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KIERKEGAARD IN PROCESS

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ABOUT KIERKEGAARD IN PROCESS

*Kierkegaard in Process* is the Søren Kierkegaard Student Journal, based at the University of Copenhagen. This journal will offer a platform for undergraduate and graduate students to submit their own research on Kierkegaard.

*Kierkegaard in Process* responds to the idea that very often students have something great to say, and very often no platform to say it. Kierkegaard in “process” emphasises the thought that one is never really finished with the existential project Kierkegaard is communicating and importantly, also that our student contributors are underway with academia, not fully accomplished scholars. *Kierkegaard in Process* further embodies both the thought that everyone is a continuous student of life and that we as philosophy students are also students of Kierkegaard.

At *Kierkegaard in Process* we wish to emphasise a reading of Kierkegaard that regards religiosity as an inseparable part of the authorship, but not as a Christian apologetic.

We believe Kierkegaard’s value is not only limited to the sphere of philosophy and theology, but also literature due to his characteristic style of writing and invaluable existential insights.
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

We once again have the pleasure of welcoming our readers to the second issue of Kierkegaard in Process. In the pages that follow you will find an assortment of student essays on Søren Kierkegaard from academic institutions around the world.

In this issue we have chosen a selection of essays that demonstrate the breadth of Kierkegaard’s scholarly significance, representing literary, theological, philosophical and anthropological approaches to his writings. We have chosen essays that – in our view – exhibit a high level of independent thought and academic substance in relation to the level of the authors, which span from undergraduate to PhD.

This volume begins with Giacomo Bianchino’s paper which discusses the long persisting question of how one might read Kierkegaard. Bianchino explores the connections, systematicity, coherence, and unity between Kierkegaard’s multifarious pseudonymous texts and suggests that one might read Kierkegaard’s writings as a literary canon. The second paper, by Lykkefry Bonde, continues the literary approach, and discusses the etymological significance of the Danish terms at elske, and at leve; and the importance such significance plays in Kierkegaard’s Works of Love and Stages on Life’s Way. This literary focus is continued in Canaan Sutt’s paper, where Sutt considers the relationship between Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms, and the function of reason in Kierkegaard’s writings. Sutt takes these issues together, and shows the philosophical significance of the pseudonyms, whilst at the same time demonstrating how this exemplifies the view of reason held by Kierkegaard. In Troy Klassen’s paper the emphasis is on the philosophical; specifically the concept of silence. Klassen explores the concept of silence with reference to Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling and The Concept of Anxiety. Additionally, Klassen also explores this concept in relation to Franz Kafka’s The Trial, emphasizing the literary and contemporary significance of Kierkegaard’s writings. Continuing this comparative structure, Lillian Wilde’s paper explores the concept of faith in Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling and Lars von Trier’s film Breaking the Waves. Wilde argues that both works are expressions of the human attempt to understand faith. The comparison of Kierkegaard’s writings and contemporary film further emphasise Kierkegaard’s modern significance. The next paper, by Max Manuel Brunner, offers a critical reading of Fear and Trembling. Brunner focuses on Kierkegaard’s notion of the infinite, and argues for its resemblance to Hegel’s concept of the bad Infinity in Encyclopaedia Logics. The penultimate paper, by Maria Deiviane Agostinho discusses the unreflected and reflected will in Kierkegaard’s Works of Love, and how this highlights the problematic attempt to build an ethics based on the inner-outer tension. Agostinho also explores the similarities of Kierkegaard’s depiction of the neighbor, with de Beauvior’s issue of the I-other relationship. The final paper, by Mads Platon-Rødsgaard, explores the concept of choice in Kierkegaard’s Either/Or. Rødsgaard discusses this in relation to Fichte’s Die Bestimmung des Menschen. Rødsgaard applies the choices presented in Die Bestimmung des Menschen to Wilhelm’s understanding of choice in Either/Or.
We would once again like to take this opportunity to thank our Academic Advisers: Alison Assiter, Maria J. Binetti, Joakim Garff, René Rosfort, and Jon Stewart. We greatly appreciate your support, as well as your feedback and advice. We would also like to thank everyone who submitted. We greatly enjoyed reading your papers. Finally, we hope you enjoy Kierkegaard in Process Volume 2.

Amanda Houmark

Barney Riggs
SIGLA

The following works by Kierkegaard appear throughout the journal as abbreviated below. Works by Kierkegaard are referenced in the text, whilst works by other authors are referenced in the footnotes.

The Danish references to Kierkegaard use the following:


The English references to Kierkegaard, unless otherwise specified follow the Princeton editions of Kierkegaard’s writings, translated by H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, and are abbreviated in the following:

AN Armed Neutrality
BA The Book on Adler
C The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress
CA The Concept of Anxiety, (translated by R. Thomte & A. B. Anderson)
CD Christian Discourses
CI The Concept of Irony
COR The Corsair Affair; Articles Related to the Writings
CUP1 Concluding Unscientific Postscript I
CUP2 Concluding Unscientific Postscript II
EO1 Either/Or Part I
EO2 Either/Or Part II
EPW Early Polemic Writings: From the Papers of One Still Living; Articles from Student Days; The Battle Between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars, (translated by J. Watkin).
EUD Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses
FSE For Self-Examination
FT Fear and Trembling
JC Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est
JFY Judge for Yourselves
LD Letters and Documents, (translated by H. Rosenmeier)
P Prefaces/Writing Sampler, (translated by T. W. Nichol)
PC Practice in Christianity
PF Philosophical Fragments
PV The Point of View including On My Work as an Author and The Point of View for My Work as an Author
R Repetition
SBL Notes of Schelling’s Berlin Lectures
SL Stages on Life’s Way
SUD The Sickness unto Death
TA Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review
TD Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions
UD Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits
WA  Without Authority including The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air, Two Ethical-Religious Essays, Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays, An Upbuilding Discourse, Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays

WL  Works of Love
CANONIZING KIERKEGAARD: TOWARDS A SYSTEMATIC READING OF THE AUTHORSHIP

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This paper was written on Gadigal land. I acknowledge my status as a settler Australian and pay my respects to those who have struggled, past and present.

