absolute Paradox. Kierkegaard clarifies his distinction between the absurd and nonsense in the Journals. There he writes:

> .... the concept of the absurd is precisely to grasp the fact that it cannot and must not be grasped. This is a negatively determined concept but it is just as dialectical as any positive one. The absurd, the paradox, is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no, it is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense. But, of course, if faith is completely abolished, the whole sphere is dropped, and then reason becomes conceited and perhaps concludes that ergo, the paradox is nonsense.[160]

The "contradiction that God existed in human form" is from a rational point of view quite absurd, but it is precisely such an absurdity that the true Christian must believe. If we try to unravel the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation so that it makes 'good sense' we show ourselves to be pretentious

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[157] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 183.

[158] Ibid., 201.

[159] Ibid., 189.

[160] Journals, #7.

and haughty because this is to aspire to a level of knowledge reserved for the Deity. Since human categories are finite there is a collision with the understanding when they are asked to believe a paradox like the Christian Incarnation. But God does not have such limits because he is infinite. Therefore, while the Incarnation may appear as an Absolute Paradox for us, it may not be so for him. Or as Kierkegaard puts it, in God's case there is a perfect coincidence of thought and being which no man can aspire to, for "man is a particular existing being... whose essential task cannot be to think sub specie aeterni".[161]

Kierkegaard says his purpose in making the distinction between A and B is to make it as difficult as possible to be a Christian (though no more difficult than it actually is), presumably by requiring that genuine faith is evident only when the Absolute Paradox is appropriated in the believer's life. He says the difficulty in becoming a Christian arises for both the clever and the stupid because it is an essential difficulty, not one increased or lowered by the level of one's intelligence. Religiousness B is "... essentially difficult for every man equally for essentially it is eternally difficult for every man to relinquish his understanding and his thinking, and to keep his soul fixed upon the absurd;...."[162] Kierkegaard says that if we are talking about the ability to understand something, then the person with a high level of intellect has a distinct advantage over the person with a lesser intellect. But in matters of faith, and especially the Paradox, it is equally diificult for a person of high and low intelligence to believe it.[163]

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[161] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 195.
[162] Ibid., 495. Cf. Journals, #1017.
[163] Ibid., 337.

Becoming a Christian is the most difficult of all human tasks whether a person is of high or low intelligence because in faith human beings are compelled to set aside the natural instruments of reason and the understanding in order to believe. To embrace the Absolute Paradox with an infinite passion is no easy matter whether one is of high intelligence or not since the task of believing is not differentiated by the level of one's intelligence. The problem of becoming a Christian persists throughout the ranks of humanity because Christianity's central doctrine is universally paradoxical. For it to be possible to believe nonsense one would have to throw away his understanding and all human beings possess the understanding. In other words, believers do not embrace the paradox minus their understanding. They do so fully cognizant that what they believe is against the understanding not destructive of it, according to Kierkegaard.

But it seems the believer is required to live a kind of conflicted existence when he embraces the absolute paradox against the understanding. On the one hand he must continually resist the temptation to be repelled by the Absolute Paradox because of what his reason tells him. On the other hand, he must embrace the Paradox as being descriptive of the eternal, essential truth. This kind of conflicted existence would certainly create the passion Kierkegaard thinks is necessary in order to have faith. However, it is clear that there must come a time when the thinker stops being offended by the Absolute Paradox and embraces it into his life. That is, the thinker must come to a point when he no longer sees the Absolute Paradox as absurd but views it as truth even though his understanding continually tries to pull him

in the other direction. If the Absolute Paradox remains perpetually offensive it seems unlikely that anyone would or could incorporate it into his life. It is this transition from a state of offense to one of embracing the absolute paradox as true that is of interest to me.

Now, there is something puzzling about Kierkegaard's claims that in believing the Paradox to be true the believer does not believe nonsense and that believing the Paradox to be true is equally difficult for all men, without regard to their respective intellectual abilities. In the instance of the latter, it seems that those of high intellect by and large reject religion. Religion is more regularly embraced by those who are untrained in philosophy or science. They have not been bothered by the sorts of questions and objections these disciplines typically raise. Prima facie, it looks as though Kierkegaard's statement is untrue. But, Kierkegaard seems to mean that because the absolute paradox is the greatest possible contradiction embracing it as truth disturbing to everyone's understanding.

However, in the first instance, I am troubled by Kierkegaard's claim that believers do not believe nonsense when they embrace the Absolute Paradox. He seems to simply assert this view without offering a convincing argument as to why it is true. He recognizes that if the absolute paradox is perceived to be nonsense, believers will rightfully reject it. But he does not say why the Absolute Paradox is not nonsense, other than some confusing language about its being an ontological category. Kierkegaard does not, for instance, tell us why the God-man is not nonsensical in the same way that a round-square is nonsensical. He merely says it is so. If the God-man and a round-square are

both contradictions, how do we justify calling one of them nonsense but not the other? Kierkegaard appears to sense the difficulty here but does little to help his cause by way of an argument.

Yet, according to Kierkegaard, the Absolute Paradox is absurd and a contradiction of the highest order. It must also be embraced if one aspires to Christianity or religiousness B. But how is such a state of soul possible? What gives the believer the ability to alter the usual role of the understanding of discerning paradoxes and trying to mediate them to one of determining if he believes in the absolute paradox or not?

Kierkegaard answers these questions in a familiar theme discussed in Chapter Three. There I commented on Kierkegaard's view that the condition given in the moment removes the spiritual blinders caused by sin. As we saw, sin works as a roadblock to faith and must be removed by a divine miracle. In this context it is the same (or at least similar) divine miracle that allows the believer to embrace the absolute paradox as the eternal essential truth. Kierkegaard says the result of the union of the Paradox and Reason is ".... that happy passion to which we will now assign a name,..... We shall call this passion: Faith. This then must be the condition of which we have spoken, which the Paradox contributes".[164] The condition given by God enables the disciple to see with the eyes of Faith.[165] Without this condition the believer would never come to believe the Paradox.

Herein we find Kierkegaard's description of how faith arises in the first place. He says God must grant the condition which makes it possible to

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[164] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 73.

[165] Ibid., 80.

understand that the Absolute Paradox is decisive for eternity. Without the assistance of divine guidance it is impossible for the learner (or disciple) to discover it.[166] Kierekgaard writes:

> How does the learner then become a believer or disciple? When the Reason is set aside and he receives the condition. When does he receive the condition? In the Moment. What does this condition condition? The understanding of the Eternal..... It is in the Moment that he receives it, and from the Teacher himself.[167]

Pojman interprets this as meaning that people must be given a new organ or receptacle, or capacity for receiving the truth of the Paradox. This organ is faith.[168]

With regard to the possibility of belief, Kierkegaard says, "But that the God himself gives this condition has been shown above to be a consequence of the Moment, and it has also been shown that the Moment is the Paradox, and that without it we are unable to advance, but return to Socrates".[169] In Kierkegaard's words, "Speculative philosophy achieves the triumph of understanding Christianity entire; but it is to be noted that it does not understand it in a Christian manner, but speculatively, which is precisely a misunderstanding, since Christianity is the very opposite of speculation".[170]

The faith sense of understanding (which is to understand that the Paradox cannot be understood) is only possible when God stirs a person with a condition which allows him to accept the Absolute Paradox as crucial to his eternal happiness. This is why Kierkegaard says that only God can be the

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[166] Ibid., 72.
[167] Ibid., 79.
[168] Pojman, 91
[169] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 79.
[170] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 243.

teacher in matters of faith since he must grant the condition which permits anyone to believe in the first place.[171] Reason attempts to mediate the Absolute Paradox into something available to the understanding of any person. Not only is this impossible but to attempt to mediate the Paradox or sort it out by philosophical means is a sign of unbelief.

Notice that he says since the Teacher himself contributes the condition to the learner it follows that the object of Faith is not the teaching but the Teacher. Kierkegaard says, "The Socratic principle is, that the learner being himself the Truth and in possession of the condition can thrust the teacher aside; the Socratic art and the Socratic heroism consisted precisely in helping men to do this".[172] Without the miraculous condition given by God which makes belief possible in the first place we will only be thrown back to Socrates, which is at best religiousness A.

In the above passages Kierkegaard explains his views on how believing the absolute paradox relies on a divine miracle. While believing against the understanding is a necessary condition, the presence of a divine miracle is a necessary and sufficient condition to embracing the absolute paradox. These passages show, I think, that while the believer must believe against the understanding he cannot do so without the aid of a condition given to him by God.

But the way Kierkegaard frames his project of describing the Incarnation as an absolute paradox, which must be believed against the understanding, topped off by the presence of a divine condition is unsettling. I am uneasy

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[171] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 72.

[172] Ibid., 77.

because making a divine miracle necessary to believing in something like the absolute paradox is too readily appealed to when such belief looks to be very difficult or impossible from the point of view of reason. It makes me suspect that Kierkegaard's claims on this matter are indeed open to the objection that believing the absolute paradox is the same as believing nonsense. My suspicions are heightened by the fact that Kierkegaard offers no substantive argument that distinguishes between believing the Absolute Paradox and believing in nonsense. He only asserts that there is a distinction. And if it turns out that Kierkegaard is susceptible to this charge, I take it that believing nonsense is tantamount to believing in something that is false.

To see how Kierkegaard is left open to this objection, I want to investigate part of an essay by Terence Penelhum entitled "Believing Impossible Things". In this essay Penelhum develops an interesting meditation on a passage from Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass. In this passage the White Queen and Alice discuss believing something to be true though this something is quite impossible. It is as follows:

> 'It is so very lonely here!', Alice said in a melancholy voice; and at the thought of her loneliness two large tears came rolling down her cheeks.
>
> 'Oh, don't go on like that', cried the poor Queen, wringing her hands in despair. Consider what a long way you've come today. Consider what o'clock it is. Consider anything, only don't cry!'
>
> Alice could not help laughing at this even in the midst of her tears. 'Can you keep from crying by considering things?', she asked.
>
> 'That's the way its done,' the Queen said with great decision: 'nobody can do two things at once, you know. Let's consider your age to begin with--how old are you?'
>
> 'I'm seven and a half exactly.'
>
> 'You needn't say "exactually", the Queen remarked: 'I can believe it without that. Now I'll give you something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day.'

'I can't believe that!', said Alice

'Can't you?', the Queen said in a pitying tone. 'Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.'

Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying', she said: 'one can't believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice', said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.....'

What does this intriguing passage have to do with Kierkegaard and the absolute paradox? For one thing, guided by our natural faculties of reason and understanding, according to Kierkegaard, the doctrine of the Incarnation is something that is quite impossible to believe. This is why the offended consciousness arises in the first place. It cannot mediate the conflicting elements of the eternal and the temporal residing in a single person, according to Kierkegaard.

If we exchange Alice's difficulty in believing that the White Queen is one hundred and one years old (though believing this is not logically absurd) for the absolute paradox then what Alice needs to do is close her eyes and practice believing it. The Queen implies that if Alice tries hard enough then she could come to believe in something as impossible as the Absolute Paradox. The Queen says she has practiced so long at believing impossible things that she can believe as many as six of them before breakfast.

For Kierkegaard, believing the Absolute Paradox to be true is not a matter of practice but occurs in the Moment when God gives the necessary condition to the believer. But is it conceivable that someone could come to believe in the truth of the Absolute Paradox in the manner that the Queen suggests, viz. by practice? Penelhum suggests that believing impossible things is quite

possible but at a high price. The person who believes impossible things "buys spiritual peace at the cost of self-deception".

Is embracing the Absolute Paradox an act of self-deception or the product of a divine miracle? It seems either explanation could account for why someone would embrace the doctrine of the Incarnation as an Absolute Paradox. It may turn out that going from the state of the offended consciousness to embracing the absolute paradox constitutes a form of self-deception. If this is true, our propensity to mediate the paradoxical nature of the incarnation is not a sign of sinfulness or lack of faith at all, but may be a way of avoiding self-deception.

Penelhum continues this argument in another work. He says if we make a judgment that a proposition is paradoxical, this amounts to judging it to be false by the light of reason.[173] While such a judgment does not keep us from believing it to be true we are left with an unavoidable conflict of beliefs. To get past this conflict requires that we misdescribe them in some way. He says the way Kierkegaard does this is to claim that our beliefs arise from two different teachers, viz. reason and grace. To achieve faith we must then turn our backs on the lower teacher, reason and embrace the higher teacher, grace.[174] This is exactly what Kierkegaard does when urging his readers to reject reason as the ground of faith and turn to an absolute paradox, which can only be believed miraculously. While such actions appear to be commendable and may seem liberating we are reduced to holding beliefs from the higher teacher we know to be self-contradictory, which amounts to

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[173]Penelhum, God and Skepticism, 117.

[174]Ibid.

judging them to be false. Penelhum says, "If faith requires that one do this, it requires that one make commitments while at the same time holding them to be false. Faith that requires this is a form of self-deception--and self-deception is a misuse of reason not an escape from it".[175]

One of the obvious places to raise the question of self-deception is in the well known distinction Kierkegaard makes between the "Knight of Inifinite Resignation" and the "Knight of Faith" in Fear and Trembling. The real hero of the story of is the "Knight of Faith" who has renounced his nearest and dearest love but by virtue of the absurd believes he will get it back. Abraham is showcased as the paradigm believer (Knight of Faith) because he resigns himself to the loss of his son, Isaac but does not turn away in despair because he believes God will miraculously return Isaac to him. But does this kind of belief, based on the virtue of the absurd, make the Knight of Faith a hero or a self-deceived wretch?

Kierkegaard says that true faith has resignation as its presupposition which means the level of the Knight of Infinite Resignation must be attained before one can become the Knight of Faith. Kierkegaard's point is that faith is paradoxical because to become the Knight of Faith one must first give up (renounce) that which he desires the most. How can one retain that which he has shunned? "This is absurd", says the one who tries to bring these matters "within the proper compass of the understanding".[176] The judgment that this view of faith is absurd and paradoxical is the point Kierkegaard wants to make. He writes:

But a paradox enters in, and humble courage is required to grasp the

[175]Ibid.

[176]Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 57.

> whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce his claim upon Isaac, but by faith he got Isaac. By virtue of resignation that rich young man should have given away everything, but then when he had done that, knight of faith should have said to him, "By virtue of the absurd thou shalt get every penny back. Canst thou believe that"?[177]

The Knight of Infinite Resignation achieves Knight of Faith status because he is able to absurdly believe that what he has renounced will miraculously be given back to him.[178] Infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith itself, so that one who has not made this movement does not have faith. As Kierkegaard puts it, the act of resignation does not require faith[179] but faith requires the act of resignation.[180] To move on to become the Knight of Faith the potential believer must relinquish that which is most dear to him and absurdly believe, since all things are possible with God, that it will be given back.

If the religious life is about renunciation, believers might expect to renounce their alcoholism, bad temper, gluttony, even their fortunes. But certainly they do not hope they will get these things back since they are an impediment to the religious life. Believers renounce these things in the hopes they will be rid of them because these things hobble their level of religious devotion.

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[177] Ibid., 59.

[178] For Kierkegaard it was Regina though in the end he did not get her back. Walter Lowrie tells us of a Journal entry dated, May 17, 1843, where Kierkegaard says, "If I had had faith, I would have remained with Regina." Lowrie comments that, "He (Kierkegaard) was then only a knight of infinite resignation, but he was on the way to becoming a knight of faith". Translator's Notes to Fear and Trembling, 226. Does this mean that anytime you do not receive back that which you have renounced it is due to a lack of faith?

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid., 57.

But, I will explain what I think Kierkegaard's point is in the following example. Imagine that I own a very old and rare book that is priceless as well as irreplacable. Because this book is very old I must keep it in a sealed case to protect it from light and humidity. It is my most prized possession. To sell or lose this book would do me great emotional harm. But I also want to become a knight of faith. According to Kierkegaard, I must renounce my attachment to this priceless book. So, I include my rare book in a stack of other books that are to be given to the Salvation Army to support its work. I know my priceless book will be sold for a dollar or two and become the property of someone who may not appreciate its worth. For me, the book is permanently lost and I shall never see it again. But to become the knight of faith I must absurdly believe that it will be returned to me though this looks, by the light of reason and the understanding, to be quite impossible.

It seems unlikely that Kierkegaard means in a literal sense that we become knights of faith by searching out that which is most precious to us, renouncing our attachment to it and absurdly believing it will be returned to us by God. Kierkegaard must have something else in mind when he distinguishes the knight of infinite resignation from the knight of faith. Perhaps he means that to believe you will get something back when it is absurd to do so is akin to having the passion faith requires. But even if the knight of infinite resignation/knight of faith distinction is a metaphorical expression for the absurdity of faith, as stipulated above, when the knight of faith acknowledges that he judges something to be absurd or paradoxical he also judges it to be false. To go on, then, and embrace the paradox in faith amounts to believing something when he knows it to be false. And, as noted,

this can only be done if he is self-deceived.

The biblical Abraham is Kierkegaard's paradigm "knight of faith". It is certainly arguable that Abraham was self-deceived in believing Isaac would return to him. The Genesis story intimates that Abraham thought Isaac would return to him, not because it was absurd to believe this, but because God had made promises to Abraham that could only be fulfilled if Isaac were alive. But Kierkegaard interprets Abraham sacrifice of Isaac and the expectation that he will receive him back again as denoting his status as a "Knight of Faith". For Abraham to absurdly believe Isaac will come back to him generates the the passion faith thrives on, according to Kierkegaard. But the biblical account does not see Isaac's return as absurd or impossible, since God is in control of the situation. Kierkegaard depicts Abraham as believing something he first recognizes as impossible, i.e. God fulfilling his promises through Isaac though he is dead. But the only way he can do this is to be self-deceived. When it comes to the Incarnation it is clear that Kierkegaard's insistence that we embrace the absolute paradox while recognizing its self-contradictory nature falls victim to Penelhum's self-deception critique.

The moment (as a divine miracle) might answer the question of how one can go from a state of offense (natural) to embracing the Absolute Paradox as true (supernatural). But it also seems perilously close to a form of self-deception. An equally good counter-explanation to the divine miracle thesis is one that says the believer is simply self-deceived because he has gotten into the practice of believing impossible things.

These difficulties arise because Kierkegaard first insists that the

Incarnation must be construed as an absolute paradox, ostensibly to protect the uniqueness of the Christian Incarnation and to show us why reason is not a reliable teacher for faith. Admittedly, my argument turns on Kierkegaard being unable to escape the criticism that believing the Absolute Paradox is tantamount to believing nonsense. I raise the possibility of this criticism because of Kierkegaard's inability, or at least unwillingness, to give a compelling argument to think otherwise. If believing the Absolute Paradox is a matter of self-deception it seems the faithful neither hold nor would want to hold this belief.

This brings us full circle to the original topic of the offended consciousness. What Kierkegaard calls the "Offended Consciousness" may be the natural human reaction to being told that what we must believe is nonsense. Rather than a pre-condition to faith, as Kierkegaard describes it, the offended consciousness expresses our psychological state when we know that what we are required to believe is false. In these terms it is little wonder that it takes a miracle to make the absolute paradox the object of faith.

But let us imagine for the moment that my self-deception argument against the absolute paradox fails. Let us allow that Kierkegaard makes his case that believing the absolute paradox is not tantamount to believing nonsense and, hence, of being self-deceived. In making these allowances we must pursue what Kierkegaard thinks gives us the ability to see the Absolute Paradox as an Absolute Paradox. To see the Incarnation as an absolute paradox can only be done through the eyes of faith. Believer's find the wherewithal to hold the absurd fast with the passion of the infinite because

God grants them a miraculous condition to do so, as we saw in Chapter Four. As Kierkegaard explains, in the normal course of human affairs our tendency is to seek a resolution to paradoxes as they come along. To embrace the absolute paradoxicality of the Incarnation requires an ability or faculty outside the faculties of reason people usually employ. This can only be done subjectively. Kierkegaard thinks the appropriation of genuine Christianity can only correspond to the Absolute Paradox. He writes:

> .....but to believe is specifically different from all other appropriation and inwardness. This formula fits only the believer, no one else, not a lover, not an enthusiast, not a thinker, but simply and solely the believer who is related to the absolute paradox.....for precisely the relation to or the repulsion from the unintelligible, the absurd, is the expression for the passion of faith.[181]

A certain subjective stance is required to believe the Absolute Paradox to be true. The understanding must be modified or altered in some way to permit the passionate embrace of its truth in the act of faith. Somehow the understanding is changed from a roadblock to a sounding board for faith, a way to gauge the intensity of faith. This is made possible by the condition in the moment. Kierkegaard writes, "This coming-into-existence kind of change,..., therefore is not a change in essence but in being and is a transition from not existing to existing..... The change of coming into existence is a transition from possibility to actuality.[182]

It seems what Kierkegaard wants to say is that the understanding must take on the perspective of the divine to appropriate the Absolute Paradox. He says in the Journals that when a believer acquires faith the absurd is no longer

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[181] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 540.

[182] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 90.

absurd because faith transforms it. Only the passion of faith can master the absurd, according to Kierkegaard.[183]

The "HOW" and "WHAT" of the Absolute Paradox

As we have seen, Kierkegaard insists that the object of faith be an absolute paradox, i.e. impervious to the standards of reason. To believe this kind of paradox requires a setting aside of reason and the infusion of a divine miracle. This is the basis of an important distinction Kierkegaard makes between the "HOW" of faith versus the "WHAT" of faith. Regarding this distinction Kierkegaard writes:

> The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said.
>
> The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the what of Christianity but by the how of the Christian. The how can only correspond with one thing, the absolute paradox.[184]

The subject has to do with HOW one believes; the objective has to do with WHAT one believes. While the terms "how" and "what" are general headings which distinguish the objective from the subjective, they also specify something about the Absolute Paradox, viz. that it is related to the notion of "how", not "what". For Kierkegaard, the emphasis of faith falls on 'how' one believes (with infinite passion) not 'what' one believes (objective knowledge). This is why he says that the 'how' of the individual is an expression just as precise and more decisive for what he has than is the 'what' to which he appeals..."[185]

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[183] Journals, #10.

[184] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182 and 540, respectively.

[185] Ibid., 542.

The logic of this distinction becomes apparent as Kierkegaard works to emphasize how a believer achieves faith as what he believes is pushed to the background. I will not rehearse Kierkegaard's views on the achievement of faith since this has already been examined above. Rather, I want to examine the difficulties that naturally arise because of this distinction. I will call Kierkegaard's efforts on this matter a minimalist view of doctrine, specifically the doctrine of the Incarnation. For example, in the Postscript he tells us that the eternal happiness of the believer is related to something historical but the essence of this happiness cannot become historical.[186] In the Fragments Kierkegaard says it is enough "that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died,".....[187] The rest of the historical detail is of little importance, on his view.

While Kierkegaard gives salutory attention to the historical by noting that an eternal happiness rests on something historical, its essence will not allow an eternal happiness to become historical. By the word "enough" Kierkegaard means there is a thread of historical information sufficient to support faith. For Kierkegaard, history is both embarrassing and necessary for Christianity. While the 'what' of faith (e.g. history) is present, according to Kierkegaard, it is present in a minimal way. He sees, for instance, the necessity of there being an actual historical Incarnation but, as he repeatedly tells us, any preoccupation with history is deterimental to Christianity. As Pojman says, "..... while Christianity needs a minimum of historical data,

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[186] Ibid., 345.

[187] Kierkegaard, Fragments, 87.

inquiry into the credibility of those data will necessarily fail to establish anything one way or another and may even result in turning the believer aside from obedient discipleship".[188]

One of the problems that arises for Kierkegaard's minimalist account of the incarnation is the sustainability of such a view given the need of some historical data to underpin the Absolute Paradox. That is, there was actually a Jesus of Nazareth who was the embodiment of the temporal and the eternal. The degree of need in terms of historical data is in question. It is not clear that this need can be minimized in the way Kierkegaard attempts to do it. An example of the supremacy of "how" over "what" can be found in his story of the idol worshipper. He writes:

> If one who lives in the midst of Christianity goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is the most truth? The one prays to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.[189]

The faith of the idol worshipper is superior to the faith of the person who worships the true God because of how the idolator worships versus what he worships. Because he worships with the passion of the infinite he is the better example of faith. If the accent of faith falls to the side of "what" the believer shows himself to be a member of Christendom. What counts as genuine worship is how one does it, not what he in fact worships. For Kierkegaard, the idol worshipper is an example of someone who has rightly accented the "how" of faith over the "what" of faith since he can do this

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[188]Pojman, The Logic of Subjectivity, 38.

[189]Kierkegaard, Postscript, 180.

without actually believing in the Christian incarnation.

Now Kierkegaard does not mean that Christianity contains no doctrine. Climacus says with reference to the Incarnation, "I have heard that Christianity proposes itself as a condition for the acquirement of this good (eternal happiness), and now I ask how I may establish a proper relationship to this doctrine".[190] If we were to ask Kierkegaard if he meant that he wanted to eliminate all doctrinal content from religious belief he would answer with a firm, No! If he were asked to appraise the Apostle's Creed or the Christian confession that Jesus is the Son of God he would say that these statements contain fundamental and essential doctrines underpinning the Christian faith. Without them Christianity ceases to be Christianity. So there is a positive sense for the word doctrine in Kierkegaard's usage.

But what is the importance of his negative claim that Christianity is not a doctrine in and of itself and its connection to a believer of infinite passion? Kierkegaard is interested in showing that Christianity cannot be regarded as a doctrine of the philosophical sort, particularly of the Hegelian variety. But as John Cook points out, this is hardly news since very few people would disagree with Kierkegaard that the Incarnation is not meant to be a piece of metaphysics deduced from metaphysical categories.[191]

What Kierkegaard means and hopes to accomplish in his claim that Christianity is not a doctrine is a demonstration that faith concerns a proper relationship, i.e. the relationship between the believer and the Absolute Paradox. He says if this is viewed as a doctrine this vital relationship is

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[190]Ibid., 19.

[191]Cook, 6.

reduced to something intellectual. He writes:

> Christianity is no doctrine concerning the unity of the divine and the human.....nor is it any other of the logical transcriptions of Christianity. If Christianity were a doctrine, the relationship to it would not be one of faith, for only an intellectual type of relationship can correspond to a doctrine.....
>
> Faith constitutes a sphere all by itself, and every misunderstanding of Christianity may at once be recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual.[192]

Christianity is not a doctrine but a proper relationship. It cannot be a doctrine because it is "absurd," a "contradiction" and a "paradox" and "unintelligible". The proper relationship of Christianity is a "how" not a "what".

To clarify his notions of 'how' and 'what' Kierkegaard also distinguishes between what he calls the contemporary disciple and the disciple at second hand. The contemporary disciple is one who lived during the same period of history as Jesus, while a disciple at second hand are all believers who lived after Him. Now Kierkegaard says, if faith rests on a historical basis then the contemporary disciple has a distinct advantage over the disciple at second hand. There is a perceived argument that those who were present with Christ have a greater faith because they were witnesses to his life and miracles. By virtue of the fact that he is historically proximal to Jesus the contemporary disciple enjoys a faith that is certain. On the other hand, the disciple at second hand is historically distant from Jesus and is disadvantaged by less certain historical data. But since faith does not rest on a historical basis this disciple is not subject to the disadvantage of historical distance. Both

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[192] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 290-1

disciples have genuine faith by embracing the Absolute Paradox with an infinite passion. Since belief arises by appropriating the Absolute Paradox into one's life disciples from the nineteenth century are on equal footing with disciples from the first century when they come to believe.

Now it is important to see what Kierkegaard means here since it clarifies the implications of the condition for all believers at any time in history. Earlier I discussed what Kierkegaard means by the religious condition given by God. Because this condition is given to all believer's the contemporary disciple is not advantaged in matters of faith over the disciple at second hand. Since no one can come to believe in the Paradox without first receiving this condition it matters little when he is born. The believer does not have to concern himself with whether he is historically proximal or distant from the Teacher (the person of the Paradox). Having proximity to the Teacher does not create a greater opportunity to acquiring faith than being born in any other period. Kierkegaard creates a level playing field in terms of the passion any believer must have at any time in history, whether he is historically proximal to the Teacher or not. For Kierkegaard, becoming a Christian is a matter of becoming contemporary with Christ. He writes:

> But so long as there is a believer, such a one must, in order to become such, have been, and as a believer must continue to be, just as contemporary with His presence on earth as were those [first] contemporaries. This contemporaneousness is the condition of faith, and more closely defined, it is faith.[193]

Kierkegaard thinks the way to make all believers contemporary with Christ is to effectively eliminate from faith's concerns the intervening eighteen centuries between the life of Jesus and his own day. Only when

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[193] Robert Bretall, A Kierkegaard Anthology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 375.

believers are contemporary with Christ can they experience first hand the offended consciousness necessary for faith. Further, Kierkegaard thinks that without contemporaneousness believers think they can "know" Christ. But this is impossible because "He is the paradox, the object of faith, existing only for faith".[194] Therefore, to rely on history to teach us something about Christ is to turn Him into something other than the absolute paradox.

It is comforting to know that the faith of a twentieth century believer produces the same salvific effects as those who were actually present with Christ. But is what Kierkegaard says here something that Christians could really accept? Is it true that the historical information about the life and teachings of Jesus are irrelevant for faith? The parameters of faith are the substance of theology and it seems the parameters Kierkegaard gives us are insufficient because they are too narrow and exclusive. I think it is clear that his account of Christianity is very strange when compared to what we find in the New Testament and on this basis the reasons to accept it are suspect.

Wittgenstein makes an important insight to these problems when he writes:

> Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather: believe, through thick and thin, which you can do only as the result of a life. *Here you have a narrative, don't take the same attitude to it as you take to other historical narratives!* Make a *quite different* place in your life for it.-There is nothing *paradoxical* about that![195]

When Wittgenstein tells us to make a quite different place in our lives for the historical narratives of Christianity he means to distinguish them

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[194]Ibid., 388.

[195]Wittgenstein, 32e.

from simple historical 'truth'. We cannot take simple historical truth and insist people believe it since it is quite impossible to make a different place for it in their lives. Wittgenstein seems to say something Kierkegaard might also say, that historical truth is something people can be indifferent to, that it will have no existential impact on them.

Wittgenstein also seems to say, like Kierkegaard, that you cannot use history or the documents that support it to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. But unlike Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein does say that Christianity is concerned with its historical narrative. It cannot be minimized or narrowed in the way Kierkegaard does through his emphasis on the "how" versus the "what" of belief. If believers are going to make a different place in their lives for the historical narrative, it must include the entire historical narrative, not an abridged or condensed version of it. By shifting the accent of faith to the "how" of belief Kierkegaard excludes the robust historical narrative that needs to have a special place in the lives of believers. While faith is clearly not a matter of historical proof, the viability of faith depends on a historical narrative that tells believers of the life of the person who is the object of their faith. But Kierkegaard's distinction between the "how" and "what" of belief forbids even the possibility of the historical narrative playing an essential role for faith. What is more, Wittgenstein thinks there is nothing paradoxical about believing a historical narrative and doing so through thick and thin.

If it is Kierkegaard's desire to get people to read the gospels differently than they read the newspaper or even the history of the American Revolution, then I concur. The former must be read with the appropriate

religious interest while the latter might be read with indifference. But if the gospels are constituted by a set of historical facts surrounding the life of Jesus, then Kierkegaard simply must give a larger place for them as part of the content of faith. His attempt to minimize or exclude the historical information turns his treatment of the absolute paradox into a crucible where the history of Jesus' life is burned away in favor of ultimate subjectivity, which is inconsistent with the way the gospels are presented. The entire life of Jesus is the focus of the believer's religious interest not a mere thread of information that attests to his existence. Pojman is critical of Kierkegaard on this matter when he writes:

> Christianity purports to to be about not just the Incarnation but a specific era in history, where a particular person is said to be the Savior of the world. There are background conditions (the history of Israel) and a set of supporting evidences (Jesus' teachings, miracles, resurrection, as well as the changed lives of the disciples) for the doctrine of the Incarnation. There is a "cloud of witnesses" who claim to offer evidence. While all this may not solve the problem of the place of apologetics in religious faith, it seems to suggest that the pure abstraction in Climacus' formulation of faith differs fundamentally from the religion he thought he was defending.[196]

The early Christians look to Jesus as the object of their faith because of the kinds of things Pojman alludes to in this passage. The doctrinal content, the "what" Kierkegaard refers to, is a priori to the "how" of belief. There can be no "how" without a more extensive "what" than Kierkegaard allows. Someone who is interested in the historical narrative of the life of Jesus is not necessarily interested in proving the truth of the incarnation through historical means. His interest may lie in the fact that he wants to make a

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[196] Pojman, The Logic of Subjectivity, 47

special place for it in his life.

In my attempt to pull Kierkegaard up short in his distinction between "how" and "what" I do not mean to imply that the biblical materials are simple raw history that a person chooses to believe or not believe. Nor I do not want to argue over the matter of how God prepares the believer to accept the summons of the gospel. In opposing Kierkegaard, I am not attempting to defend the historical veracity of Christianity or its scriptures through the methods of evidentialism. I am simply saying that Christians believe that God invaded history and performed certain events regarded as salvific. They believe this because it is recorded in the scriptures. This is very much a matter of "what" vis-a-vis a "how". A Christian will say, "This is what God did; He parted the Red Sea, brought plagues on the Egyptians, delivered Daniel from the lions and raised Jesus from the dead". It seems inescapable that the accent in scripture is on the "what", not the "how" of belief. Hence, my argument seeks to expose Kierkegaard's vulnerability to the way he minimizes history and objective content in relationship to Christianity.

If we ask why juxtaposing the eternal and the temporal constitute an absolute paradox in the first place, significant problems related to the distinction of "how" and "what" comes to the forefront? First, the eternal and the temporal seem to be notions that are heavily freighted with metaphysics. We need extensive unpacking of these terms by Kierkegaard to help us see that the Christian Incarnation is an Absolute Paradox. For instance, does eternal mean atemporal? Is this paradox a dialectic of atemporality and temporality? If so, this invites questions about God's

nature. Is God atemporal or everlasting? Kierkegaard must tell us more about God's nature, not to mention human nature, for us to more clearly grasp the Absolute Paradox. Or, as Kierkegaard might say, to more clearly grasp the claim that the Christian Incarnation cannot be grasped.