ABSTRACT

The system of connections between his texts has baffled Kierkegaardian scholars and created rifts in the tradition of his interpretation. The competing notions of systematicity across his pseudonymous authorship stress possibilities of structural “coherence” or a unity of strategy. But Kierkegaard himself demands a kind of readerly attention to consistencies and continuities that might escape a philosophical eye. This means reading his oeuvre as a literary canon, and investigating the interesting repetitions and displacements in a chain of symbolisation coextensive with his overall text. Such a process of poetic deconstruction gives the reader the tools of what Northrop Frye would call an “allegorical” frame of analysis. This frame treats each symbol or concept as something drawn from an external world of archetypes and developed according to the fictional contingencies of each text. The internal relations within and between the individual texts allows a reading based on their seriality; on the progressive development of an overall philosophical text complete with a kind of shared narrative. This narrative continuity is facilitated by the construction of a universe populated by characters that represent various existential horizons and a particular relation to the ideal. An allegorical analysis means keeping intact the dimensions of this literary universe with every analysis of individual symbols.

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“What one has come to know piece by piece, just as a bird gleans each little straw for itself, happier over each little bit than over all the rest of the world... this now shows itself to thought” (EOI 60)

One of the pressing issues of Kierkegaard scholarship is the foundational question of how he should be read. Any work done on the vital contributions he made to philosophy and theology inevitably finds itself brushing up against the problem of his authorship. For any putative librarian or encyclopaedist, the Kierkegaard oeuvre sits rather uncomfortably between analysis and art. His attention to the literary has often seen him relegated to the unfortunate realm of “Anti-Philosophy.”¹ Austere Hegelians condemn him as an “unhappy consciousness,” too romantic for austere

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philosophical study. Conversely, those who go so far as to place him firmly among the philosophers do so in peril of silencing the importance of his style- and is at the level of style, interestingly enough, that the intersection between philosophy and literature is most pressing. The literary structure of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous production revolves around a nuanced dialectical logic. Between individual texts there is a web of interrelation which itself has philosophical implications. In his attempts to “make up for” the gap in existential critique left by philosophical literature, Kierkegaard demanded that we take both sides of the literature/philosophy antinomy into account (EO1 3). But to find a method in Kierkegaard requires a particular kind of reading. Thankfully, he himself left clues about how one may adopt a cogent and ‘genuine’ reading of his texts. These tools of navigation are rare, often appearing as aphorisms or throwaway expressions. They do form a series of inroads, however, to the pattern of analysis and critique as it was developed across his oeuvre. By making use of Northrop Frye’s theory of allegorical criticism and Henry Sussman’s literary deconstruction of Kierkegaard, I argue that it is possible to read his works systematically, or at least ‘paratextually’. This means turning away from the “metatextual” questions of overall meaning and instead turning one’s eye towards the tropological continuities and displacements between the individual works. Through an analysis of the first years of Kierkegaard’s output (1841-1844), a tensile but meaningful totality of relations will be gestured at. Taking from The Concept of Irony, Either/Or, Repetition, Fear and Trembling and Philosophical Fragments, this paper seeks to outline some of the literary aspects of Kierkegaard’s method.

THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION: READING KIERKEGAARD SYSTEMATICALLY

The fictive element in Kierkegaard’s work presents an important set of problems for analysis. Henry Sussman, in his wonderful work on The Hegelian Aftermath (1982), imputes to Kierkegaard an almost metaphysical commitment to a “figural as opposed to an ontological constitution and basis of reality.”3 Kierkegaard’s exposure to analytical literature was certainly mediated by a Danish vogue for philosophical fiction. The Heiburg School, to which a young Kierkegaard sought entry, busied itself with considering the literary applications and critical limits of Hegel’s system.4 Taking his cues from the work of the Danish Hegelians, Kierkegaard’s earliest foray into literature came in the form of the satirical play The Old and the New Soap Sellers (1840). He preserved this concern with Hegel’s literary dynamics in his philosophical publications. His dissertation, On The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates, dealt explicitly with problems of philosophical and literary theories of representation. The

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4 In Either/Or, Kierkegaard’s aesthete looks favorably on Heiburg’s Don Juan (EO1 105); his relationship to Danish Hegelianism is on full display in Stewart, J. (2003), Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 45-82.
underlying fictive form and structure of analysis became an important thematic in the early authorship. This transferal of Hegelian concepts to a literary register determined the objects and scope of his critique. In his presentation, ideas and notions become motifs and symbols. It is the formal continuities between these symbols that unify Kierkegaard’s production, rather than the particular subjects of given texts. For instance, Sussman lists four literary “tropes” that appear across the early pieces (at least until 1846). These are aphorism, displacement, repetition and “logical deadlock.”5 These all serve to create an “economy of relations” within and between the texts.6 This economy is pervaded by an atmospheric and strategic sense of irony. In the analysis that follows, the object is not necessarily one trope or another, but the “economy of relations” that is a condition of conceiving of Kierkegaard’s work as thematically unified.

The system of connections between texts has baffled Kierkegaardian scholars and created rifts in the tradition of his interpretation. Commentators enjoy reducing the angle of secondary critique to three possible options. For Henriksen, this is between the Literary, Content and Psychological methods.7 The first stresses the importance of shared form; the second follows thematic links and the last reduces the problematic to matters of biography. Taylor also stresses the “biographical/psychological” method, but adds the “historical-comparative method” and “descriptive-thematic method.”8 The “historical-comparative” approach lies in contextualising Kierkegaard’s thought. The “descriptive-thematic” doesn’t go beyond the themes in Kierkegaard’s work, taking it on “his terms” and his alone.7 As to the “biographical/psychological” model, it seems unhelpful given Kierkegaard’s intricate attempts to disguise his personality to reduce his project to his ‘biographical’ or ‘psychological’ profile. Despite this, there have been notable attempts to do so by the likes of Lukács (Lukács, G. (1974), Soul and Form, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, pp.29-41) and others. In this paper, however, the “historical-comparative” method is considered key to understanding the conditions under which Kierkegaard generated his corpus. Once one enters the realm of his fiction, however, the work can no longer be treated simply as historical artefact or philosophical tract. It must be analysed in line with theories of narrative construction. While the historical must be kept in mind, its relation to the content of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works has to be mediated by the literary character of his motifs, symbols and structures.

The Kierkegaardian authorship must be regarded as more than a simple structural “coherence,” as argued by both Law and Taylor.9 While it is no ‘system’ of Hegelian proportions, it demands, as Schulz holds, a systematic approach to the analysis of themes and motifs the separate works.10 This method is not pure constructivism: indeed there are grounds for defending the inherent intertextuality between Kierkegaard’s works.

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6 Ibid., p.81.
7 Law, 1993, p.3.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p.7.
11 Ibid.
Helpfully enough, Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms often cite each other. As Constantius Constantine, in *Repetition*, he mentions an “author” who believes that “recollection’s love is the only happy love” (R 133). This is none other than the aesthete “A” from *Either/Or*. He later cites a character who defends the “esthetic [sic] validity of marriage” (R 152), an allusion to the essay of the same name by Judge Wilhelm in the second half of *Either/Or* (EO2 3-154). There is a kind of universe here that can be conceived in terms of existing connections between the relevant authors; a sort of shared fictional givenness or facticity that grounds each text. Each author seems aware of the production of the other pseudonyms, and reserves their own opinion on the quality of their work.