Secondly, Kierkegaard's analysis of "what" and "how" invites the question, "Why this particular paradox as the object of faith"? The answer is that it is the only absolute paradox in existence. But if bringing together the eternal and the temporal is the constitutive nature of an absolute paradox, is it not possible to generate other versions of absolute paradoxes? And if so, why does the Christian incarnation have to be the true object of faith? Will not any religious contradiction do if it is absolutely paradoxical? All we must do is create a contradiction that is absolutely paradoxical based on the terms Kierkegaard gives us to have an adequate object of faith. Why not simply construct our own version of the incarnation that meets Kierkegaard's requirement of uniting the eternal with the temporal and proclaim that it is the genuine object of faith because it is absolutely paradoxical? When Kierkegaard minimizes the "what" to accent the "how" it becomes less clear that the Christian Incarnation must be the object of faith.

We might say, for example, "God is incarnated in a Douglas Fir tree near the summit of Mount Hood. Go there to receive spiritual instruction from Him". Our version of the incarnation has the main ingredients of the temporal and eternal brought together in the Douglas Fir tree. Overall, my imaginary incarnation has the all the essential features of Kierkegaard's absolute paradox. It can hardly be questioned that such an incarnation would, on Kierkegaard's terms, be an absolute paradox. It would also require a

passion screwed up to the maximum to make such an incarnation the object of faith, as well as a good deal of self-deception.

So, on what grounds would Kierkegaard be able to reject this version of the incarnation as the true object of faith? Clearly, like most any other Christian believer, he would have to say that this is not the incarnation of Christian tradition. Such imaginary incarnations are not the ones written about in the scriptures nor defended by Church creeds and councils. Therefore, the God-incarnate-in-a-tree, for example, cannot be the object of faith. Assuming these are the kinds of objections Kierkegaard would raise (and it is hard to imagine any others) the accent switches from the "how" to the "what". But the "how" of belief does not allow this appeal. The point is that without a more significant body of theology and history resting on a historical narrative, 'how' people become believers cannot be answered or sustained apart from the inherent need for a substantial 'what' of belief.

So, it is false to claim that the Christian Incarnation is the true object of faith because it is the only absolute paradox since, in the terms Kierkegaard gives us, it is simple to manufacture other paradoxes which are equally contradictory. On these grounds, other Absolute Paradoxes are as deserving of a believer's veneration as the Christian incarnation. If this is right, it means any sufficiently paradoxical proposition could be inserted in place of the doctrine of the Christian incarnation and be equally worthy of faith, i.e. if its contradictory nature is what really counts why not merely replace it with another contradiction which should generate a lively and enthusiastic faith? The only way an objection to this version of the Absolute Paradox can be

raised is if we switch the accent of faith to the "what" side of the issue. But the notion of "what" looks suspiciously like the door is opened again to the objective way Kierkegaard vehemently rejects. It means the historical narratives of the gospels cannot be viewed as superfluous baggage to the underpinning of faith. When an objection is raised to my mythical absolute paradox, it can only be made in light of the concerns of the objective content of the incarnation itself. Kierkegaard pays the price of vitiating the very object of faith he seeks to protect by claiming that the "how" of faith has primacy over the "what" of faith.

I have argued against construing the Christian Incarnation as an Absolute Paradox on the grounds that the language itself is confusing, that it may involve self-deception if one is going to believe it and that the distinction between "how" and "what" destroys the object of faith for Christianity. Lastly, I want to call into question Kierkegaard's framing the Incarnation as an absolute paradox in the first place. Why does Kierkegaard think the object of faith for Christians must be a paradox of absolute proportions? Certainly, he puts himself out of step with most Christian theologians who have tried to understand the Incarnation. For example, while Aquinas recognized that the Incarnation provides a difficult puzzle it does not entail a contradiction or an irresolvable paradox.

Summary

I have argued that Kierkegaard's notion of the Christian Incarnation as the Absolute Paradox is suspect for at least two reasons. First, the ability to

believe the absolute paradox to be true looks to be a matter of self-deception as much or more than a miracle given by a divine condition. In raising this objection I have not argued against the general notion of a divine implanting which makes belief possible. This is entirely conceivable. Its strengths and weaknesses will have to be debated elsewhere. But, paralleling Penelhum's views, one cannot judge a proposition to be false and also say you believe it to be true without being self-deceived. However, this is exactly what one has to do to believe Kierkegaard's conception of the Christian Incarnation as an Absolute Paradox.

Secondly, Kierkegaard's claim that the main impetus of the Christian Incarnation is on the "how" of belief as opposed to the "what" of belief makes him vulnerable to the charge that he is in danger of losing the object of faith altogether. Without taking the position of Kierkegaard's opponents that the Incarnation is a historical belief, I have argued that the minimalist construction of the Incarnation is self-defeating and opposed to the New Testament in general.

Though other objections to Kierkegaard's Absolute Paradox are possible (and likely), the two I have raised are sufficient to make us suspicious of the absolute paradox as the true representation of the Christian Incarnation. Kierkegaard's attempt to defend the uniqueness of the Incarnation against its reduction to a historical belief or speculative philosophy by conceiving of it as an Absolute Paradox causes him to make mistakes that are the hallmark of his exclusivist fideism.

CHAPTER V

EXCLUSIVIST FIDEISM AND SUBJECTIVITY

> Faith hopes for this life also, but, note well, by virtue of the absurd, not by virtue of the human understanding; otherwise it is only common sense, not faith (Journals,#5)

Thus far I have critiqued some selected themes which are, in my view, at the core of Kierkegaard's pistology. I have characterized Kierkegaard's pistology as an exclusivist fideism which I think fails primarily because it is incompatible with the religious life of ordinary believers. In essence, Kierkegaard establishes impossible standards of belief, it is a pistology beyond the practical reach of the faithful. I conclude that his conception of faith neither reflects the Christianity of the New Testament nor most believers anywhere.

However, such a critique of Kierkegaard is hardly news. My arguments against his view of faith place me among a whole host of philosophers who think Kierkegaard's work is provocative enough to respond to it. But, as with any extended critique, it is fraught with dangers. Chief among these dangers is that of being carried away too quickly by the flush of success against your opponent (if I indeed have been successful). It can lead one to not take sufficient care in analyzing one's opponent's views and to pass over the important insights he makes.

Kierkegaard's discussion of subjectivity is just such a theme. It is easy to

believe the coup de grace is at hand, because of the images 'subjectivity' conjures up in our minds. We might be led to think that Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity constitutes a horrendous blunder on his part and puts us in a position for an easy kill. It is at least a theme that has lead many critics to poke eager fun at Kierkegaard. This is because for those trained in western philosophy subjectivity is usually a word of scorn and representative of everything philosophy seeks to avoid. Are we not supposed to seek objective truth so that we can know that the claims we make are true for us and everyone else? For a thinker to purposely tell us that truth is subjectivity is like the lamb brought to slaughter, or so we might think. Kierkegaard's proposition that subjectivity is truth has the effect of turning philosophers into sharks at a feeding frenzy. But to react this way to Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity is a serious mistake.

Yet I am double-minded about Kierkegaard's explication of subjectivity. On the one hand, Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity shows insightfulness to the nature of religious belief. On the other hand, Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity presents dangers for theism, but not for the reasons usually cited by western philosophers. In light of my double-mindedness, I want to accomplish two things in this chapter. After some general remarks, I will highlight the importance of subjectivity for the inner life or the place where religious devotion resides in the believer. Secondly, I will critique Kierkegaard's subjectivity based on its implications for God as the transcendant Being of faith.

General Remarks on Subjectivity

Most of the images of subjectivity that come to mind are not compatible with what Kierkegaard means by subjectivity. For him, subjectivity is not a rejection of the classical theory of truth defined as the correspondence between thought and reality. Subjectivity is not an arbitrary claim to truth which works by turning logic on its head. It is not personal opinion nor mere perspective. Subjectivity is not like saying, "I like Picasso but my friend likes Rembrandt. But it is all subjective anyway." Or worse, subjectivity is not a matter of preferring chocolate ice cream to Neopolitan. Nor is it solipsism. Kierkegaard does not have in mind a crass relativism when he says that subjectivity is truth.

What, then, does Kierkegaard mean by this very curious and controversial notion? In the early part of the Postscript he writes:

> Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness. As soon as subjectivity is eliminated, and passion eliminated from subjectivity, and the infinite interest eliminated from passion, there is in general no decision at all, either in this problem or any other. All decisiveness, all essential decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity.[197]

In the Journals he states a comparable proposition:

> Subjectivity is inwardness. Inwardness is spirit. To believe is not an indifferent relation to something which is true, but an infinitely decisive relation to something. The accent falls upon the relation.[198]

In these two roughly similar passages Kierkegaard systematically connects subjectivity, inwardness, passion, the decision of faith and an interest in one's own eternal happiness. He makes subjectivity a keystone to faith by saying

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[197] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 33.

[198] Journals, #4537

that without it a cascade of negative results occurs with the end being the lack of a decision of faith.

As we have seen, subjectivity at the level of religiousness A comes to the forefront by consideration of an objective uncertainty. In the Postscript, Kierkegaard exemplifies this objective uncertainty by the ambiguity of nature's design by God and the "if" of immortality. Kierkegaard thinks we will always be uncertain about immortality and God's design of the world if we try to discover their truth status objectively. We can only have an eternal happiness when we are certain about such important religious precepts as immortality and God's design of the world. Our hope in being certain about these matters takes place subjectively, not objectively. It is a negatively "reasoned" argument that brings us to the notion of subjectivity as the solution to our uncertainty. Subjectivity involves achieving an ideal through the negative, i.e. the positive becomes recognizable by the negative. Since objectivity fails in finding God and the focus of the religious life, the answer must be found in subjectivity, so the argument goes. The negative argument behind the emergence of subjectivity is employed by Kierkegaard to defeat the philosopher who wants to bring objectivity to the rescue of faith. This is something Kierkegaard considers to be a marginalization of the inner life of passion and the certainty of faith. Kierkegaard thinks that subjectivity alone is up to the task of making faith certain and passionate. He writes:

> For a moment let us concede that Christianity exists objectively, although this is not quite true, because even its objective existence is far from being Christianity.
>
> We assume, then, that objectively it exists. What does not exist, however, is the kind of passion which is the formal condition of being

> able to receive the content of Christianity, unconditioned passion, the passion of the unconditioned.
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> This kind of passion quite literally does not appear in the world any more. Yes, it is so long since it has been that even the novel writers and poets in our time do not dare (for fear of being regarded as mad men, liars, or laughing stock) to portray passion of such loftiness.[199]

Religiousness B brings the believer to the ultimate state of faith by claiming his eternal happiness rests in that which is supremely uncertain, viz. the absolute paradox. Since religiousness B is the highest state of faith we can expect the believer to be at the height of his subjectivity or inwardness when he appropriates Christianity into his life.

Subjectivity is the signature theme of Kierkegaard's work and the reason we regard him as the father of existentialism. He says that when we see subjectivity as the truth, its conceptual determination must be found as an expression which has objectivity as its antithesis. In his own words such a definition of truth would take the form: "An objective uncertainty held fast in an approximation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual".[200] Kierkegaard goes on to explain this rather dark saying. In objective terms the subject (or existing individual) only has and can ever have uncertainty.

But Kierkegaard thinks this is of great importance because the objective uncertainty spawns a tension which raises passionate belief to the level of the infinite in the existing individual because his understanding compels him to sort things out objectively. This in fact is constituitive of inwardness or the truth of subjectivity. Since the objective way can only provide an

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[199] Ibid., #3133.

[200] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

approximation, the existing individual begins to sense anxiety over his lack of certainty of things he must be certain about. He now sees that faith cannot rest on an objective uncertainty but can only settle upon a subjective certainty. In another important Postscript passage Kierkegaard connects passion and subjectivity when he says, the passion of the infinite is truth which makes subjectivity the truth as well. Subjectivity as the truth, according to Kierkegaard, is the decisive factor in the decision of faith.[201]

Later in the Postscript Kierkegaard asks a number of questions that pertain to existence. He wants to know what it means to die, what it means to be married and what it means to thank God for the good he has bestowed. He begins with what seems to be an outlandish claim, viz. that truth is subjectivity. He writes:

> *When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship: if only the mode of this relationship is in the the truth, the individual is in the truth, even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.* Let us take as an example the knowledge of God. Objectively, reflection is directed to the problem of whether this is the true God; subjectively, reflection is directed to the question whether the individual is related to a something *in such a manner* that his relationship is in truth a God relationship.[202] [Italics in original]

For the moment I want to set aside what, from a Christian point of view, seems to be obviously false about this claim and focus on what Kierkegaard is trying to get us to see. By implication, the dialectical counterpart to the

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[201] Ibid., 181.

[202] Ibid., 178.

subjectivity-is-truth-thesis is that objectivity is truth. But the objective manner is a mistaken notion of truth because its focus is on the relationship between an object and its knower. The subjective manner, however, focuses simply on the relationship whether what (the object) he is related to is true or not.

In this passage Kierkegaard takes God as an example of an object of knowledge. If we reflect objectively on God we of necessity focus on whether this is the true God. Kierkegaard puts it that objective thinking diverts our attention from the more important concern of whether we are in a God-relationship or not. Our concern for a God-relationship can only arise subjectively. The subjectivity-is-truth-thesis is to be seen as a rejection of the claim that ethical and religious questions could be settled by an appeal to historical, philosophical or scientific methods. Kierkegaard says, "The subjective reflection turns its attention inwardly to the subject, and desires in this intensification of inwardness to realize the truth."[203] He thinks subjectivity provides a direct, unmediated relationship with the truth, which is in fact a relationship with God. In objective terms, a relationship to the truth is mediated by a concern for whether the knower is related to a truthful object. In this case, being in the truth becomes of second importance to there first being an object which is the truth. Trying to be in a relationship to the truth objectively forces the believer into a circuitous, indirect route to his final object. Being subjectively related to the truth is like being able to sit in the first row of your favorite play with an unobstructed view of everything

[203]Ibid., 175-6.

that takes place on stage. One feels a direct connection with the actors as they deliver the meaning and the drama of the play. Being connected to the truth objectively (if such a connection is possible) is like coming down with an illness on the night of the only performance and so one must be told how good a play it was by a friend.

From a religious perspective, Kierkegaard thinks of being related to the truth as synonymous with being in a proper relationship with God. Subjectivity is preferred to objectivity because it brings about a God-relationship. Kierkegaard criticizes the objective way for trying to bring God to light objectively because this amounts to an approximation-process. The existing individual who chooses the subjective way over objectivity does so because he sees the near impossibility of finding God objectively through proofs and evidence. This is a painful waste of time for the existing individual because it forestalls his relationship to God.[204]

Kierkegaard goes on to say that God is a subject and therefore must be approached subjectively. This is why it is impossible to bring God to light objectively. Being related to God is a matter of like relating to like (subject to subject) not like relating to unlike (subject to object). Kierkegaard bemoans the fact "....that philosophy teaches that the way is to become objective, while Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, i.e. to become a subject in truth." He adds, "Lest this should seem a mere dispute about words, let me say that Christianity wishes to intensify passion to its highest pitch; but passion is subjectivity, and does not exist objectively".[205] To become

[204]Ibid., 178.

[205]Ibid., 177.

subjective, Kierkegaard thinks, is to insure the decision of faith which objectivity delays because of its approximative nature. To be endowed with an eternal happiness requires the decision of faith which occurs only subjectively. Bringing us to an absolute relationship to the absolute can only be achieved subjectively.

In discussing whether we can be certain of our immortality or not, Kierkegaard says one man attempts to find out objectively and enters a never ending approximation-process, while another man embraces the uncertainty of his immortality with the passion of the infinite. This occurs because the approximation-process is like an infinitely long introduction to Christianity. It does nothing to bring the individual any closer to the decision of faith. Kierkegaard says, philosophy, and historical and rhetorical introductions to Christianity only succeed at the level of introducing a doctrine, but not in becoming a Christian.[206] It is the latter individual who has certainty about his immortality because of his subjectivity.[207] The passion of the infinite occurs when the existing individual suffers as he struggles and fights for the certainty that he is immortal, that he has an eternal happiness. The existing individual has his own subjectivity as the ground of a certain immortality.

Kierkegaard thinks the objective thinker (as opposed to the subjective thinker) lives a kind of skeptical life since his objectivity can never supply the certainty he needs. Because he is uncertain of his actions and his faith, the objective thinker lives prudently rather than in the risk of faith. He lives under the veil of a mystifying agnosticism. His life is a, "on the one

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[206]Ibid., 343.

[207]Ibid., 180.

hand....but on the other hand" kind of existence. This will never do for the existing individual who aspires to the faith of religiousness B.

It is tempting to say Kierkegaard equivocates sincerity with subjectivity in his search for the mark of genuine faith. We might complain that he thinks believers are in a God-relationship simply because they believe sincerely enough, though what they believe in is false. Hence, being in the truth is simply a matter of believing with an infinite passion.