Beyond these moments of explicit reference, there are implicit connections between the texts. These connections are thematic and methodological. Here, “method” is, as Johannes Climacus notes, a relationship between the contingency of a given episode and the overall purpose of the canon:

> The very word “method” as well as the concept, adequately indicates that the progress implied here is teleological, but in any progress of this sort there is in each moment a pause (here wonder stands *in pausa* and waits for the coming into existence), which is the pause of coming into existence and the pause of possibility precisely because the telos is outside (PF 80).

Each moment, each pause, can be taken in its own right because the goal lies outside it. If they are all related to the telos in some way, this relation is beyond their control. A good reading of each pause (each text) cannot fail to account for their simultaneous isolation and canonical context. To take them on their own terms is to ignore to some extent what the overall project is. That the texts contain a solitary integrity and a place within a larger totality allows the reader to analyse them in terms of convention and repetition.

This method of analysis is put forward among other strategies in Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*. “Allegorical” criticism requires envisioning each poem or text as self-contained ‘units,’ and taking shared symbols as the media that unite them. The allegorical universe is comprised of symbols that are drawn from outside each text; its “archetypes” must exist out in the world, independently of the discourse of the narrative. This world may be a shared universe, fictional or otherwise. It merely demands that there be continuity of motif across texts. The independence of symbols from the formal coherence of a given work means that they are able to unite and relate texts to one another. Indeed, simply by taking the thread of a particular archetype or symbol from one poem to another, one can receive an “entire liberal education.”

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12. In the “Diapsalmata,” “A” proclaims that “to live in recollection is the most perfect imaginable” (EO1 32).
15. Ibid., p.96.
16. Ibid.
In an allegorical sense, there is a unity of strategy and a dialectical attention that characterises the Kierkegaardian project. This reproduces itself in the symbolic continuities across his texts. Understanding the mechanics of this pseudo-system requires that the student of Kierkegaard recall at all times that “to be a good reader is actually an art” (R 225). The “method” of “pauses” that Climacus put forward in Philosophical Fragments creates a sense of progress and interruption not unlike the serial novel. The “genuine reader” must keep in view at all times the relation between the text and the series. A full exposition of a theme requires its literary emplotment as a ‘pause’ in the broader texture of the Kierkegaardian teleology. To understand how and why a concept or symbol appears where it does in Kierkegaard, one must understand the symbol’s life across distinct texts. It is here that the tropes of displacement and repetition come into the fullness of their meaning. To accurately emplot the symbol, the reader must pay attention to what Derrida calls “the play of repetition and the repetition of play.” Kierkegaard’s playful use of symbols relies upon the fixity of the figural basis of reality; the incisions of each episode must be considered part of an overall corpus. To navigate the philosophical importance of Kierkegaard’s individual contributions, we must impute to his work the literary structure of a (semi-fictional) canon.

BUILDING A TEXT: ALLEGORICAL RECIPROCITY ACROSS THE AUTHORSHIP

The universe in which the Kierkegaardian reader is operating, then, can be constructed as an allegorical unity. At a stylistic level, it is made up of instances and motifs whose iteration and repetition are themselves important facts. The placement of these symbols is the object of both poetic and philosophical interest. The tools of this interpretation remain those of the “literary-descriptive” method. The attention here is not directed at the supervening object or metalanguage that explains or compels the project forwards. It is turned away from the intelligible content of the books and towards the dark workings of the underlying principles of arrangement and organisation.

Examining the relations between symbols across Kierkegaard’s texts, there emerges a very distinct and dialectical connection. Such a pattern of interrelation is teased out by Sussman. Each work takes, as its focus, a central thematic. Rather than being the analytical object for a sustained analysis, it merely configures the terms of the critique around a central point. This point, like the “centre” of Derrida’s play of structure, is the only non-substitutable point in a chain of continual repetition and displacement. This is part of the trouble in trying to examine Kierkegaard’s work in terms of its philosophical content. The fact that so many commentators have expended great effort in even figuring out what a given

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18 Ibid., p.352.
19 Sussman, 1982, p. 66.
work is about is, in itself, very telling.²⁰ With the introduction of the pseudonymous method from Either/Or (1843) onward, displacement comes into full swing, and the focus of a text is mediated by layers of what Sussman calls “narrative involution.”²¹ Though the topic of The Concept of Anxiety, for instance, should be easy, its subtitle tells us that it is actually “a Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin” (my italics). It is even more confusing when one must contend with two pseudonyms. In the economy of Either/Or, the central thematic isn’t found at the level of content. Its constant displacement of meaning allows a distortion “whereby all words and other signs are dislocated from the things they would seem to indicate.”²² This disturbs the belief that it is possible to isolate a discrete subject as the given “content” of a Kierkegaard text. Instead, the allegorical approach to Kierkegaardian analysis preserves the thought that even the kind of theme in a text may change. The subjects of the books range from discrete philosophical concepts to nuances of a particular structural relationship. It is the relationship between the pseudonyms in Either/Or that is important. Picking symbols out from the text, then, is a constructive way to orient oneself in the corpus, but not necessarily a method of conceptual analysis. It must be accompanied by a thorough textual analysis of the symbol’s literary context. To understand the fullness of a symbol’s meaning in Kierkegaard, one must understand why it is appearing as it does where it is.

To navigate the internal dynamics of Kierkegaard’s system of relations, one may take a given symbol and chart the changes in its use across a number of texts. Because of the layers of involution, choosing a theme can itself be difficult. This is not, however, a problem in the non-pseudonymous texts. The Concept of Irony gives us a symbol to work on without much struggle. Irony receives a sustained and direct treatment in his dissertation. Certainly it meets the criteria for allegorical study. Like other texts in the Kierkegaardian canon, its treatment relies upon a primary knowledge of the motif under analysis. As with Frye’s archetypes, the object of study is independent of the text, already existing in the audience’s epistemic horizons. The Concept of Irony assumes a conventional knowledge of what irony is in its readers. Yet it bemoans that irony is yet to be spoken about “as a position” (CI 253). Sussman holds that Kierkegaard’s deployment of Hegel’s concepts moves between their conventional usage and discursive critique.²³ This progression from common use to analysis takes one beyond convention, transforming the uncritical motif of irony into a reflective symbol. The independence of irony from the text makes it possible to regard it as an object in-itself. Irony had certainly been utilised as a philosophical tool of analysis before the Concept of Irony. Kierkegaard devoted an entire chapter of his dissertation to the figurations of irony in philosophy since Fichte (CI 272-389). But it was yet to be considered historically “as a position.” Before The Concept of Irony, such an idea had been used uncritically as an instrument by philosophers. Fichte, Hegel and

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²⁰ Law, 1993, pp.1-4.
²² Ibid., p.82.
²³ Ibid., p. 96.
importantly Solger are taken to represent individual theories of irony that do not engage it as a concept in its own right.

The Kierkegaardian operation in The Concept of Irony is, precisely, to make the symbol reflective by representing it conceptually. It is to bring the natural into the realm of reflection, transforming it into a for-itself existence for Spirit. While irony, in Kierkegaard’s own words, is not conscious in nature, it becomes conscious for those who have “an eye for it” (CI 254). All later mentions of irony in Kierkegaard’s canon will have to take into consideration the reflective character of irony laid out in the dissertation. After this iteration of irony’s critical meaning, it changes its place in the Kierkegaardian system. Its deployment becomes, over time, methodological. When used consciously, the “thematic” of irony is replaced with its weaponisation as a critical tool for analyzing other concepts. It is, to extend the metaphor, added to the arsenal. This is what makes the repetitions of themes philosophically important. As mentioned earlier, the ideas treated critically in Either/Or appear in Repetition as cursory, throwaway references. There is a presumption that they already have a reflective place in the consciousness of the reader. This would become the model for Kierkegaardian analysis across the texts: moving between the pre-critical in-itself reproduction of a theme to its conscious use and manipulation.

The process of analysing a conventional term philosophically determines the structure of many individual Kierkegaardian texts. Yet this also takes place across different works. Kierkegaard often introduces a concept in a book before the book that treats it analytically. This creates a ‘paratext’: a symbolic narrative whereby a concept is dealt with in increasing intensity over the course of several works. This paratext is not a “metatext” that explains why the corpus is working towards a particular term, but a subtext that builds up a literary background for the term or symbol that is eventually given a full analysis. It is this full analysis that anchors the earlier iterations of the symbol. In the Either/Or section “The Immediate Erotic Stages” Kierkegaard’s aesthete details this process at a smaller scale. He explains retroactively that it is the final “immediate erotic stage” that explains the others. He holds that the third stage “is actually the whole stage,” and that the each moment is abstract unless we consider them to be “presentiments” of the final moment (EO1 84). It is the choice of this ‘final’ stage of analysis that allows the reader to understand the various in-themselves of the early iterations in their broader systematic significance. The meaning of a concept in a given text is made clear retroactively, by a later edition in the canon. Kierkegaard proved himself aware of the Hegelian process of retroactive justification as early as The Concept of Irony (CI 119). This process came to determine how texts were interrelated through the media of their shared symbols.

At the level of method, a symbol’s first iteration is given meaning by the succeeding text. To put this in the mathematical language of French

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linguist Jean Claude Milner, it is to say that “the series...takes its logic from the term which exceeds it.” The placement of a symbol in one text derives its logic from that text which follows it. Within the confines of the canon or series, one can attain a limited degree of finality or absoluteness. Despite not being the end of the canon itself, a given text can be the end of the process by which the symbol becomes reflective or selfconscious. The symbol begins its life in uncritical usage and ends in being made dialectically explicit. The full exposition of an idea explains to us the meaning of its predecessors. The thematic subtext of the authorship allows for us to conceive of the symbol in the full dynamics of its literary range. The way that the Concept of Irony transforms Irony into a “position” is repeated for all important symbols in the canon. The full examination of a symbol in a given text is the moment at which the nature of the concept is made Spirit. What separates irony from other symbols is that it occupies part of the authorship from the very beginning. For other complicated ideas, Kierkegaard is careful to introduce them before their full study. After the book that takes the symbol or concept as its focus, the in-itself of the motif’s literary use is transformed into a critical tool of exposition. It becomes reflective, moving from unconscious theme to conscious, for-itself philosophical use.

The reader must recall that Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous method does not seek to settle the final meaning of a symbol. Unlike the intervention made in Concept of Irony, the later works only hope to establish the contingent literary meaning of an individual symbol within the canon. His method, considered from a textual position, is based around acts of what Geoffrey Hlibchuck calls “negative determination.” This is a process of excluding the background of a concept to appraise it in its absolute singularity. The various ‘accidental’ appearances of a given concept or symbol may be liberated from their particular contexts to form a larger unity. But they must be maintained as accidental. Repetition’s Constantius himself claims that, in the context of literature, the accidental is the closest thing to the Idea (R 162). In the retrospective analysis of a symbol’s development across different works, the accidental nature of each incidence is preserved while being determinately negated to show the non-substitutable essence of the symbol. This is only possible within the bounded totality of a literary universe, where the terms of convention have already been set. It involves the imputation or supplementation of a “centre” which is inside the action but whose non-substitutability means that it is also outside the chain of substitution that it is grounding. There is an acknowledgement at every step of the process, in every moment, that the final meaning is in the process of arriving. Only when it is made into a “for-itself” concept can the symbol’s relation to its predecessors be made apparent. This isn’t to say that the overall teleology of the canon is fulfilled. It is simply the major intervention within the canon to settle the meaning of the concept; to transform it into something ready-to-hand. In this sense, it is a smaller totality, a synecdoche whose process of becoming-clear reflects

25 Milner, 1990, p.64.
26 Hlibchuk, 2008, p.46.
the overall dialectic of history. But unlike history, its finite limits of beginning and end allow for the concept to be settled in its canonical, rather than historical, meaning.

CONCLUSION

The process of unpicking Kierkegaard has no definite endpoint. One tries in vain, as Constantius reminds us, to say “1, 2, 3” about his book (R226). The lack of easy development means that an authoritative position on what each text ‘means’ remains beyond the reader’s grasp. In the place of an absolute dictum on Kierkegaard, however, one has access to a certain artfulness. One has the capacity to become a “genuine reader” and chart the interrelations between texts according to their symbolic content. Paying attention to the fragmentary mentions of “method,” as well as to the Hegelian background of Kierkegaard’s production, affords the possibility of an insight into the functioning of the totality of works. This insight is based around an acknowledgement of how Kierkegaard gives language back to the reader in a new way. At a structural or methodological level, he transforms conventional terms into critical tools. Though this is not the same as explaining the totality according to its final meaning, it does give the canny student a means of orienting oneself within it. With sedulous attention to the internal and external dynamics of a Kierkegaard text, one may be able to construct its place in the broader totality. The play of symbols may be decoded, or re-coded, to craft an image of Kierkegaard the writer as well as Kierkegaard the scholar.