But, clearly, this is a caricature of Kierkegaard's view of subjectivity. He sees through the complaint of reducing subjectivity to sincerety and tries to head it off. He distinguishes between the inwardness of the religious believer and what he calls the "aberrant inwardness" and "subjective madness" found in a figure like Don Quixote. Here Kierkegaard is making his readers aware that genuine faith has two necessary criteria; one being maximum passion and the other that this be directed toward the infinite. Therefore, a person who is maximally passionate about being a Republican does not qualify as a genuine believer because his passion is directed toward something finite. The passionate Republican only concerns himself with "particular finite fixed ideas" or "little finitudes" that "do not really concern anybody".[208] A true believer must not only have infinite passion but he must have it for the infinite God. Hence, we should not raise what I think is a hasty criticism of Kierkegaard, a criticism that confuses a strong sincerety with the infinite passion of faith.

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[208]Ibid., 174-5.

Subjectivity as Descriptive of the Inner Life

Though Kierkegaard explains how it is that objective Christians lack the key ingredient of subjectivity, he still suffers from an overly vague notion of what it means to be related to the truth. I will take this issue up in depth later in the chapter. For now, I want to see how the notion of subjectivity might assist us in gaining some insights about one of the most important topics for faith, viz. the nature of the inner life. I said earlier that I was reticient to be overly critical of Kierkegaard on the matter of subjectivity. This is because I think this notion holds some promise to enlighten us as an account of the inner life of the believer.

Temporarily setting aside my general critique of Kierkegaard is not cause to think that what Kierkegaard has to say about subjectivity should be swallowed whole. Yet, in my estimation, Kierkegaard does some of his most important and best work on this topic. The theme of subjectivity provides a rough and ready way to discuss the inner life of faith. It might be said that the inner life of faith and devotion hinges on subjectivity. By my lights, there is no more central topic to help us focus on the meaning and nature of the religious life and spirituality than subjectivity. If Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity is descriptive of the inner life of faith, then there can be few topics that are so central to religion. I do not want my disparaging reflections of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism to overshadow his achievements in the area of subjectivity to the degree that they may be lost in the dust of criticism. Hence, I will continue to critique Kierkegaard as in the previous chapters but

here I will be more circumspect in my assessment of his work on subjectivity. Some of the past criticism will be tempered by my sympathies for what Kierkegaard has to say about subjectivity.

The importance of the self or the inner man is a fundamental concern of western philosophy. Descartes and Locke began with a philosophical analysis of the nature of the inner man as a metaphysical entity rather than with passion and ethical and religious possibilities. But instead of metaphysics Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity describes ways of living in the world. This makes it possible to give an account of the inner life on the basis of subjectivity devoid of any metaphysical commitments.

I think subjectivity as descriptive of the inner of life faith is distinct from the inner man as a metaphysical entity because the former is a state of existence human beings achieve rather than something that is inherent to their nature. In other words, people do not come hard wired with subjectivity. Subjectivity is a condition human beings achieve just as they acquire the skills to play the piano or to do calculus problems. People become proficient at the piano and calculus by following a set of prescribed steps. They are not born with these abilities. Similiarly, being subjective in the sense Kierkegaard means it is not part of a person's inherent nature as Descartes thinks the mind as a substance is possessed by human beings. If anything, subjectivity is opposed to human nature because it supports the passion of faith against the understanding. So, it is important that we not critique subjectivity as a metaphysical description as we might, for example, Descartes' philosophy of mind or the transcendental ego of Kant.

If subjectivity does not constitute theory building of the metaphysical sort,

how then should we think of subjectivity as Kierkegaard gives it to us, as equivalent to the truth? I think Kierkegaard's concern is to create a ground for the practicalities of being a Christian. Through subjectivity Kierkegaard may be reminding us that philosophizing and speculating about religious belief potentially leads to the vitiation of the inner life. Subjectivity is a way of describing the posture of the believer and his attitude about his relationship to God. Subjectivity is a necessary state of existence where one experiences the passion of faith and believes in the absolute paradox. This is why subjectivity is not mere emotion or religious fervor, for Kierkegaard. It is the defining category of faith's constituitive elements. If I have interpreted Kierkegaard correctly, we might think of subjectivity as the reference point for the inner life or of Kierkegaard's way of expressing his concerns about a believer's walk with God. Subjectivity may be seen as the importance believers attribute to their spiritual pilgrimage. They see the inner life of faith (or subjectivity) as the motivating force underlying the strength of their religious commitments.

If Kierkegaard has this in mind, then he expresses himself truthfully because a central concern of the Christian faith is the close relationship the believer has with God. His faith becomes passionate because he can say with certainty, "I believe in God"; "I trust God"; "I have been saved by God". These statements are expressions of a lived faith. They are to be contrasted with statements like, "To be a person of religious belief means to believe in God, to trust God and to be saved by God." The former show that an existential impact has been made on the believer's life while the latter might be the

indifferent reflections of an unbeliever.

In some passages Kierkegaard's emphasis on the inner life makes it look as though he forgets the external criteria of faith. For example, in Fear and Trembling he writes, "I candidly admit that in practice I have not found any verfiable example of the knight of faith, though I would not therefore deny that every second man may be such an example".[206] He goes onto say, "One can discover nothing of that aloof and superior nature whereby one recognizes the knight of the infinite".[207] For Kierkegaard, there is nothing exterior that distinguishes a knight of faith from ordinary folk like tax-collectors and butchers. Kierkegaard says if he found a knight of faith he would latch onto him to see if he could get a glimpse of the infinite peeping through. But the knight of faith has nothing about him (externally speaking) that tells us who he is. "No heavenly glance or any other token of the incommensurable betrays him; if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the congregation, for his healthy and vigorous hymn-singing proves at the most that he has a good chest".[208] The knight of faith tends to his daily affairs he goes to work, to church, he worries about what his wife is preparing for dinner. In essence, he concerns himself with the things that ordinary people are concerned about. He does all the things that make it look as though he is fulfilled and happy in the finite life. Kierkegaard says he searches in vain to detect something external in the knight of faith's behavior which indicates that he is indeed a

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[206]Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 49
[207]Ibid., 50
[208]Ibid.

knight of faith.

Yet in other passages Kierkegaard lays great stress on the external criteria of faith. For example, in the Postscript he says of Socrates:

> Must he therefore be accounted a doubter in comparison with one of our modern thinkers with the three proofs? By no means. On this "if" he risks his entire life, he has the courage to meet death, and he has with the passion of the infinite so determined the pattern of his life that it must be found acceptable-*if* there is an immortality. Can any better proof be given for the immortality of the soul?[209]

In this context it looks as though Socrates exhibits an external criteria for the inwardness of his faith. He has the courage to meet death and with the passion of the infinite he determines the pattern of his life. The inner condition of subjectivity is the basis of the external criteria of courage and passion after which Socrates patterns his life.

Even though Kierkegaard is not always clear about the connection between the inner life and outer life, it seems as though he wants to say that the outer finds its source in and is sustained by the inner. Subjectivity constitutes an inner transformation or change which affects the outer life. Perhaps this is akin to what Jesus means by being born again, discussed in John's gospel (Chapter 3).

Kierkegaard is unfazed by the standard philosophical debate revolving around epistemological certainty. This is because the certainty of faith is of a different order than the epistemological certainty sought by thinkers like Plato, Descartes and Kant. Kierkegaard thinks faith needs certainty because without it believers are subject to a slack-souled existence, wavering between being convinced and doubting the truth of Christianity. Subjectivity is

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[209] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 180.

fundamental to faith because it opens the way for the believer to achieve the decisiveness faith requires.

Philosophy is not just a matter of pure thought as the objective way purports to be. For traditional philosophy, subjectivity is often an embarassing notion because it is assumed that the inner is in need of outer criteria. Therefore, it is assumed that philosophy must fiercely remove entities like the inner life because they are unnecessary and unknowable.[210] But for Kierkegaard, it is the outer which is in need of inner criteria. He reverses the Wittgensteinian dictum that an inner process requires outer criteria.[211] While philosophy is often in the habit of analyzing away the inner life which brings about the loss of value and the individual,[212] subjectivity is a potential antidote to this problem.

In her recent book, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals, Iris Murdoch notes her concern over the vitiation of the inner life in much the same way Kierkegaard expresses himself. She says that Wittgenstein's (and those in his tradition) laborious piling up of examples suggests that "human doing" can be analyzed and formalized.[213] She worries that Wittgenstein's claim that his philosophy offers description of perspicuous presentation amounts to phenomenology.[214] If we allow that the inner life is real and "dense", it is certainly an error to analyze it away.[215]

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[210]Murdoch, 270.

[211]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1968), #580.

[212]Murdoch, 278 and 281.

[213]Murdoch, 276.

[214]Ibid., 277.

[215]Ibid., 278.

I am not sure that Murdoch's complaint against Wittgenstein is valid. If it is, there are unsettling analogues of comparison between the objective way Kierkegaard outlines and the "description" of human doing Wittgenstein writes about in the Investigations. Now, Murdoch is not pinning her philosophical hopes on the inner life in the same way Kierkegaard pins the viability of faith on subjectivity. But she does claim that the nature of human experience is polymorphous and intensely individual. She says, "Seeing, thinking and 'interpreting' are mixed."[216] Murdoch thinks Wittgenstein's wishes to keep the 'individual' and 'value' out of the philosophical picture. When human experience is released from phenomenology, human experience can formulate truthful descriptions in many ways. For example Murdoch says an approaching train may be described as getting larger or moving. But Murdoch thinks such descriptions as the only legitimate concern of philosophy, are enslaved to phenomenology. It can also be asked, "Is the train late"?; "Is it the blue one"?; "Will she be on it"?[217]

Both kinds of questions reflect truthful considerations of the train. But the latter questions are untroubled by philosophy and are concerned with the inner life of human experience and the existential impact they have upon us. Reflections which describe the nature of God's existence, for example, fall naturally into the sort of distinction Murdoch makes here. God is omniscient, God created the world, God's existence is demonstrable are observations made in the "laboratory". Kierkegaard thinks such reflections have little or no existential impact on believers. They do not intensify the

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[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid.

passion of faith. Rather, they vitiate subjectivity (the inner life) by failing to consider how the believer is related to these observations. Kierkegaard (and I think Murdoch) would say these observations need to be brought out of the laboratory and released from philosophy to preserve the inner life of subjectivity.

To this point I have given a positive reading to Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity. This positive reading is based on seeing subjectivity as analogous to the inner life of the believer. If subjectivity is comparable to the inner life, then Kierkegaard has identified one of the most important features of the religious life and has attempted to give us an account of it. But now we must turn from this positive reading of subjectivity and comment on a potential difficulty that resides in Kierkegaard's description of subjectivity.

Subjectivity and Theological Non-Realism

As we have seen, Kierkegaard thinks subjectivity is truth by virtue of the inward relationship an existing individual has with God. He says, "It is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor and not its content, for its content is precisely itself".[218] Kierkegaard suggests that the content of faith (objectivity) is a given or comes automatically with subjectivity. If our relationship to God is a true one the objective content of God's nature or objective propositions about God are of secondary importance because they are part and parcel to subjectivity.

On this reading of Kierkegaard, there is an implied guarantee of having the necessary objective ingredients of faith if one first has the proper

[218] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 182.

relationship to God. It is comparable to my purchase of a new car. With my purchase I assume the car comes with tires. The car dealer does not sell me a car that I cannot drive immediately because it lacks tires. I do not purchase the car and then have go to B.F. Goodrich to get a set of tires for it. Having a proper relationship with God brings with it other necessary ingredients of faith, such as the objective content usually associated with Christian theism. Or, put differently, having a true God-relationship is not like being told that the batteries are not included with the purchase of my favorite computer game.

Another possible reading of Kierkegaard is one that does not concern itself with the givenness of the objective content of faith at all. It simply says the truthfulness of the content is of no concern because the relationship with God is itself the content. In the above quote we see that this is exactly what Kierkegaard says. This interpretation is supported by the story of the idol worshipper who holds false beliefs about God but actually worships the true God because his worship is one of infinite passion. Since his belief is properly oriented in subjectivity, what he believes is of little consequence. In Kierkegaard's story of the idol-worshipper[219] we see that the objective content of Christian theism is not automatically carried with the passion of the infinite which is characteristic of the true believer, nor does it need to be. In this case the car we purchase from the dealer does not even need tires to function properly, nor does the computer game need batteries!

But I think in either interpretation, Kierkegaard takes too much for

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[219]Ibid., p. 180.

granted with regard to theology. In his eagerness to exclude even the slightest hint of objective truth from faith he unwittingly degrades Christianity into a alien concept unrecognizable by most ordinary believers. This occurs because Kierkegaard shifts the entire weight of faith to the infinite passion of the believer and puts at risk the very existence of God. Whether Kierkegaard means the content of faith is carried by the God-relationship and therefore needs no explication or is simply irrelevant to faith by virtue of the relationship itself, he stakes everything on the alleged truthfulness of the relationship the believer has with God. This, I claim, leads quite naturally to a theological non-realism.

Theological non-realism is the view that the actual existence of a transcendant being does not necessarily correspond to the faith of the believer. What really counts for religious belief is the degree of passion resident the believer without regard to the actual existence of God. With theological non-realism God could disappear completely from the equation of faith with no harm done to religion. But this is clearly a result Christian theists, including Kierkegaard, could not accept. For Christian theism to be what it is by definition requires an actual object of faith. Kierkegaard would certainly reject the claim that his version of subjectivity leads to a theological non-realism. He would concur with other Christian theists on the necessity of the existence of God for Christianity. Yet Kierkegaard's overly strong emphasis on subjectivity turns God's existence into a vanishing point and excludes the possibility of a meaningful discussion of God's nature and attributes.

The issue of the loss of objective content for faith was first discussed on

the topic of the Absolute Paradox in Chapter Four. There I discussed Kierkegaard's distinction between the "how" and the "what" of belief. I tried to show how this distinction leads to the problem of finding the correct paradox as the object of faith. Kierkegaard shows no hesitation in taking his

readers to the next step which is to give a definition of what it is to become a Christian in the subjective sense. He says this must be determined, not by the what of Christianity but by the how of the Christian and this can only correspond to the absolute paradox. Kierkegaard seeks to eliminate any provisional function of objective content from faith so as to make it decisive. In defining faith Kierkegaard says, "Faith is the objective uncertainty along with the repulsion held fast in the passion of inwardness, which precisely is inwardness potentiated to the highest degree".[220] Such a description of faith fits only a religious believer and has little that is akin to a lover, an enthusiast nor a thinker, but only one who is related to the absolute paradox.

Against Kierkegaard's defintion of faith, I argued that without an extensive accounting of the "what" of belief there was no compelling reason to believe the Christian Incarnation was the proper object of faith, provided one could devise an incarnation of sufficient paradoxicality. In the case of subjectivity the "how" of belief carries us further because it undermines the existence of any necessary object of belief whatsoever.

In the Postscript it is a God relationship that completes us and that is the highest.[221] What is the relationship between embracing this proposition, the

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[220]Ibid., p. 540.

absurd, and being in a faith relationship to God, one might ask? And for that matter, what are the implications for practice of the Postscript definition of faith? If faith is precisely embracing the absurd in an appropriation process of infinite passion, as opposed to living in a God-relationship, practical implications regarding how one should live, serve God, love God, trust God are unclear if not nonexistent. As we have seen, Kierkegaard sees faith as a lived relationship to God, and so as more than his definition strictly entails. But he also sees it as at least what his definition entails, and his definition of faith does seem to make essential to faith believing, against our understanding, that the absolute paradox is true.

However there is another turn. The mark of faith is not one's saying one believes the absolute paradox; objective believers do that. The mark, rather, is having infinite inwardness--and one may have infinite inwardness even though one misconceives God or holds wrong beliefs about God. And I would contend not necessarily believe in God at all. It seems even an atheist or a person of religiousness A could have infinite inwardness. This means that while faith corresponds to only the absurd, the one with faith need not articulate the absurd as the object of his faith. It implies that Kierkegaard has not put his finger on the distinctly Christian understanding of faith. On this interpretation, for Kierkegaard, many objective believers turn out to be unbelievers and many overtly non-Christians may turn out to have faith. In any case, for Kierkegaard, it is true that accepting as true Christian doctrine, as objective Christians do, is not the test for faith. Yet, at the same time, for Kierkegaard in the Postscript, faith must have an object. The question is, can

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[221] Ibid., 219 and 456.

this need of an object faith be supported by the subjectivity is truth thesis?

A.E. Murphy puts it, "Given [Kierkegaard's] definitions of 'subjectivity,' 'truth,' and 'faith,' it seems to follow, as he claims, that such a 'faith' is the truth, though why this self-centered passion should be identified as religious faith rather than sheer egocentricity is so far hardly clear". The force of Murphy's criticism dissipates when we consider the content Kierkegaard gives to subjectivity, such as the belief in an absolute paradox and a passion for the infinite. The charge of egocentricity is not in reference to the distasteful person who has an inflated picture of his own worth or someone who is arrogant or whose head is swelled. Rather, it refers to a misplaced emphasis on subjectivity as a category. I think this charge sticks if we see, as Murphy says, that subjectivity is "parasitic for its 'existential' significance on the assumed objective truth of a doctrine about man and God whose right to claim such truth it strives at every point to discredit".[222]

Kierkegaard writes, "Religiousness is indeed inwardness in existing and everything which serves to deepen this determinant heightens the religious, and the paradox-religiousness".[223] Murphy perceives this statement to be a classic case of subjectivity biting the hand that feeds it while also calling this procedure faith since what feeds recessive inwardness feeds faith. He writes:

> This is the best Kierkegaard has to offer. There is no better reason for believing that this is the highest existential condition attainable by man than for believing in the objective reality of God (as Kierkegaard describes Him), and for this, he has been at pains to tell us, there is no reason whatever. What have we left? Just subjectivity itself, as devoid of ontological as of divine support. 'Subjectivity is truth; subjectivity is

[222] A.E. Murphy, Reason and the Common Good: Selected Essays, eds. W.H. Hay, M.G. Singer and A.E. Murphy (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), 178.
[223] Kierkegaard, Postscript, 506.

> reality' (Postscript, p. 306). Whose subjectivity? Kierkegaard's. And there the matter ends. Whether it is a dead end or an ultimate disclosure of reality, is for the reader to decide. But he will do well to remember that it can be at best a disclosure of the reality, not of God, but of Kierkegaard.[224]

Murphy is troubled by the fact that Kierkegaard absolutizes his own subjective experiences and depicts them as the exclusive truth of the gospel. He rightly says that while faith is not knowledge it still affirms the objective truth of what is believed. Kierkegaard's description of subjectivity as inwardness also raises the suspicion that when "faith loses its concern for objective truth, it loses its transcendant reference and that means that it also loses its transcendant object".[225] Subjectivity actually becomes a self-relationship rather than the God-relationship Kierkegaard often defines as faith. In this form, subjectivity poses a greater danger to faith than it does to reason.

If this charge is true, Kierkegaard becomes a kind of accidental atheist or at least a thinker who inadvertently promotes a kind of theological non-realism.[226] I say accidental or inadvertent because Kierkegaard would certainly describe himself as a Christian theist. But his view of subjectivity as maximal inwardness easily degenerates into the loss of God which Christian theism certainly could not tolerate. Kierkegaard's discussion of subjectivity sounds very much like finding the true self is tantamount to finding God. It

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[224] Murphy, 178.

[225] Ibid., 179.

[226] In fact, two important theological non-realists have found just this inspiration from Kierkegaard. Cf. Don Cupitt's, Taking Leave of God and Stewart Sutherland's, God, Jesus and Belief. One wonders if Death of God theologians like Thomas Altizer could not have found as much inspiration from Kierkegaard as they did Neitzsche.

is a formula which seems to say, "Look deeply enough inward and you will find God". If Kierkegaard is not an accidental atheist, then at bottom he makes God serve subjectivity just as Kant makes God serve morality, being a postulate of it.

Summary

I have attempted to work with Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity at two levels. First, I have viewed it as a way into the problem of the inner life of the person of religious belief. The inner life is important because it is where the believer holds the certainty of his faith and ponders his relationship to God. It is the place the believer moves from assenting to the truth of claims about Christianity to actually embracing this truth. For this reason I said Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity may provide a useful handhold to a discussion of the inner life of faith.

But I also criticized Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity because it seems to lead to a theological non-realism. I feel as though in his search for an exclusive definition of the Christian faith, Kierkegaard undermines the very faith he seeks to protect. He does so by unintentionally making room for easily drawn conclusions, that if drawn, degrade Christianity into anti-Christianity in the form of a theological non-realism. If there is value in subjectivity as a pointer to the inner life, it will have to be found in a way that avoids this problem.

CHAPTER VI

FAITH AND INCLUSIVIST FIDEISM

> Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example! Mark Twain.

In the beginning of this study I claimed that Kierkegaard's pistology amounts to an exclusivist fideism. I noted that this was unfortunate because the net effect of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism is a view of faith that is incongruent with the religious experience of most ordinary believers and that it unnecessarily makes reason in a positive sense taboo to the concerns of faith. These features imply that the term exclusivist describes Kierkegaard's fideism in two ways. They are exclusive in the sense of singular and ultimate importance or to make prominent and exclusive in the sense of to bar or to prohibit giving exclusivist fideism the only franchise in describing the true nature of faith.

Let me illustrate how I think the term exclusivist properly modifies Kierkegaard's fideism in both of these senses. Imagine I hear a young boy hawking newspapers on the street corner, announcing that the latest edition contains an exclusive story and I eagerly part with the change in my pocket to get a copy. On the front page of the newspaper in bold letters it reads, DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN. Now such a story is clearly an exclusive in the sense that it overshadows every other story in the newspaper. On this day, people

care less about the sports page, the classifieds or even other very important news stories compared to the exclusive story of Dewey defeating Truman for the presidency. This is the singularly important story in the newspaper after the presidential election in 1948.

But as we all know, Dewey did not defeat Truman and go on to become the thirty-third president of the United States. This headline was unfortunately premature. Having gone to the presses too early it announced a false election result. Kierkegaard views his pistology as singularly important in the way the story announcing Dewey's defeat of Truman grabbed national attention. And like this exclusive headline, I claim, Kierkegaard's pistology turns out to be false. While the headline, DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN seems singularly important, it does not give us truthful details about the results of the 1948 presidential election, neither does Kierkegaard's pistology accurately depict how a person comes to and continues to believe.

To continue the example, other stories in that same newspaper, though they might not be exclusives, would likely give us true information. Just as their are other true storie as opposed to the premature and false story of Dewey defeating Truman, their are other pistologies which give a more accurate account of how people actually come to and hold their religious beliefs.

The term "exclusivist" is also descriptive of Kierkegaard's fideism in the sense of to bar or prohibit. Kierkegaard's fideism is exclusive in the sense of barring or prohibiting because it does not allow objective reasoning to be a part of faith. We might compare this to an exclusive country club which only

admits white males to the ranks of its membership. Just as the country club excludes minorities and women from it membership, Kierkegaard excludes reason from the concerns of faith. And as I am deeply bothered by the exclusivist nature of the country club that will not admit my Afro-American and female friends, I am bothered by Kierkegaard's exclusionary practices when it comes to faith and reason.

This chapter moves past my criticisms of Kierkegaard by espousing a version of fideism I call inclusivist fideism. Inclusivist fideism is the view that faith is primary in the life of the believer but rejects the notions that a singularly valid path to faith is discernible or that reason should be excluded from the useful considerations of the believer. I call what I argue for "fideism" because, like Kierkegaard, I accept the primacy and authority of faith. But I modify my version of fideism with the term "inclusivist" because I think the path to faith is not reducible to a single set of religious experiences and I allow that reason can be connected to faith in a positive sense while also maintaining the virtue of faith. Hopefully, inclusivist fideism does not fall victim to the kinds of criticisms I have brought against Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. Inclusivist fideism accepts as authoritative the set of conditions the believer sees as calling forth belief in himself, whatever that account entails. If we were to ask believers about their initial coming to believe we would, in my view, hear a variety of accounts and we must accept these accounts as authoritative for them. Unless there is some reason to think otherwise, we cannot discount the genuineness of their faith. Though their religious experiences experiences vary they have arrived at faith.

Hence, inclusivist fideism is incorporative because it does not insist on a singular path to faith as does Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. How the summons of the gospel is incorporated into the lives of believers will undoubtedly be described variously by those same believers. Against Kierkegaard's view, I claim that for any pistology to be accurate it must be seen as polymorphic rather than the monomorphic description Kierkegaard gives us. The path to faith is likely to be an amalgam of descriptions, a "bricolage", an interesting and varied construction which is not limited to any singular description.

Parts I and II address Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism in the sense of to make prominent or to bring to the forefront. In Part I I give attention to what I think is the root cause of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism and suggest a remedy to its negative effects. In Part II I move discussion forward by examining several conversion cases from the New Testament. The purpose of this examination is to compare these examples to people becoming Christians to the pattern of faith Kierkegaard insists all people, if they are to become genuine believers, must follow. This is in response to Kierkegaard's claim that we must return to the Christianity of the New Testament.

Parts III and IV examine the side of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism that means to bar or to prohibit. Since I believe Kierkegaard has unjustifiably excluded reason from the concerns of faith I argue for ways in which reason and faith can be partners in light of my inclusivist fideism. In Part III I give an account of reason or rationality which serves as the basis on which Christian theism might be defended. Part IV then tries to show the way in

which objective reasoning is valuable to religion by noting the contexts or situations in which reason supports faith.

Part I

What advantage does inclusivist fideism have in forming an accurate pistology? Chiefly, inclusivist fideism does not prescribe a singular set of faith-producing conditions. I believe such prescription has the tendency to overlook the variety of conditions that believers recognize as bringing about belief in themselves. Any pistology is bound to go awry if it tries to construct a map of the landscape of faith apart from giving careful attention to the details of the terrain. The danger of any inaccurate map is that the one who tries to follow it is soon lost. Good cartography depends on having the details of the terrain if it is to have accurate and useful maps. By and large, my argument charges that Kierkegaard's pistology fails because it amounts to inaccurate map making with regard to the landscape of faith. I think Kierkegaard excludes details from his map he would likely find on the terrain and adds details not found there. Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism lays out a pistological map with the view that this is the map one must follow if one wants to arrive at the destination of true faith.

Via his pistology, Kierkegaard seeks to lead us to an absolute relationship with the Absolute. He would likely respond to my objection that his pistological map does not accurately assess the terrain of faith by saying that he created his pistological map because he found all other maps wanting particularly the one he perceives as based on speculative philosophy. Kierkegaard could say he has had to resurvey faith's terrain because he

discovered that all the available maps were faulty. What he found there was that all other pistologies were tethered to metaphysical moorings that diminished the passion and commitment of faith. Because these moorings restricted the energy of faith, faith became impractical and impossible to act out in everyday life.

But Kierkegaard's description of faith is as metaphysically garish as anything we encounter in Hegel or the Hegelians. In the long run, Kierkegaard trades one set of metaphysical impediments (Hegelianism) for another. His pistology is tethered to a metaphysical anchor as encumbering as the one he opposes. Kierkegaard's pistology is littered with such metaphysically laden concepts as objective uncertainty, the absolute paradox, the temporal/eternal distinction as well as his versions of passion and subjectivity. While a crystal clear doctrine of faith might seem desirable, the risk in such seeking is to create a pistology awash in metaphysical impediments. These impediments take the form of imposing a pistological map on the landscape of faith. This, I believe is the net effect of Kierkegaard's pistology.

Kierkegaard's attempt to enlist the insights of the Greek Skeptics on the nature of religious belief should have taught him important lessons about the metaphysical snares that easily entangle our philosophical efforts. I think the work of the Greek Skeptics can be brought against the metaphysical system building of Kierkegaard's pistology as readily as it can against Hegelianism.

If Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism is the wrong way to deal with

religious belief, then how can inclusivist fideism do a better job? A partial answer can be found in what James Kellenberger calls Witttgenstein's gift to contemporary philosophy of religion. According to Kellenberger, Wittgenstein offers a unique gift to the philosophy of religion.[230] This gift does not come from concepts like language games or forms of life that philosophers of religion most often allude to when they look to Wittgenstein for insight. Instead, Kellenberger says that Wittgenstein's best advice is that in philosophical enquiry we look at perspicuously arranged examples.[231] This advice carries over to those times when we reflect on religion. Kellenberger writes:

> If we bear in mind that there may be no single, unique religious discourse and if we simply delete reference to language-games and forms of life, we can, I suggest, retain the germ of Wittgenstein's advice. It is, or becomes: ground philosophical reflection on religion in the practice of some or concretely imagined religious persons, go to the phenomena of religion in some concrete embodiment, get before oneself a number of examples of religious activity.[232]

Kellenberger goes on to say the way Wittgenstein's advice (or gift) is to be used depends on our philosophical concern for religion. He notes such important examples as the issue of religion's rationality, mysticism, reflection on the problem of evil and of particular interest to my argument, the nature of faith itself or what I have called, pistology. In putting these examples before ourselves we might ask, how believers understand faith's requirements and demands? In this instance, such concrete portraits of faith as Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, Sir Thomas More and Kierkegaard

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[230]James Kellenberger, "Wittgenstein's Gift to Contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Religion", Philosophy of Religion 28 (1990): 147-172.

[231]Ibid., Cf. Philosophical Investigations, #23, #24, #66, #122.

[232]Ibid.

himself will be of great importance.[233]

Looking, as Wittgenstein suggests we do, keeps us from bringing philosophy to religion, as opposed to finding a view embodied in religious practice or literature.[234] If Kellenberger is right about Wittgenstein, he wants to let the religous landscape dictate the map that will be followed in reflecting on religion rather than proceeding with an apriori pistological map which skews our philosophical reflections on religion. By first looking at examples of religious belief we avoid the potential imprisoning effect of metaphysical commitments found in Kierkegaard's pistology as well as other pistologies vying for our attention.

Of further interest is Kellenberger's citation of Plantinga whom he says recommends Wittgenstein's kind of "looking" in giving us his advice about religion. Plantinga remarks that there "are many conditions and circumstances that call forth belief in God" which might include "guilt, danger, a sense that he speaks, preception of various parts of the universe." Plantinga then says:

> A complete job would explore the phenomenology of all these conditions and more besides. This is a large and important topic, but here I can only point to the existence of these conditions.[235]

When we survey the religious landscape we are likely to find a variety of examples regarded by believers as conditions which call forth belief. An accurate pistological map will show us that the religious landscape is an admixture of conditions which are belief encouraging. The search for

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[233] Ibid.

[234] Kellenberger, 165.

[235] Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reason and Belief in God," in Faith and Rationality (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press), 81.

examples will lead us to an encounter with a variety of conditions which believers regard as the sources of their own coming to believe. If it turns out that there are many conditions which call forth belief that differ from those Kierkegaard insists on, this works against his view that there is but one set of sequential conditions which has the potency to call forth belief.

Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism implies that all religious discourses other than the one he gives us are false and that there can be but one unique and genuine discourse for Christianity. But if Kellenberger's interpretation of Wittgenstein is sound, it places Kierkegaard's pistology in some jeopardy since it seems to depend on a single, unique religious discourse. This is why I think a chief cause of Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism is the inaccurate pistological map it generates. Its inaccuracy is seen in the poor way it compares to the religious experience of most ordinary believers.

Part II

One of my chief complaints against Kierkegaard is the lack of examples he gives us with regard to the kind of faith he thinks is genuine. Above I questioned the applicability of Kierkegaard's pistology to ordinary folk like shopkeepers, cobblers and homemakers. What sort of examples should we look for and where should we expect to find them? Examples that seem the most relevant, given Kierkegaard's desire to return us to the Christianity of the New Testament, should come from the New Testament itself. What better place could examples be found of the kind of faith he says we must return to than in the New Testament? Kierkegaard's view implies that the

kind of evidence relevant to a proper account of Christianity would be cases from the New Testament of people becoming Christians. We might expect Kierkegaard to focus on St. Paul, St. Peter, the "Woman at the Well", Nicodemus or a whole host of individuals whose conversions are discussed and detailed in the New Testament. Yet Kierkegaard gives us no such examples.

Without a clear application of his pistology to actual believers, Kierkegaard's claim that faith must be a lived faith is undermined. The problems with his pistology emerge as he insists that all existing individuals must follow the arduous path to faith he outlines in the Postscript and other writings. While Kierkegaard tries to make his pistology normative, we must ask to whom it applies? Are there actual examples who exhibit Kierkegaard's rather extraordinary notion of faith, especially in the New Testament?

If Kierkegaard were careful enough to cite examples of people coming to faith from the New Testament, he would have to show us that these individuals follow the pattern of faith he wants to establish. And he would have to show how this pattern is resident in every case he cites. By way of reminder, Kierkegaard thinks existing individuals come to Christian faith through a set pattern of stages. Just as a runner must pass designated checkpoints along the course to win the marathon, the believer must pass through some necessary stages which culminate in religiousness B. First, the existing individual must consider the implications of an objectivity uncertainty. The examples Kierkegaard specifies is the uncertainty of whether God created the world or not and whether we are immortal or not.

Though it is objectively uncertain that God created the world and that we are immortal and, thus, ambiguous by nature, the existing individual sees that he must have certainty about them. His passion is elevated because no objective means to determine the truth of these uncertainties is forthcoming. The existing individual is then compelled to see that these objective uncertainties can only become certain by means of subjectively. This brings the existing individual to religiousness A which is defined as a concern for his eternal happiness. But sensing that this is not the ultimate stage of faith, through a divine condition the existing individual embraces the absolute paradox of religiousness B and becomes a full-fledged believer in the Christian sense.

I will now atttempt to do what I complain Kierkegaard has not done, viz. to examine some concrete cases from the New Testament of people becoming Christians and compare these cases to Kierkegaard's pistological map. I am betting that if we have to use Kierkegaard's map we will soon be lost.

While there are a great number of recorded conversions in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts, I am particularly drawn to the cases I cite because they are examples of ordinary believers who respond to the summons of the gospel. The cases vary widely in terms of the number of people who become believers and the circumstances that call forth their belief. In examining these cases I find a great disparity between the pattern of faith Kierkegaard insists on and how the individuals in these cases come to believe. If this is true, Kierkegaard's pistology is uprooted since in citing these cases I am following his dictum that we must return to the Christianity of the New Testament while also showing that his pistology compares badly to

actual examples of people becoming believers.