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TRACING ETYMOLOGICAL ROOTS:
KIERKEGAARD’S ANALOGY OF LOVING AS
CULTIVATING PLANTS

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ABSTRACT

“Tracing Etymological Roots: Kierkegaard’s Analogy of Loving as Cultivating Plants” carefully explores the plant analogy in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* and contrasts this view of love with the one in *Stages On Life’s Way*. The essay examines the etymological roots of the Danish word “to love,” at elsk, and “to live,” at leve. These inquiries uncover a relationship between loving and growing plants. The two actions are similar in the fact that when one grows plants, one does not synthesize any molecules. Instead, one trusts that the seed of the plant will grow the plant into what it needs to become. Being a gardener merely involves providing the best conditions for this plant. This holds true for loving human beings too. The best condition a human being can have is that someone presupposes love in them, which means to assume that their heart contains a seed of love. The implications of this botanical view of love are explored by looking the nature of God, whether love is a commandment or a requisite for life, and what it means to love someone for who they are and who they will become.

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When a world-famous philosopher writes a book entitled *Works of Love*, one should feel intrigued to read it. All, who have experienced love, will have desire to find a way for love to guide one’s life. Søren Kierkegaard, the author of *Works of Love*, employs a plant analogy in his chapter named “The Hidden Life of Love and Its Recognizability by the Fruits.” In this chapter, Kierkegaard compares loving human beings with nurturing tree and carrying fruits. The plant-love analogy seems to discontinue by the end of the chapter with the only plant-related title. However, through Kierkegaard’s word choice the analogy continues throughout the work. He thus seems to think there is a relationship between loving and growing plants. This essay will examine the plant analogy that is obvious in the first chapter and more hidden analogy through the rest of the work. By looking closely to the diction of the Danish, translating selected passages into English, and exploring the etymological roots of words, this essay will examine the philosophical implications of *Works of Love* concerning the nature of love. Finally, the essay will compare *Works of Love* with *Stages on Life’s Way* to gain a fuller understanding of Kierkegaard’s thoughts on love as described in *Works of Love*. 
The Danish term “to cultivate one another,” *at dyrke hinanden*, means to have sex. But what is one cultivating and how does one’s work influence the other person? What does this have to do with love? In the Danish language, both now and in the past, there is a close relationship between cultivation and having sex, loving and taking care of plants. Interestingly, the etymological root of the Danish word to love, *at elske*, is from the Old Norse *elksa* which is related to the words *to cultivate* and *to nurture*.29 The phrase *at dyrke sex* or *at dyrke hinanden*, cultivate sex or cultivate each other, is relatively new in the Danish language emerging around the late 1970s.29 Although the phrase does not seem to have been in existence in the time of Kierkegaard, it indicates that the relationship between love and plant growth is present in the Danish consciousness. Due to the etymological and conceptual connection between loving and gardening in the Danish language, the question arises: did Kierkegaard know about this etymological root of *at elske* and did he deliberately create his analogy based on that knowledge? What is the relationship between loving and growing plants?

The association between loving and planting is explored in chapter one, “The Hidden Life of Love and Its Recognizability by the Fruits,” where Kierkegaard introduces the idea of *at sætte hjerte*.

One says in relation to certain plants that they must form heart [*sætte hjerte*]; one can say the same about the love of a human being: if it really *must carry any fruit*, and be recognizable on its fruit, then it must begin by *forming heart* [*sætte hjerte*]. For although love emanates from the heart let us not in our hurry forget that it is love that forms the heart [*sætter hjertet*]. Supposedly, every human being has an indefinite heart’s fleeting movements but in the sense of having a heart given by nature is infinitely different from what it means in the sense of the eternal to form heart. And how rare isn’t exactly this that the eternal gains so much control over a human being that the love in him will forever manifest or to form heart [*at sætte hjerte*] (SKS 9, 20).30

*At sætte hjerte* in Danish leads one’s thoughts to plant anatomy. Although Kierkegaard claims that the expression is common, it is not, nor was it at his time.31 On the contrary, two common terms that *at sætte hjerte* leads one’s thoughts to are *at sætte blomst*, *at sætte frø*, and *at sætte frugt* which mean to form a flower, to form seeds, and to form fruit. The English *Forming heart* or “Forming a heart,” (WL 12) as the Hongs translate the phrase, does not necessarily allude to plant anatomy. I considered translating the phrase as “grounding heart” in order to bring out the botanical nature of the word. That is not exactly what the term means, however, since *at sætte hjerte* refers to the actual forming of either flowers, seeds, or fruits. The word “forming” is thus appropriate although the other

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30 For original text, see Appendix 1.
31 There are no references to the phrase other than his work online. As a Danish-speaking Dane, I have never heard the expression before reading *Works of Love*. 
meaning of “forming” as “molding” is distracting. With regards to the symbolic meaning of the phrase, forming heart is a requisite for enabling a person to love and to grow fruit. It is a requisite that requires love in order to form. The action of forming a heart means that love has manifested forever in the person and this person is now able to grow fruit in their individuality.

Plant analogies are also enveloped in other passages in Work of Love. In the chapter “Love Builds Up,” Kierkegaard creates one grand plant analogy. He introduces the analogy,

When the question is about the work of love’s ability to build up, then it must either mean that the loving person plants love into the heart of the other person; or it must mean that the loving person presupposes that love is in the other person’s heart and just with this presupposition the love in him builds him up – from the ground, in so far as he indeed lovingly presupposes it in the ground. One of these options must be to build up. But can the one human being plant love in the other human being’s heart? No, that is a superhuman relationship, an unthinkable relationship between human being and human being, in this way, human love cannot build up. It is God, the Creator, who must plant love into every human being, he, who himself is love (SKS 9, 219).

In this passage, we learn that love is the seed that is planted in the ground, in the hearts, of each one of us by God. The relationship between human beings is thus not to plant any seeds but instead tirelessly believe that there is a seed of love containing life-force enough that with the aid of the presupposition of love, love can build up. The word choice of this analogy clearly unifies planting and growth with love. The next passage furthers the analogy:

It is out of the question what the loving person, who wants to build up, must do to recreate the other human being or to force love to cultivate in him. Instead, the question is how the loving person forces himself in an up-building manner. Look, it is already up-building to think that the loving person builds up by forcing himself! Only the unloving person believes that he must build up by forcing the other; the loving person presupposes constantly that love is present and just this way he builds up. The master builder thinks poorly of the stones and gravel that he will use for the construction, a teacher presupposes that the disciple is unknowing, the discipliner presupposes that another human being is rotten: but the loving person only has one approach, to presuppose love; what there further is to do can constantly only be to constantly force oneself to presuppose love. In this way, he lures the good to come forth, he loves love forth [opelsker], he builds up. Because love can and will only be treated in one way, by being loved forth [ved at elskes frem]; to love it forth [at elskes frem] is to build up. But to love it forth [at elskes frem] is indeed to presuppose that it is present in the ground. It can thus tempt the human being to be a master builder, to be a teacher, to be a discipliner because it seems to be to reign over others: but what it means to build up the way love does it cannot tempt because it is exactly to be the serving person; therefore, it is only love that has the desire to build up because it is willing

32 For original text, see Appendix 2.
to serve. ... The loving person has certainly done nothing; he has only presupposed that love was in the ground. The loving person works so silently and so ceremoniously and after all the forces of eternity are in movement; humbly love draws no attention to itself when it works the most, indeed its work is as if it did nothing. Alas, business and secularism is the greatest blunder: that in a certain sense to do nothing should be to do the hardest work (SKS 9, 219-220).31

The diction of this passage leads one’s thoughts to nurturing plants. Inquiring into the word at opelske in the Danish/English dictionary, “to grow” is the first entry, which in brackets emphasizes the word’s connection to the concept of cultivation.34 Literally, the word means “to love up” or “to uplove,” yet, figuratively, it means to supply something with love so that it will blossom. I thus found “to love love forth” to be the best translation. The expression at elske frem has a similar connotation, as it literally means “to love forth.”

By evoking ideas such as “Loving love forth”, being a serving person, and doing nothing as a work practice, the passage leads one to think of the loving person as a gardener, who grows plants. The gardener does not synthesize molecules into a vegetable. All she does is provide the best conditions for her plants. She does not want to change her plants in any way. She trusts that the seed contains all it needs to become a fully-grown vegetable. This is similar to the loving person: the best condition for an individual is that others believe that there is love and a seed inside of him, which can build him up with love, enable him to radiate with love, and to become the person that his seed will that he is. Therefore, neither the loving person nor the gardener, neither the lover nor the beloved do anything except presupposing love. When this is done, they merely observe the works of love unfold.

Kierkegaard continues the thought of letting love do the work. He expresses,

We could thus compare the upbuilding of love with the work of nature in the hidden. While human beings are sleeping, the forces of nature sleep neither day nor night; No one thinks about how they endure — while everyone amuses themselves with the loveliness of the meadow and the fertility of the field. Love works in this way; it presupposes that love is present, like the sprout in the crop, and if it succeeds in bringing it to grow, then love has hidden as it was hidden while it worked early and late. However, this, the upbuilding, is indeed just in nature: you see all this splendor and then it hits you upbuildingly when you come to think about the curious fact that you never see the one who brings it forth. If you could see God with sensing eyes if he, if I dare say this, stood next to you and said, “it is me who has brought forth all this”: then the upbuilding has vanished (SKS 9, 221).35

31 For original text, see Appendix 3.
35 For original text, see Appendix 4.
This passage shows the divine nature of love since it implies that it is both God and love that builds the splendor of the world. This segment makes one wonder whether Kierkegaard thinks God and love to be one and the same and therefore if you love you are with God. He goes on exploring this connection between God and love as he writes,

But God is love, we thus only can resemble God by loving, like we also only, after an apostle’s words could be “God’s colleagues in – love”. In so far as you love the beloved, you do not resemble God because for God there is no preference [forkjærlighed], which you probably many times to your humiliation but also many times to your satisfaction have considered. In so far as you love your friend, you do not resemble God because there is no difference for God. But when you love your neighbor, then you resemble God (SKS 9, 69).36

Why do you resemble God by loving? Through the analysis of love’s generative nature, this seems to be its point of connection with the divine. God creates causa sui and love seems to have similar properties; to the question about why one loves one’s beloved, most people experience a lack of words – it can seem causeless. Human love thus have divine qualities and humans resemble the divine in loving.

To Kierkegaard, not only do you resemble God through love, you also allow him to enter you. He relates, “the loving person, who believes everything is not simply obvious, he is like one whose roots are in the hidden: he breathes in God, he draws nourishment for his love from God, he strengthens himself by God” (SKS 9, 244).37 You are therefore not only nurturing others by loving, you are being nurtured yourself. In this way, the plant analogy is expanded; you are both a gardener and a plant. If the First Letter of John 4:16 is right that God is love, then it is only by loving that God can enter you. Kierkegaard reflects on what sort of action loving is if this analysis is true,

It is as if the apostle said, “Oh Lord, what is it all that prevent you from loving, what is it all that you can win through self-love! The commandment is that you must love, oh, but when you want to understand yourself and life, then it indeed is as if it did not need to be commanded; because loving human beings is the only thing that is worth living for, without this love you are not really living; and loving human beings is the only blessed solace, both here and there; and loving human beings is the only true sign that you are a Christian (SKS 9, 368).38

From this point of view, “You must love your neighbor” does not seem like a commandment. The life-giving properties of loving invalidates the commandment as a commandment. If love is what allows God to enter and nourish your being, then the commandment is not a commandment but advice for life. Or is it a life necessity? If love provokes growth and life is growth then love must be a requirement for life.

36 For original text, see Appendix 5.
37 For original text, see Appendix 6.
38 For original text, see Appendix 7.
The interconnection between loving and living is also communicated in the title of the chapter “Love Remains.” The title in Danish is *Kjerligheden Bliver*. The title alludes to the First Letter of John 4:16 and thus the traditional translation by the Hongs has been translates as “Love Abides” (WL 300) as in the Bible passage. The problem of translating *bliver* as “abides” is that there are many more meanings to the word *bliver* than simply “abides.” The three main meanings of at *blive* are “to stay,” “to remain,” and “to grow” (WL 300). Most notably of these translations for our inquiry is “to grow” - at *blive* can also mean to become. The beginning pages of “Love Remains” assures the reader that regardless of what happens in your life, love remains. Interestingly, the etymological root of the word “to live,” at *leve*, is “to continue” or “to remain.” The title “Love Remains/Abides” therefore inextricably intertwines love with life. Whether Kierkegaard was aware of the linguistic implications when he chose to allude to John is uncertain, yet it works well as the point of the chapter is to show exactly that connection. Moreover, it shows the cyclical relation between love and life: life allows the existence of love; love loves even more life forth.