The first case I cite comes from Acts 2:37-41. The passage reads:

> Now when they heard *this* , they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.[236]

This passage records the first large group conversion in the New Testament. The three thousand people who become believers do so in response to St. Peter's sermon which is recorded in verses 14-36 of Acts Two. The passage says they were "pierced to the heart" and they wanted to know what to do. Peter tells them to repent and be baptized in order to be saved.

While being "pierced to the heart" might be construed to mean that one becomes passionate in the sense of suffering that Kierkegaard has in mind, if being pierced to the heart amounts to having passion it does not arise because of an objective uncertainty. For example, St. Peter does not tell his audience to consider the ambiguity of whether God created the world or not and whether we are immortal or not. He does not tell them to determine the truth of an objective uncertainty by subjective means. The passion of these three thousand individuals (granting Kierkegaard his point for the moment) is motivated by their being told that they have crucified the messiah (verse 36). Nor does becoming a Christian believer, according to this passage, involve embracing an absolute paradox, but it calls for repentance and

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[236]All scriptural passages are quoted from the New American Standard Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975).

baptism.

The second case is found in Acts 8:26-38. It reads:

> But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert *road* .) And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of theEthiopians, who was in charge of her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship. And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO SHALL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please *tell me* , of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?" And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

This passage hardly needs explanation to see that the Ethiopian eunuch does not become a believer after the pattern Kierkegaard insists on. He is curious about the meaning of a passage from the prophet Isaiah. God leads Phillip to him to answer his questions about the identity of the person in the passage. Philip "preaches Jesus to him" and the Ethiopian eunuch responds by stating that he believes Jesus is the Son of God and he wants to be baptized. This case seems far removed from the elements Kierkegaard prescribes in his pistology. The Ethiopian eunuch hardly looks passionate. He simply

responds to Philip's proclamation that the identity of the person in the Isaiah passage is Jesus and the eunuch then states his belief in Jesus as the messiah. In this case Jesus is the fulfillment of a Hebrew Bible prophecy not an absolute paradox to be embraced with the passion of the infinite.

A third case of people becoming believers occurs in Acts 16:22-33. This passage is commonly known as the conversion of the Philippian jailer. It reads:

> And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceed to order *them* to be beaten with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came an earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened. And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison door opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in the house. And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household* .

Now, here is a case of an individual (the Philippian jailer) who definitely becomes passionate to the point of despair. Thinking his prisoners have escaped, he is about to take his life, knowing the authorities will do it anyway for not keeping his responsibilities. But again, the Philippian jailer's passion is not motivated by an objective uncertainty of the sort Kierkegaard discusses. While one could say that the jailer fears the escape of his prisoners and

consequently his death, it is not an issue of whether he will live or die. His death is objectively certain and will be assured either by his own hand or those who have authority over him. Neither do we see the embracing of an absolute paradox as the object of faith but simply a response to the religious teaching of Paul and Silas. The Philippian jailer's response along with his family is to believe in Jesus as the messiah as the answer to what he must do to be saved.

The fourth and final case of individuals responding to the gospel with belief is found in Acts 17:22-34. This case involves St. Paul preaching to a group of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers who are part of an organization known as the Areopagus. The context tells us that the members of the Areopagus wanted to know about St. Paul's teaching on the resurrection (Acts 17:18) The passage of concern is as follows:

> And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if prhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising

> Him from the dead." Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, We will hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

As in the previous cases we find a person or persons responding to a presentation of the gospel. In this instance, however, the writer of Acts tells us about some who did not become believers. There were those who "sneered" and those who politely dismissed St. Paul while promising to hear him again. But there were those who responded positively to his message and became believers.

There is no evidence in this passage that the members of the Areopagus are being compelled to consider an objective uncertainty so as to catalyze their passion and subjectivity. Now it might be argued, as in the other cases, that this is not needed since these individuals already participate in religiousness A by virtue of their pagan belief. That is, they already have concern for an eternal happiness because they are religious worshippers of a sort. Kierkegaard could say that they are religiously advanced in a certain sense. Kierkegaard could say that St. Paul's sermon in this passage serves to make religiousness B believers out of those who are already religiousness A believers. But to achieve this end St. Paul should have explained the manner in which belief in Jesus involves an absolute paradox. However, according to the passage, the reason men should repent is that the world will be judged through Christ. The proof of this is given by God Himself because He raised Christ from the dead (verse 31).

In each of these cases we see that the common element of the conversions

involves a response to some basic teaching or preaching with regard to the essentials of the gospel. The circumstances of the teaching and preaching vary greatly and involve individuals fom Hebrew culture as in Acts Two and Eight and Greek culture as in Acts Sixteen and Seventeen. The levels of passion range from apparently none in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch to a more moderate passion of those who are "pierced to heart" in Acts Two to the great passion of the Philippian jailer who is about to take his own life. But whatever passion is evident in the lives of the individuals in these cases it does not seem to arise from a consideration of an objective uncertainty of the kind Kierkegaard discusses. If Kierkegaard views passion as preparatory or as a necessary disposition for belief he may well be right. What he seems to be wrong about is that passion, as he conceives of it, arises because of an objective uncertainty. If passion is a necessary condition for faith, these cases show passion arising from sources other than the objective uncertainties Kierkegaard has in mind. Even if we allow that those who are converted in each case is a participant in the religiousness A kind of faith, there is nothing which suggests that part of the content of the preaching and teaching presents Jesus as an absolute paradox. On the other hand, Jesus is always said to be crucified and raised from the dead and it is these facts that make him the worthy object of faith.

In examining these cases of conversion to Christianity, I have done what Kierkegaard should have done if he wants to show his readers that his version of Christianity reflects the Christianity of the New Testament. If Kierkegaard wants to return to New Testament Christianity he must show

how cases like these fit his pistological map. Through selected cases I have tried to show how his pistology is disrupted at certain crucial points. Since Kierkegaard does not give us the details of how his pistology fits cases like those I cite, one is left wondering if he has not imposed a pistological map on the New Testament rather than deriving his map from the New Testament.

I do not deny that some other conversion cases from in or out of the New Testament might be interpreted in a way that matches Kierkegaard's prescribed path to faith. But the structure of his exclusivist fideism must make every case fit this pattern if his pistology is to be viable. Kierkegaard's claims about what it takes to be a genuine believer requires that all cases of conversion to Christianity match his exclusivist fideism if faith is to be viable. I have examined four cases which I contend vary significantly from the pattern of faith Kierkegaard insists on. They represent cases of conversion which his thesis does not appear to cover. If this is true, the exclusivity of the path to faith he insists on is suspect because these cases operate as clear counter-examples to his pistology.

Part III

In the third chapter I complained that Kierkegaard's rejection of reasoning in religion was not adequately supported. However, this does not prove the contrary, that reasoning is a legitimate part of faith. It only shows that Kierkegaard's arguments per se for rejecting a connection between faith and objective reasoning are failures. There may well be other arguments which show that objective reasoning has no part in religion. In this section I elucidate a version of rationality which includes the concerns of religion. It

should be clear that when I affirm that faith is rational I mean that a believer can give reasons for his faith. But I do not mean reasons such as, "I became a believer because I grew up in a religious home" or "my faith is the result of a profound religious experience in which I heard God speak to me." I have in mind the sort of reasons loosely connected to natural theology, reasons which rise out of arguments.

I take it that a Christian believer is not violating the command of scripture if he offers a rational defense of his faith, that he is not doing something impious or pretentious. In fact, there is possible scriptural support for the case of the Christian theist who gives reasons for his faith to the unbeliever. It says in 1 Peter 3:15:

> ..... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

The context surrounding this passage tells us that those to whom the believer makes his "defense" (apologia) is the unbeliever and even the hostile unbeliever. St. Peter tells his readers in verse 16 to keep their consciences clear so that those who slander and revile them may be put to shame. In verse 13 he says no one can harm them if they are zealous for what is good and in verse 14 that they are blessed if they suffer for the sake of righteousness. The point is that this passage instructs believers to make a defense to unbelievers by giving an account of the hope that is in them.

Admittedly, making a defense does not strictly mean giving reasons and evidence for faith. For instance, there are three New Testament cases where St. Paul offers defenses to unbelievers that do not involve natural theology or

the sort of reason giving I am concerned with. In Acts 22 St. Paul defends his preaching to a group of Hebrew religious leaders, in Acts 24 he makes a defense that he has done nothing to break the law before the Roman governor Felix, and in Acts 26 he defends his preaching activities to King Agrippa. While St. Paul does defend the resurrection of Jesus in Acts 22 and 24 he does not do so on historical or eye-witness grounds. He simply finds it incredible that the members of the audience have trouble believing in the resurrection given their religious heritage and their shared religious convictions.

But the word for defense in the above passage is apologia, from which the English word apologetic is derived, and has as its most common meaning, to give reasons, evidence or arguments in support of some claim. This is important because other English translations of the Bible render this passage differently. For example, the Jerusalem Bible version of the above passage reads, "... always have your answer ready for people who ask the reason for the hope you all have." Interpreted in this manner the passage does not explicitly endorse using reasons connected to natural theology to defend one's faith. The "reason for the hope that you all have" may be some segment of the Christian revelation such as God's love for us or the hope of eternal life.

While the Bible gives us no clear cases of someone actually defending Christianity in the sense of offering reasons, evidence or arguments it does not forbid this activity. If it turns out that my understanding of apologia is incorrect, the most that can be said against giving reasons for faith which involve natural theology is that the Bible is silent. But if my understanding

of apologia is correct I have shown a biblical precedent in 1 Peter 3:15 which seems to encourage the use of natural theology (or something analogous to it) in defending one's faith.

In claiming that belief in God is rational I leave myself open to a serious objection since it is the considered opinion of many philosophers that natural theology is no longer a viable enterprise. The fact that the traditional proofs are inadequate in a philosophical as well as religious sense makes my claim suspect. But I hope to show that the rationality of faith does not depend on the philosophical or religious adequacy of traditional proof-making. And I hope to do so apart from the kind of move Plantinga makes when he treats belief in God as an unquestioned properly basic belief.

Some may object that the enterprise of showing faith to be rational involves constructing a God-hypothesis. The objection is that God's existence cannot be viewed as hypothetical and also have the biblical God as the deity of a living religion. But God's existence is not hypothetical to the believer in his person. Hypotheses are most often used by those who continue to inquire about the truth of some proposition. The proposition that God exists is not a hypothesis for a believer since he is already convinced that God exists. The only time the notion of a God-hypothesis is applicable for a believer is an ad hoc form as he encounters unbelievers who may be inquiring about the truth of the proposition God exists. The believer may allow for this conception as a convenient way to formulate arguments for the unbeliever's consideration, but only in the short term. If rational inquiry into the existence of God involves one in a God-hypothesis, it is only as a temporary convention which creates the circumstances whereby a believer can engage an unbeliever. These

temporary circumstances constitute an honest attempt to meet the unbeliever on his own grounds but do no violence to the God of religion.

Kierkegaard, of course, is suspicious of any attempt to offer positive arguments in favor of God's existence. He worries that natural theologians form a speculative conception of God that bears no resemblance to the God of a living faith. For him, there is a necessary disjunct between the God of natural theology and the God of the Bible. In the classical formulation of this problem, He is the God of the philosophers rather than the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus. But as Peter Geach argues, it does not follow "that a God whose existence and attributes were established by natural theology would not really be the same God as the true and living God of religious belief, that natural theology of its very nature lays hold of the wrong God, an abstract God".[237] Geach offers the following example to illustrate this point:

> Suppose that Sherlock Holmes established from his data both the existence of a murderer-i.e. that the case actually is one of murder-and some of the murderer's characteristics. Suppose the police later on arrested a man with those characteristics and found confirmatory proofs of his guilt: it would occur to nobody,.....,to distinguish between the abstract murderer of Sherlock Holmes's deductions and the real live murderer raging in his cell; surely nobody would wish to deny this plain statement of the case, that Holmes had abstract knowledge relating to a concrete individual.[238]

Geach's point is well taken. There is no compelling reason to think that the God discovered in natural theology is necessarily different from the God worshipped by the members of monotheistic religions. Nor does it follow that men and women are indifferent to the God of natural theology especially

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[237]Peter Geach, God and the Soul (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969), 113.
[238]Ibid.

if He turns out to the same God of faith. If it does not follow that believers are indifferent to the God of natural theology then this part of Kierkegaard's attack on objective knowlege in religion is ineffectual.

There are natural examples of philosophers who are usually taken to be men of faith, who still thought it worthwhile to argue for the existence of God.[239] Kierkegaard's view is not obviously true especially when we think of such important thinkers as Anselm and Aquinas. In modern times Joseph Butler, Peter Geach and Richard Swinburne are examples of philosophers who hold no dialectical tension between faith and reason. If Kierkegaard's objection is directed toward the person who mistakenly thinks proofs and evidence are commensurate with faith, then it is difficult to figure out who his targets are. Even such well-known natural theologians as those mentioned above did and do not think that when an unbeliever encounters proofs or evidence that he would, as a matter of course, set aside his unbelief and take up the banner of faith.

Is it reasonable to believe in God? Anthony Kenny insists that if the answer to this question is "yes", then it is because theism meets a certain criterion of rationality. After rejecting "propositions which are self-evident or fundamental" and "propositions which are evident to the senses or to memory" as meeting the criterion of a rationally defensible theism, Kenny claims that "propositions defensible by argument, inquiry and performance" are the only ones suitable to defending the rationality of theism.[240] Kenny expands his claim by saying that belief in God's existence "is justifiable and

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[239]Penelhum, God and Skepticism, 95.

[240]Anthony Kenny, Faith and Reason (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 25-45.

defensible if traditional natural theology is a possible discipline, that is to say, if the traditional activity of offering evidence for the existence of God and arguments against disproofs of the existence of God can be successfuly carried out".[241]

Now, Kenny admits that the theist does not have to successfuly defend his beliefs to every challenger. As he notes, this is an excessively severe requirement for rationality.[242] It is possible that the unbeliever may only prove himself to be obstinate or pig-headed in rejecting the rationality of the believer's defense of theism. But Kenny does say that the believer must be capable of defending theism to those who are likely to challenge his beliefs. The believer cannot think that theism is rationally exonerated because the theist convinces a group of school children that it is reasonable to believe in God. The believer must make his case before the relatively sophisticated unbeliever.

But Kenny's claim that the believer is not required to successfully defend his belief to every challenger raises an interesting problem for the person who tries to show that natural theology is a possible discipline. Has not the trouble with natural theology usually arisen because the unbeliever will not accept its conclusions? What if what makes natural theology a purportedly impossible discipline is the unbeliever's refusal to accept the its results? Could not the person who thinks natural theology is a legitimate activity charge the unbeliever with being overly obstinate or unjustifiably stubborn in his refual to assent to the rationality of belief in God? According to Kenny, this seems

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[241] Ibid. 64

[242] Ibid., 37.

entirely possible. So, the fact that an unbeliever does not agree with the conclusions of arguments brought forth by natural theologians is not a strong enough reason to reject natural theology as a legitimate discipline. The unbeliever does not hold all the cards in deciding whether natural theology is a possible discipline or not.

Kenny gives us a useful methodology to determine whether our beliefs generally and theism specifically, are rational. I think we can in principle accept Kenny's requirement for belief in God being a rational belief though Kenny himself seems to doubt that this requirement can be met. Once accepted we can advance a way of showing the rationality of belief in God. But Kenny's methodology does not tell us about the nature of rationality itself. It seems, then, that a more fundamental problem lies before us in determining the nature of rationality. While we accept Kenny's criterion of the rational defense of theism we do so in light of a specific understanding of rationality.

The traditional theory of rationality in western philosophy reached its zenith in the Enlightenment where reason was seen as autonomous. Rationality was viewed as a neutral instrument which worked by sifting facts and turning up true conclusions. The view was that rationality is an idealized, independent, unquestioned measuring rod of all truth. With regard to religion traditional rationality performs for faith by devising proofs which turn up God. Descartes, for example, thought mathematics was the way to prove God's existence. This proved to be problematic because it looks as though God is served up by rationality in the same way Grandmother

serves up ham at Thanksgiving. Like the ham, God is put on display for all to admire. But a God served up by this kind of rationality has neither the taste nor the pleasent aroma of Grandmother's ham.

Kant's devastating attacks on the traditional proofs showed that belief in God did not meet the assumed standards of rationality. It was thought that since religious belief could not be rational its grounding must lie elsewhere. Kant thought morality was the way. But thinkers like Hamann attacked the sovreignty of reason by trying to show that reason is not a disinterested power of contemplation.[243] Hamann challenged the Enlightenment impulse to give sovreign authority to the power and prestige of reason and the assumption that it could deliver knowledge that is apodicticly certain. Hamann believed Enlightenment philosophers proved to be over-confident with their models of rationality. Ultimately they were confronted with a painful dilemma: either they must choose a rational skepticism or an irrational fideism.[244]

The rationality/irrationality dichotomy is an example of the sort of dilemma which repeatedly appears in the form of a philosophical puzzle. The usual remedy for such dilemmas is to find an effective means to ride between the horns the dilemma presents. One means of resolving this problem is to follow R.T. Herbert's claim that faith is neither rational nor irrational, but that it is non-rational. Herbert thinks people do not come to believe in God by a consideration of a body of evidence at all. As Herbert explains it, the person who thinks faith is rational deems the evidence to be

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[243]Frederick Beiser, The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 9

[244]Ibid., 3.

sufficient for faith while the person who deems the evidence to be insufficient thinks faith is irrational. But according to Herbert, people come to believe because belief befalls them in the way one falls in love or comes down with a disease. Herbert's views place him in good theological company as we can find views analogous to his own in such thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Kierkegaard. As with these notable thinkers, Herbert's explanation of how people come to believe is an example of a way to protect the virtue of faith.