Kierkegaard seems to speak of two kinds of love – perhaps contradictory types of love. On the one hand, he speaks of a love that grows and becomes and on the other hand, love is “limitless” and “unchanged” (SKS 9, 168). The two types of love seem to be particular love and universal love respectively. Particular love is the one that grows, becomes, and changes. It is the love that each one of us experience inside ourselves; the love that transforms itself, us, and the world. In contrast, and yet connected closely, is the universal love, the life force, God. Despite the fact that universal love moves through different living beings and is experienced like particular love, universal love stays unchanged and limitless as it is that which contains, holds, and provides all life. Often, Kierkegaard focuses heavily on the universal love and seems to forget about the individual, subjective experience of love. Kierkegaard writes beautifully about the necessity of loving the beloved with all his imperfections in his particularity as with the anecdote about Jesus and Peter’s friendship.

Christ’s love for Peter was in this way limitless; he perfected by loving Peter, what it means to love the human that one sees. He did not say, “Peter must first change and become a different person before I can love him again,” no, just the opposite, he said, “Peter is Peter and I love him; my love if anything must just help him to become another human being.” He thus did not cut off the friendship in order to resume it again later when Peter had become a different human being; no, he preserved the friendship unaltered and was thus in this way helpful to Peter in becoming a different human being (SKS 9, 172).  

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41 For original text, see Appendix 8.
This passage quintessentially shows Kierkegaard’s message of love as a means for human growth. This idealism is particular to certain of Kierkegaard’s “voices,” which are particularly present in *Works of Love*. The questions arise however: what does it mean to completely love someone, when one is not Jesus? Where is the attention in Kierkegaard’s thought towards the particularity of the two loving individuals?

In *Stages on Life’s Way*, Kierkegaard, through the character Frater Taciturnus, addresses question of the loving human being’s particularity. The man who supposedly does not say much – Taciturnus – acknowledges the obstacles for loving, not only the external ones, such as parental disapproval, but also the internal obstructions. He writes,

> When love gets stuck, or the individual perceives it that way, then he says about himself that he is unhappily in love … The poet would now ask him: “What is there as an obstacle: is it gruesome parents, who needs appeasing, … is there another man who must be gotten rid off [… many examples].” The person in question answers no. Then the poet turns around and says: “yes, my dear friend, then you do not love (SKS 6, 383).”

Since the love that the person in question experiences is “given, there are no hindrances to be seen, on the contrary there is peace and comfort, a wind-still sea favors it” (SKS 6, 383), the obstacles for love exist within himself. As Taciturnus (or Kierkegaard) writes, “The difficulties thus do not come forth as the love collides with the world but as it must reflect itself in the individuality” (SKS 6, 383). One cannot claim to love if one hinders the love inside before it even gets outside themselves. It is thus one’s particularity that blocks the way for love to exit – this could either be caused by the other’s particularity also, that there merely is a disconnect between the two human beings or that something is restricted inside oneself. This fact points towards a subtle distinction in Kierkegaard’s work: human beings are able, in their particularity, to presuppose love in anyone, that is, to abstractly assume and believe that there is a seed of love in anyone’s heart. On the contrary, to embody divine universal love towards *everyone* is an act, which mortals only can strive towards.

As seen through this analysis, there are many different voices in Kierkegaard’s two works. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard partly speaks in a coherent, loving voice about growing and loving. The other voice in *Works of Love* is Kierkegaard as a strict Lutheran preacher who condemns erotic love, poets, and other “unholy” aspects of the human life (SKS 9, 69). On the other hand, in *Stages on Life’s Way*, the three parts consist of different voices that can be summarized the first as ironically misogynistic, the second reasonable and ethical, and the third reflective and full of pain. Frater Taciturnus falls into the third category. Although the two works are only two years apart in publication, *Stages on Life’s Way* was written in 1845 whereas *Works of Love* was written two years later in 1847, Kierkegaard changed his approach. *Works of Love* is powerful, captivating, and beautiful,

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42 For original text, see Appendix 9.
43 For original text, see Appendix 10.
44 For original text, see Appendix 11.
45 Although an abstract action, the power of this effort must not be disregarded.
whereas *Stages on Life’s Way* is filled with sadness, derision, and pain. It seems that Kierkegaard in those two years either matured both himself and his views or by writing *Works of Love*, he wrote a work of wishful thinking. An example of how Kierkegaard’s views matured is in the lover’s relationship to the beloved. In *Stages on Life’s Way*, the diary writer lost his fiancée and is miserable because of it. On the contrary, Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love* that one must watch out that one does not confuse love with the possession of the beloved (SKS 9, 45).

Another example of how the conception of love in *Works of Love* is focused on the love of the lover independent of the actual relationship to the beloved is the passage that narrates the anecdote about the break-up and the hyphen,

"Then the break came between the two; it was a misunderstanding, however one of them broke off the relationship. But the loving person says “I remain” [jeg bliver] – then it is however not a break-up. Imagine a compound word where the last word is missing there is only the first word and the hyphen (because the one who breaks the relationship cannot however take the hyphen with him, the loving person keeps the hyphen naturally on his side), imagine then the compound word as the first word and the hyphen, and imagine then that you know nothing more than that about how it all works together: what would you say? You would say that that word is not complete that something is missing. In this way also with the loving person. That a break-up came to be that cannot be seen straightaway it can only be known in the sense of transitory [of walking-passed-ness]. But the loving person will not know the temporary because he remains; and to remain is in the direction of the future [of the to-coming] (SKS 9, 303-304)."

The anecdote allows a change in the power relation between the couple from the one saying “No” to the one saying “Yes.” Regardless of the actual status of the relationship between the two, love remains on the side of the loving person. The loving person will keep the hyphen and point in the direction of the beloved regardless of whether his emotions are reciprocated. In love, independent of what the beloved feels, the loving person has agency in keeping love close and in that way also the divine and life itself.

The way love is encountered in *Works of Love* is thus optimistic and stunning in its focus on love in itself whereas *Stages on Life’s Way* is focused on all the obstacles and difficulties encountered in love. One could say that the ideas in *Works of Love* are what one ought to strive towards and the emotions expressed in *Stages on Life’s Way* are how one might feel in the process of striving. The lessons that *Works of Love* will that we strive towards, can aid us on our journey toward greater self-knowledge, a more intimate relationship with God, and a closer connection to the world. Through the study of the etymology of *at elske* and *at leve*, love, growth, and life are revealed as interconnected; love is required in *forming heart* so that love can manifest in the human being, love in this way allows the human being to grow, and since growth is a requisite for life, only in love, 46

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46 For original text, see Appendix 12.
life can truly be a life. The question of whether or not Kierkegaard knew about the etymological roots to the words examined in this essay remains unanswered; his philosophy and the etymological roots of his diction align beautifully nevertheless.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX


4. “Vi kunne derfor kun sammenligne denne Kjerlighedens Opbyggen med Natures Arbeiden i det Skjulte. Medens Mennesket sover, sover Natures Arbeide i det hverken Nat eller Dag; Ingen tænker paa, hvorledes de holde ud –


7. “Det er som sagde Apostelen »Herre Gud, hvad er saa det Hele, der vil forhindre Dig i at elske, hvad er det Hele, Du kan vinde ved Selvkjerlighed! Budet er, at Du skøl elskes, o, men naar Du vil forstaae Dig selv og Livet, da er det jo, som skulde det ikke behøve at befales; thi det at elske Menneskene er dog det Eneste det er værd at leve for, uden denne Kjerlighed lever Du egentlig ikke; og det at elske Menneskene er tillige den eneste salige Trøst, baadeher og hisset; og det at elske Menneskene det eneste sande Kjende paa, at Du er en Christen«.” (SKS 9, 368. My translation, 4 April 2016).