Herbert's view has a certain plausibility and represents a pistology that resolves the age old problem of faith's rationality versus its irrationality. But I have said that I want to show how I believe faith is rational or at least show a way in which rationality is important for faith. I will proceed with this purpose in two ways. First, I will discuss an alternative way of viewing rationality as opposed to the traditional version which seems to still infect our thinking. Secondly, I will discuss the place rationality fits into the general scheme of coming to believe while being mindful of the need to protect the virtue of faith. Specifically, I am interested in Aquinas' insights on this matter. In the coming discussion, Aquinas is the foil to Kierkegaard's pitology but not in the usual way we think.

Louis Pojman suggests that we breakdown the dichotomy of rationality and irrationality into a problem of perspectives. He says the issues revolving around the subject of rationality have produced conditions called non-perspectivist and hard-perspectivist treatments of rationality. Once again we have a dilemma that invites philosophical treatment. The non-perspectivist view of rationality has been handed down in the philosophical tradition of

Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Clifford and Chisholm. Perhaps W.K. Clifford's formula, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence" is the best known example of the non-perspectivist view of rationality.[245] Pojman notes that we often treat rationality as a "clear-cut decision-making process, similar to the one used in mathematics and empirical science when we arrive at justified belief or truth".[246] This understanding of rationality is non-perspectivist because it allegedly is applicable to all human beings everywhere. It is a universalist construction of reason.

Postcritical philosophy reacted to the non-perspectivist view of rationality with a conception of rationality that Pojman calls hard-perspectivism. This is the view that worldviews are strictly discontinuous and that it is impossible to bridge the gaps that exist between them. Hard-perspectivism provides a tempting and convenient route of escape for the theist because he can argue against the non-perspectival atheist that reason is only significant in an intramural sense. Such a view supports the claim that religion has its own internal rationality or language game which immunizes it against the critique of the non-perspectival unbeliever. The hard-perspectivist can readily affirm the rationality of belief in God because he need not fear the critique of the non-perspectival atheist.

Many atheists likely hope for a non-perspectivist version of rationality or a rationality that is entirely intermural to prevent this kind of escape for the

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[245] Louis Pojman, "Can Religious Belief Be Rational?" in Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, ed. Louis Pojman (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987), 483.
[246] Ibid.

theist. Fideists like D.Z. Phillips urge a hard-perspectivism in their view of rationality. As the non-perpectival atheist launches a series of arguments against the rationality of theism, the hard-perspectival theist (fideist) fends him off by repeatedly pointing out that the atheist's standards of reason are not applicable to the claims of religion. The hard-perspectival theist retreats to the citadel of faith and watches contentedly while his opponents' missiles splash harmlessly into the moat.

On the other hand, the hard-perspectival theist might enjoy a happy relationship with a hard-perspectival atheist since both recognize that their respective views of rationality and consequently, their worldviews are discontinuous. For example, a scientist who happens to be an atheist and a theist are perhaps mutually happy to know that religion cannot interfere with the progress of science and that science does not impinge on the claims of faith. In this case, there is a bilateral agreement of 'hands off!" with regard to each other's discipline.

The hard-perspectivist viewpoint is tempting and indeed, many fideists, especially of the Wittgensteinian stripe, have adopted this view of rationality to protect the plausibility of religious belief. Under this scheme of rationality, when the believer is asked, "Is belief in God rational"? he can readily say "yes" because his hard-perspectivism affords an intramural conception of rationality. Within the confines of his own worldview and standards of rationality he can give an affirmative answer to our question. However, in my view, the non-perspectivist/hard-perspectivist dichotomy is no better than the rational/irrational one. It leaves me thoroughly unsatisfied because

it seems that all we are left with is something like Karl Barth's claim that "belief can only preach to unbelief". My lack of satisfaction with what I think amounts to the tribalism of the hard-perspectivist view parallels that of unbelievers (or believers with no sympathies for reasoning in religion) who reject the religious value of proofs.

One of the ways the hard-perspectivist/non-perspectivist dichotomy of rationality makes itself evident is the overly simple claim that the question of faith's rationality is only of academic interest because believers do not need proofs since they already have their faith and unbelievers do not accept the possibility of any religious proofs. This impasse allegedly points out the futility of any serious interest in an understanding of faith that is rationally intermural. But I do not think the problem divides as neatly as this.

Where can we find a promising description if neither non-perspectivism nor hard-perspectivism describe the way rationality actually functions for human beings? I believe it comes by modifying our view of rationality to one of soft-perspectivism. Soft-perspectivism takes into account the differences of worldviews and the background beliefs of theists and atheists. For instance, a theist may have grown up in a devoutly religious home while the atheist may have had no religious training whatsoever. There is a disparity of backgrounds in their lives make the worldviews of the theist and atheist discontinuous. But perhaps, the atheist and theist are both trained psychologists. This means they have had similar educational backgrounds and are familiar with the technical terminology and the therapies psychology provides. They belong to the same professional societies and may have even teamed up on an important research project. In this case it looks as though

the atheist and the theist have an area of continuity between their respective worldviews. Hence, for the soft-perspectivist, worldviews are not strictly discontinuous as in the hard-perspectivist view, nor are they strictly continuous as in the non-perspectivist view of rationality.

A soft-perspectivist believes that rationality has intramural as well as intermural features. This is important because if we are going to say that belief in God is rational in keeping with Kenny's criterion for rationality, then the intermural aspects of rationality must be maintained (though not necessarily in a non-perspectivist sense). Otherwise it will be impossible to defend theism to those who are likely to challenge it by Kenny's criterion. If belief in God is rational it does not fall into the predicament of simple demonstration which is behind the non-perspectivist understanding of rationality.

The hard-perspectivist view of rationality cannot be the sense in which theism is defensible, i.e. to defend theism by saying that the worldviews of the theist and atheist are absolutely discontinuous. It is clear that hard-perspectivist rationality must be rejected if we are to defend theism by argument and inquiry in the sense that Kenny has in mind. But rejecting hard-perspectivism does not compel us to embrace non-perspectivist rationality. Indeed non-perspectivism is suspect because it does not take into account the variety of background beliefs human beings hold.

What seems important at this point is to find a way to meet Kenny's criterion for the rational justification for theism. A soft perspectivist account of rationality does not violate what Kenny requires nor does it undercut the

legitimacy of natural theology. With this in mind, I think we can look to a passage in Aquinas which will show us how Kenny's criterion for the rational justification of theism can be met which does not compel the natural theologian to convince every challenger nor see natural theology as demonstrations of God's existence in a non-perspectivist sense.

In the passage I have in mind Aquinas says that two things are requisite for faith. First, coming to believe requires that the things of faith must be proposed to human beings and, secondly, coming to believe requires the assent of the candidate-believer of the things that are proposed to him.[247] According to Aquinas, the matter of proposing the things of faith to people comes via the revelation of God since the things of faith are beyond human reason. Aquinas goes on to say that the matter of assent is driven by a twofold cause, either as an external inducement as in a miracle or by being persuaded by someone to embrace the faith as in preaching. Aquinas continues his discussion by noting a second necessary cause of faith which he says is the assent of the believer. Aquinas thinks the assent of faith, whether the person assents by external inducement or persuasion, is necessary but not sufficient to bring about faith. The reason such requirements or only necessary, but not sufficient, is that the candidate-believer can respond with belief or unbelief. As Aquinas says, "Neither of these is a sufficient cause, since of those who see the same miracle, or hear the same sermon, some believe, and some do not".[248]

How, then, do people finally become believers if the requisites of faith so

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[247] St. Thomas Aquinas, S.T., Part II of Second Part, Q. 6. Art. 1.
[248] Ibid.

far noted are necessary but not sufficient causes of belief? What is the sufficient cause of faith? In answer to these questions, Aquinas says, ".... we must assert another interior cause, which moves man inwardly to assent to matters of faith".[249] He observes that of those who hear the same sermon or observe the same miracle, some become believers and some do not and infers that some other cause must be counted as sufficient to bring about belief.

Aquinas notes that the Pelagians held the view that the interior cause of a person's belief was nothing other than his free choice. According to Aquinas' interpretation of the Pelagians, the "beginning of faith is from ourselves, in so far, as namely, it is in our power to be ready to assent to things which are of faith, but that the consummation of faith is from God, Who proposes to us the things we have to believe".[250] But Aquinas thinks this view must be false because faith requires assent to matters which are above human nature. To assent to faith means that ".... this must exist in him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly, ..." For Aquinas a divine miracle of the interior kind is the only sufficient cause of faith. "Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace".[251] Aquinas thinks a divinely caused, interior working is the only sufficient cause of faith because those things which are of faith surpass human reason. In this passage Aquinas says that the person who assents to faith is raised above his nature. For Aquinas, coming to believe is to share in the divine life. This is why the only sufficient cause for a person to be raised

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[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.

to the level of the divine is God's interior working in the believer. God Himself must be the sufficient cause of belief since a true cause cannot make something what it is not. In Aquinas' view, a cause must have within itself those things it transfers to its effects. Since human beings do not have the capacity to raise themselves to the level of the divine they cannot come to believe of their own accord. God must work miraculously in the life of the believer to realize this end.

With regard to the first necessary cause of faith (that the things of faith should be proposed to man), Aquinas says reasons can show the unbeliever that what faith asks a person to believe is not impossible by removing obstacles the unbeliever has erected. Since reasons do not make faith seen they do not diminish the merit of faith. Of great interest in this passage is Aquinas' claim that reasons do not function as demonstrations but that they support the authority of faith. He writes:

> The reasons which are brought forward in support of the authority of faith, are not demonstrations which can bring intellectual vision to the human intellect, and therefore they do not cease to be unseen. But they remove obstacles to faith, by showing that what faith proposes is not impossible. Hence such reasons do not diminish the merit or measure of faith.[252]

In this passage it looks as though Aquinas rejects the notion that the existence of God can be demonstrated. Instead, he opts for a position which sees reasons as working to clear the path for the proposals of faith. Reasons are brought forward to support faith in the sense that they remove whatever obstacles to faith the unbeliever has erected. When Aquinas says reasons are brought forth to support the authority of faith, he recognizes that faith is the only appropriate attitude for relating to divinity. He has in mind the person

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[252] Ibid., Part II of Second Part, Q. 2. Art. 10.

who judges faith's proposals to be too difficult to believe. Aquinas' goal is to intercept the unbeliever who thinks he has sufficient reasons, arguments or other intellectual obstacles which block the assent to faith. Aquinas' sense of reason-giving is one in which reasons and arguments function to show that the elements of the Christian faith are rationally tenable. For Aquinas, reasons are given as preambles to faith, not demonstrations of Christianity's truth.[253]

Aquinas' modest claim in the above passage raises some interesting possibilities for natural theology. If natural theology is tied to "obstacle removing" it avoids the quagmire of claiming that God's existence is subject to demonstration. Viewing faith as rational in the sense of an activity which attempts to remove the obstacles to faith allows us to see the traditional proofs in a different light. Even in that renowned section of the Summa where Aquinas sets forth the traditional five ways of proving God's existence, the proofs themselves are situated between Aquinas' consideration and reply to two objections to God's existence.[254] With the proofs Aquinas seeks to engage unbelievers who formulate arguments against the existence of God.

Importantly, natural theology does not fail because its arguments are implausible or incoherent. Rather, traditional natural theology fails because it does not accomplish what it sets out to do, viz. to demonstrate the existence of God. But what if the so-called traditional purpose of natural theology is modified from one of demonstration to one of removing the obstacles to faith, as Aquinas suggests? In this scheme of things, it is entirely appropriate

[253]Ibid., Part I, Q. 2. Art. 2.
[254]Ibid., Part I, Q. 2. Art. 3.

for the believer to cite arguments from natural theology if the unbeliever has erected counter arguments which are used by him to resist faith. We will examine some cases of this kind of interchange between the believer and the unbeliever in Part IV.

The distinctions Aquinas makes between necessary and sufficient causes of belief helps us to see the role reasons can have in the life of the religious person. When a believer proposes the Christian faith to an unbeliever, reasons can work to remove the unbeliever's doubts about the proposal if he has such doubts. But someone might object that Aquinas' distinction between necessary and sufficient causes of belief is fatuous if the only sufficient cause of faith is God's interior working in the believer. If coming to believe is ultimately a matter of a divine inworking, what necessary roles do proposing and assenting to the gospel play? And if these "necessary" causes are not really necessary, then giving reasons and arguments for faith has no role to play either, since the interior working of God overpowers whatever obstacles to faith the believer had formerly erected.

Part of the problem, of course, is Aquinas' repeated use of the term "causes" in relationship to faith. However, if we can get past the notion of causation and all of the philosophical problems that are conjured up by its use, I think we can still see something promising in Aquinas' claim and answer the potential objection to necessary and sufficient causes of faith. To move past these difficulties requires us to recast Aquinas' necessary causes of faith as the necessary occasions in which an external inducement (a miracle) or being persuaded by preaching to the gospel must be presented before the

interior working of God can bring the candidate-believer to faith.

For example, if we accept Aquinas' claim that the only sufficient cause of faith is God's interior working, then when Moses hears the voice coming from the burning but unconsumed bush in the desert, this is not the cause of his conviction that it is the God of his fathers speaking to him. That conviction requires the miracle of God's inward movement of grace. The same is true of the three-thousand people who respond to Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. As with Moses, their faith is not directly brought about by Peter's preaching but it arises because God moves them inwardly by grace. In both cases, Aquinas would say that the burning but unconsumed bush and the Pentecost sermon were necessary but not sufficient causes of the assent of faith. But in my modification of Aquinas' terminology I want to say that what makes Moses' experience and Peter's sermon necessary for faith is that they represent the occasion in which God's interior moving is made possible. They serve as what is proposed to human beings with regard to what must be believed in faith. Now, if we have unbelievers who maintain certain reasons or arguments for rejecting the proposals of faith, the need for giving reasons for faith becomes apparent. Of course, if the unbeliever refuses to have these barriers removed then the persuasion of preaching and external miracles are ineffectual as well.

My interest in Aquinas' description of how people come to believe should now be apparent. I think his pistology serves as an excellent foil for the pattern of faith that we have examined and critiqued in Kierkegaard. It is a plausible counter-example to how someone comes to believe using reasons

for faith in a positive sense. But if we lay Kierkegaard's pattern of belief beside the one Aquinas describes here, there is one striking similarity. What Aquinas calls the interior cause or God moving man inwardly by grace is conceptually parallel to Kierkegaard's notion of the divine condition. For both Kierkegaard and Aquinas the interior working of God seems to be the only sufficient cause of faith. So far, nothing I have said with regard to the reasons offered in support of faith violates what Aquinas and Kierkegaard think is sufficient for faith. Since such reasons are preambulatory in nature and they precede even the necessary conditions of faith they do not undermine the view that the sufficient cause of faith is God's interior moving.

However, there are also some obvious dis-similarities between Kierkegaard's path to faith and the one Aquinas describes. When we consider the first step for the candidate-believer, Kierkegaard says it takes the form of an encounter with an objective uncertainty and the candidate-believer must embrace it with the passion of the infinite. The inherent ambiguity of the objective uncertainty creates passion because the candidate-believer struggles to make certain what is by nature, uncertain. This passion brings about the right disposition for religious belief because it moves the candidate-believer toward subjective certainty and ultimately to religiousness B. The first step on the path to faith for Kierkegaard works negatively by showing that the objective way cannot generate the certainty he needs. And for Kierkegaard, this step must occur for every candidate-believer.

But according to Aquinas, the first step to faith for <u>some</u> (vis a vis all)

candidate-believers involves reasons brought forth in support of faith's authority in a positive fashion. In terms of content, these reasons may be the sort of reasons that Kierkegaard discusses in his explication of objective uncertainty. Aquinas might bring forth reasons to support faith that include the possibility that the world was created by God or the possibility that humans are immortal. Aquinas would not worry whether we can be certain about what Kierkegaard thinks is objectively uncertain since Aquinas does not see reasons as demonstrations but as being brought forth in support of faith's authority. Aquinas gives us a paradigm of how some people might have their religious disposition properly attuned in a positive way. Aquinas does not seek to create passion and drive the candidate-believer toward subjectivity with the reasons for faith he has in mind, but he views them as ways to remove whatever obstacles to faith the candidate-believer may have erected. For Aquinas, reasons work to show that what faith proposes is possible not demonstrate the truth of Christianity. He is not bothered by the threat of Kierkegaard's objective uncertainies since Aquinas only needs reasons to underpin faith's authority not reasons of demonstration.

Further, Aquinas is not committed to the view that a repertoire of reasons is needed to dismantle the obstacles to faith for all candidate-believers. This is so because not all candidate-believers have erected reasons blocking the assent to faith. Some are able to accept what faith proposes to them without the preambulatory reasons Aquinas discusses. In other words, not all candidate-believers need a change of disposition to accept what the gospel proposes. They might be like the conversion cases from the New Testament we examined. None of those believers need the kind of reasons

Aquinas has in mind. But, of course, they were unacquainted with the powerful critiques of theistic belief brought about by modern thinkers like Hume, Russell, Flew and Nielsen.

The notion that a believer can support faith's authority with reasons and potentially remove the obstacles to faith erected by the unbeliever seems to carry a certain naivete with it. Supporting faith's authority with reasons in an attempt to answer the unbeliever assumes the obstacles to faith he has erected are the real reasons he is not a believer. But human beings often have public and private reasons for maintaining certain views. If the believer involves himself in the activity of obstacle removing he must do so without naively assuming that the unbeliever does not have hidden motives driving his unbelief. If the unbeliever remains unsatisfied with the reasons for faith the believer gives him this may reveal to the believer that the unbeliever's lack of faith rests with reasons he keeps to himself and not the public reasons he espouses. For example, the unbeliever's lack of faith may antedate the public reasons which purportedly underpin his lack of faith. But at the outset of attempting to remove an unbeliever's obstacles to faith, the best the believer can do is assume that the public reasons offered by an unbeliever are given in good faith, though the believer might discover otherwise.

Defending theism for the purpose of removing roadblocks to faith (as Aquinas outlines it) has several advantages in showing how faith is rational. First, it does not involve the believer in Kierkegaard's approximation-process since the reasons brought forth to support faith do not go beyond their purpose of being preambles for faith. The primary purpose of these reasons is

not to directly turn unbelievers into believers. Secondly, faith is not strictly dependent on these preambulatory reasons since in some cases they may not need to be offered at all. Thirdly, reasons are offered to the unbeliever prior to the actual assent to faith, which is exactly what we should expect of any decent natural theology. That is, reasons are given in a prospective manner rather than in a retrospective one. Fourthly, if the kind of reasons Aquinas wants to bring forward to support faith has some connection to natural theology, then natural theology is much more than an overworked academic exercise. There is a real, practical interest in doing what Aquinas thinks can be done to support faith with reasons that have the potential to remove whatever barriers the unbeliever has erected to resist faith. Fifthly, the way in which Aquinas wants to bring in reasons to support faith's authority does not weaken faith's virtue because such reasons are outside the causes (occasions) of faith, both necessary and sufficient. Sixthly, Aquinas' account of coming to believe implies that Kierkegaard cannot exclude reason as working in a positive way for faith. If Aquinas' account is plausible, it now looks as though Kierkegaard's vehement rejection of reasons as having a positve role in coming to believe no longer applies.

Part IV

Finally, I want to set out some examples of circumstances where reasons of the kind discussed here can be brought forth to support the authority of faith. Just as there are a variety of non-demonstrative reasons that can be brought forward to support faith's authority, there are a variety of

circumstances presented to the believer in which he attempts to remove the unbeliever's obstacles to faith.

Now, I assume the dispute between theists and atheists is not misconceived nor contrived but that there is a real debate here. In other words, atheists and theists are quite clear about what the other believes. They are not like the proverbial "ships passing in the night". To deny the substance of this debate makes hash of the opposing claims theists and atheists make about the existence of God and related religious claims. The source of their dispute is more likely found in the fact that both atheists and Christian theists maintain deeply held and well thought out convictions. I also assume that atheists and theists are people of (generally) good conscience who profoundly disagree about the existence of God and the tenets of religion. If this is true then there exists a genuine philosophical problem. Could a discussion between an unbeliever and a believer even take place without the mutual acceptance of a common meeting ground of terms, arguments and reasoning?

For some influential unbelievers it is impossible to believe in God or accept the Christian revelation as true because it is positively irrational to do so. Kai Nielsen, for example, sets the tone for this view when he claims that if people have a good scientific and philosophical education they should come to see that it is irrational to believe in God and that such a belief should be given up.[255] He then offers a series of arguments in an attempt to make his case. He goes on to say that he rejects what he calls the standard view that

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[255]J.P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen Does God Exist? (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1990), 48.

reason simply cannot decide these matters.[256] For Nielsen and other atheists, e.g. Flew, Mackie, Parsons, Scriven et. al., reason can resolve this problem and it clearly tells us that belief in God should is an irrational belief. Reason can and has decided the matter on the side of atheism, according to them. Such claims can be met by theists who will object that they have passably good scientific and philosophical educations and yet continue to hold their belief in God.

In a collection of essays entitled Why I am Not a Christian, Bertrand Russell as well gives us a pardigm case in setting the stage for the debate between the believer and the unbeliever. Russell covers a wide range of topics central to the philosophy of religion and in each instance presents reasons which he thinks supports his rejection of Christianity. But at least Russell is even-handed in his treatment of religion. He says, "I think all the great religions of the world..... both untrue and harmful".[257] Now, Russell's claims afford the believer an excellent opportunity to bring in reasons to remove the obstacles to faith support faith's authority. While such reasons may prove ineffectual against the intransience of Russell's unbelief, this may not be true for the inquisitive bystander or the person who has examined Russell's claims and is unsettled by them.

The kinds of obstacles an unbeliever has erected to block faith could be philosophical or doctrinal in nature. Or, they might be a combination of both. For example, a philosophical obstacle to faith might take the form of the unbeliever seeing the world as a set of contingent, unrelated events,

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[256]Ibid., 49. In one essay, Nielsen demands that believers give good reasons for their faith, yet also claims that it is at the height of impiety to do so.

[257]Bertrand Russell, Why I am not a Christian (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), v.

exhibiting no ultimate purpose. This picture of the world as a background belief underpins the unbeliever's atheism or is cause for him to think there is no God. The believer, however, is likely to view the world as an integrated whole which reveals teleology and is conceivably evidence of a designer. The believer does not have to prove to the unbeliever that the world is an integrated whole exhibiting teleology and evidence of a designer. He only needs to show that such a view is conceivable. In doing so the believer shows that the things of faith are not impossible. In arguing for the teleology of the world the believer challenges the background beliefs an unbeliever espouses. The believer tries to show that the unbeliever may be too hasty in building his atheism on what he thinks are the certain non-telelogical features of the world. The unbeliever might turn to other reasons for rejecting faith, but the believer has at least removed this roadblock.

Another topic of the philosophical kind that may serve as an obstacle to faith for the atheist is the problem of evil. The atheist wants to argue that the extent of evil in the world is evidence (perhaps irrefutable evidence) that the Christian God does not exist. It seems the Christian theist has a stake in trying to show that the argument from evil has important contingencies and is not a knock down proof against the existence of God. In an attempt to mitigate the unbeliever's appeal to the problem of evil as a reason to remain an unbeliever, the believer may turn to a series of counter arguments.

A doctrinal obstacle to faith involves specific Christian doctrines the unbeliever finds impossible to believe. For him there might be an apparent incoherency in a core Christian belief that causes the unbeliever to reject the

possibility of faith. For example, he may find the Trinity absurd because he fails to see the logic how three persons can be one person. Or, the unbeliever may think the doctrine of the Incarnation defies all rational sensibility and, therefore, Christianity is to be rejected. The resurrection is another core Christian belief the unbeliever may not be able to swallow. For the unbeliever Christianity ought to be rejected because he "knows" dead men do not rise. He thinks Christianity is defeasible because core beliefs like the resurrection are plainly false. Perhaps his scientific commitments inform this judgment. It could be that such a doctrine is just too incredible or wildly implausible for him to believe it. Or, he might take the gospel stories which record the resurrection to be well crafted myths which try to convey an allegorical or spiritual meaning but are not stories about the actual resuscitation of a corpse.

How does the Christian theist respond to the unbeliever who might use some or all the of the above reasons to show that Christianity is defeasible on these grounds? What sorts of reasons can he bring forth to support faith in light of the unbeliever's concerns? The believer might say that the gospel writers serve as historical witnesses who present the resurrection as an event that occurred in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. They do not present their material in the form of a myth, fable or allegory. He might also argue that the presentation of the gospel writers does not appear to be a part of a conspiracy or a plot. The believer might ask on what basis the unbeliever rejects what is presented as fact by credible witnesses? Among the plethora of explanations offered for the resurrection, the Christian theist might argue that the one

presented by the gospel writers is the most plausible. It can be argued that their historical narratives offer a credible account of the resurrection and its surrounding events.

Perhaps the following personal experience will serve to make my point clearer. While I was a graduate student at the University of Calgary, on occasion I observed Hugo Meynell, a devout Catholic and professor in the religious studies department in exercised debate with Kai Nielsen, who was then a professor in the philosophy department and a committed atheist. They regularly engaged each other in the formal setting of a paper delivered at a symposium as well as informal discussions where philosophy of religion was the topic. To no one's surprise, neither of these proponents ever changed his views as the result of these debates. Nielsen did not become a believer as a result of Meynell's arguments nor did Meynell switch to atheism because Nielsen convinced him that religion was merely so much foolishness. Both were equally incorrigible in their respective views.

Kierkegaard would not necessarily see the debate between Meynell and Nielsen as pointless because it ends in an impasse. On the contrary, he might say this kind of debate demonstrates, in a negative way, how little objective reasoning can really accomplish and why it holds no great importance for faith. But Kierkegaard assumes that objective reasoning is valuable only if it has the resources to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. Kierkegaard thinks objective reasoning's inability to remove the uncertainty from its claims reduces its cash value to zero. For Kierkegaard, this forecloses any positive utility for objective reasoning and an accompanying natural theology.

But, as we have seen, objective reasoning need not live up to the standard of demonstration to be religiously valuable. Its value can be found in removing the unbeliever's obstacles to faith by bringing forth reasons which support faith's authority. Hence, in my estimation the kind of debate going on between Meynell and Nielsen is profitable beyond the limited scope Kierkegaard allows. Their debate seems to be a clear example of a setting where reasons are brought forth to support the authority of faith in the life of the believer, as Aquinas suggests. It is unfortunate that Kierkegaard's rejection of objective reasoning removes the topic of faith from the philosophical arena and sets it outside the normal traffic of rational discourse. This, I believe, is an unfortunate feature of his exclusivist fideism.

Just as people are sometimes quizzed about their moral and political beliefs (and expected to give an answer and even wish to answer) believers can expect to be quizzed about any religious beliefs they hold. A believer will have occasions to give reasons for his faith. This is especially important if the claims Aquinas makes have any merit. I can think of at least three kinds of circumstances where a believer can bring forth reasons in support of faith.

The first of these circumstances is outside the basic concern of removing obstacles to faith. It involves a retrospective picture of reason's involvement in religious belief. It is that giving reasons for faith provides certain intellectual satisfactions that can contribute to the believer's well-being. I say retrospective because the believer already has his faith when he considers the kinds of reasons and arguments that can be called forth to support faith. If faith provides a sense of security and well-being then having these

intellectual satisfactions simply advances the emotional security of the believer and reaffirms what he already believes. It tells him that his faith is not isolated but fits into his larger perspective of the world. While this circumstance is interesting and worth a full discussion in another setting it does not apply directly to the prospective concerns I have in removing whatever obstacles to faith the unbeliever has erected.

A second circumstance involves the believer and his encounter with the religious seeker who is perhaps on the verge of belief but has reservations about the truth of Christianity. Christianity has a certain appeal to him but he is not quite convinced. This person is not the enthusiastic opponent to Christianity, and, in fact, is nearly persuaded about the truth of its message. He might say something like, "I have met people who claim that Christianity is nothing more than a legend or a fable and I do not want to stake my life on fables. Are there good reasons to think that Christianity is true and not simply a fable or well-spun fairy tale"? How should a believer respond in such a question? For conscientious and intellectual reasons this person seeks answers to his questions and it seems entirely appropriate for a believer to give those reasons he has found to be intellectually satisfying.

A third circumstance in which a believer will find himself is in encounters with unbelievers whose academic training has convinced them that Christianity is defeasible. For the believer, the problem arises when an unbeliever uses philosophy, science, psychology or sociology, among other academic disciplines as a platform for his atheism. For example, I was once a student in a university biology class where the instructor emphatically told us

that his biological training demonstrated for him that there was no evidence to think there is a God. Now, this instructor did not mean, "Personally I believe in God but the science of biology is not a useful tool to support my belief". Nor did he mean, "Personally I do not believe in God but the science of biology is not a useful tool to support my unbelief." Quite clearly, this instructor meant, "Personally, I do not believe in God and the science of biology is a useful tool to support my disbelief in God's existence". For the instructor, the science of biology was an appropriate platform to undergird his atheism. According to him, the principles of biology demonstrate that God does not exist.

Now, the theist should not repeat the mistake of the atheistic biology teacher by declaring that biology is a science which supports his belief in God. Nevertheless, the theist has an interest in restraining the unbelieving biology instructor from proceeding with his atheism on these grounds. It seems the theist might want to object that it is one thing to teach what one deems to be a set of biological facts and quite another to extend this set of facts into a speculation about the non-existence of God. The theist might even be willing to admit that atheism is a thoroughly rational position to take but he should not allow that the science of biology provides this rationality.

A theist who thinks it is important to give reasons for belief does not fail to recognize an essential incommensurability between faith and reason. In giving reasons for faith a theist is not committed to the view that there is a direct transition from historical knowledge or speculative reasoning to a state of faith. Nor does he naively think that skeptics will be coerced into faith by

the reasons he gives. Hence, the theist's interest in giving reasons for faith is not to compel belief from atheists but in a modest way to remove some of the barriers to belief the skeptic has erected. Giving reasons for faith might work by changing the disposition of the skeptic such that he sees the possibility of faith where he might not have done so before. If this view is plausible then we have found a way to incorporate reason into the concerns of faith in a positive sense without undermining the virtue and authority of faith.

Summary

In this final chapter I have explored how one version of fideism, as opposed to Kierkegaard's version of fideism, might work. This exploration implies that I accept that the proper genus of faith is fideism. In general terms, fideism affirms the primacy and authority of faith in the life of the believer. Fideism also affirms that the doctrines of religion are believed by faith, not reason. In principle, I accept this notion as well. In affirming that faith's proper genus is fideism I have also rejected what I believe is Kierkegaard's exclusivist species for fideism. In its place I have claimed that inclusivist is the correct species for fideism.

In order to test the strength of my objection to Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism, I examined some cases from the New Testament of people becoming Christians. I view these as the most appropriate cases in light of Kierkegaard's claim that we must return to the Christianity of the New Testament. In examining these cases I found them to vary significantly from the exclusive path to faith Kierkegaard describes. This variance raises the suspicion that Kierkegaard falls far short of his desired goal to lead us back to

New Testament Christianity. Hence, his pistology amounts to a map that is superimposed on the landscape of faith even in the cases that should best reflect his views.

I am attracted to an inclusivist fideism primarily because I think it draws a more accurate pistological map than Kierkegaard's exclusivist fideism. Indeed, exclusivist fideism is in trouble from the outset since its demanded path to faith is not descriptive of the ways most ordinary believers come to belief. Exclusivist fideism is like being handed a treasure map that purportedly shows the location of a pirate's cache of gold only to find out that the map is bogus. This is not to say there is no treasure to be found, only that Kierkegaard's map probably does not lead you there.

Inclusivist fideism claims that we must give careful heed to the religious landscape if we are to draw accurate pistological maps. In rejecting the overall schematic of Kierkegaard's pistology I have also rejected his specific claim that objective reasoning is irrelevant to the concerns of faith. In allowing the landscape to determine the pistological map, inclusivist fideism accepts the possibility that some believers may describe their pilgrimmage to faith as supported by reason. I showed how a highly visible natural theologian, viz. Aquinas, incorporates reason into the concerns of faith. He does so not by having reasons as demonstrative of faith but by having reasons function as a way to remove the obstacles to faith. In the passages I cited reasons serve as the preambles for faith. Faith does not live or die by such reasons. Rather, they provide ways to engage unbelievers.

Aquinas' claim that reasons given to remove the obstacles to faith

certainly provides a way to meet Kenny's criterion for the rationality of theism. Most importantly, it does so without doing violence to the virtue of belief. As before, I gave attention to some cases I think focus on the kinds of circumstances in which a believer might bring forth reasons to remove the variety of obstacles an unbeliever may have erected against faith.

Kierkegaard's strengths are his concerns about the passion and commitment faith requires and he gives a compelling argument about how a lukewarm faith is to be revitalized by believers. Believers and unbelievers alike are disturbed when they see an individual who says he wants to be counted among the faithful but lacks an accompanying passion and commitment. Most often, unbelievers are quick to point to the hypocrisy that resides in such an individual and shamefaced believers are forced to concur. But Kierkegaard's anxieties have lead him to chart a course to faith that is outside the experience of most genuine believers and I have called his approach exclusivist fideism.

In opposition to Kierkegaard's demanded path to faith, but not his concerns, I have tried to say that inclusivist fideism has many important advantages over his exclusivist fideism. That inclusivist fideism, vis a vis the exclusivist fideism of Kierkegaard, can incorporate a variety of accounts of faith into its pistology is among its useful achievements. While I believe that much of faith's nature can be captured by a fideistic description, I do not believe it can be done in the exclusivist fideism Kierkegaard requires.

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