8. “Christi Kjerlighed til Peder var saaledes grænsefærsk, han fuldkommede i at elske Peder det at elske det Menneske, man seer. Han sagde ikke »Peder maa først forandre sig og blive et andet Menneske, inden jeg kan elske ham igjen«, nei, lige omvendt, han sagde: »Peder er Peder, og jeg elsker ham; min Kjerlighed, dersom ellers Noget, skal just hjælpe ham til at blive et andet Menneske.« Han afbrød altsaa ikke Venskabet, for saa maaskee at begynde det igjen, naar Peder var bleven et andet Menneske; nei, han bevarede Venskabet uforandret og var just derved Peder behjælpelig i at blive et andet Menneske.” (SKS 9, 172. My translation, 26 March 2016).


DO NOT ASK MY OPINION: CLIMACUS, PSEUDONYMITY, AND THE REASON THAT RECONCILES WITH FAITH

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ABSTRACT

Two central questions for interpreting and assessing Kierkegaard’s philosophy are 1) how one should understand the function of the pseudonyms, and 2) how one should understand the status of reason in Kierkegaard’s thinking (e.g. is Kierkegaard a fideist or irrationalist?). Both questions bear essentially on how one encounters Kierkegaard’s writings, and they may be pursued separately of one another. Here, I take them together, to show that the question about pseudonymity is itself philosophically interesting in that the pseudonymity exemplifies the view of reason that is operative in Kierkegaard’s thinking, while this view of reason elucidates the function of the pseudonyms. Special attention is given to Johannes Climacus, who brings the implicit view of reason to articulation in his work *Philosophical Fragments*.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his *Pensées*, Pascal muses that “Reason’s last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to realize that.”\(^1\) In another fragment, he writes, “St. Augustine. Reason would never submit unless it judged that there are occasions when it ought to submit. It is right, then, that reason should submit when it judges that it ought to submit.”\(^2\) If Kierkegaard is the father of existentialism, Pascal is sometimes called its grandfather. Without endorsing the historical or philosophical accuracy or usefulness of such general claims, the view of reason articulated here by Pascal is closely aligned with the view of reason that I will argue is articulated by Johannes Climacus. Interestingly, Pascal’s reference of St. Augustine\(^3\) also brings into quick relief the tradition backing the view of reason that is operative in Climacus.

\(^1\) Pascal, 1995, p.56.
\(^2\) Pascal, 1995, p.54.
\(^3\) Pascal references Augustine’s *Letter 120*, to Consentius. Consentius, a Spanish layman, had written to Augustine with questions about the Trinity, and by way of introduction had mentioned the dichotomy of faith and reason. Rather than answering his questions about the Trinity forthrightly, Augustine addresses Consentius’ views about reason and faith, urging that the two are not in the tension that Consentius imagines, and that reason should not be derogated, since without
What does this view of reason, which Pascal and Climacus somehow share, and which can be traced to Augustine, consist in? Essentially, it is the view that reason is limited. But this is a very general way of putting the matter, one that does not tell us very much about the actual views of Climacus, or of anyone else. After all, to say that what is distinctive about Climacus’ view of reason is the claim that reason is limited doesn’t distinguish Climacus from Pascal or Augustine – or from Kant or Wittgenstein, for that matter. Granted that all of these thinkers would accept the notion that reason is limited, what is of real interest is how each thinker draws those limits, as well as for what reasons or motivations, and for what purposes. The purpose for which reason is limited that links Augustine, Pascal, and, though in a complex and indirect way, Climacus, is to reconcile reason to faith.

This purpose is twofold. First, the aim is to show that reason on its own, so to speak, cannot generate or establish the truths delivered by faith; but second, the aim is to show that the contents of faith are not irrational. If reconciling reason and faith is the common denominator, then the differences that make Climacus’ project unique, though complex, arise from the context of his authorship.

What is this authorial context? Of course, to speak of Climacus’ authorship is ironical, since Climacus is a pseudonymous author invented by Kierkegaard. Be that as it may, the context of Climacus is, from one point of view, the philosophical concerns of Kierkegaard, which run both before and after Climacus, in the other pseudonymous works and in those published under Kierkegaard’s own name. From another point of view, the context of Climacus is constituted by the concerns of the audience to which Climacus addresses himself. This audience is not only, if perhaps primarily, the philosophical milieu of Copenhagen in the 1840s; in addition to this, the audience of Climacus qua philosopher is a type, which might be represented by many philosophical (and theological) schools besides those that Climacus has specifically in mind.

The pseudonymous authorship of Climacus is itself philosophically interesting, for two reasons. First, the pseudonymous authorship of Kierkegaard in general exemplifies the view of reason that is held in common with the tradition reaching to Augustine – the view that identifies the greatness of reason precisely in its self-awareness of its own limits. Second, Climacus, unique among the pseudonyms, brings this mode of reason that is implicit in the pseudonymous authorship to articulation. Rather than addressing the question of the relation of reason and faith directly, reflection on this mode of limited reason as present in the pseudonyms and especially in Climacus provides the grounding for understanding how reason and faith can be conceptually reconciled.

According to Augustine, Consentius should correct his definition “not so that you scorn faith but so that you might come to see those things which you now accept in the firmness of faith also by the light of reason.” In other words, reason is limited with regards to the contents of faith, but not discarded. (Quillen, 1991).

And if we take Kant seriously when says that he undertook his project in the first Critique in order to limit reason to make room for faith, we can include him here under a modified version of this purpose. See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, Bxxx.
II. REASON IN THE PSEUDONYMS AND CLIMACUS

II.1 General Problems with the Pseudonyms

For the serious reader, encountering Kierkegaard’s authorship for the first time can be utterly bewildering. It isn’t as simple as saying, “According to Kierkegaard in X.” Even if this straightforward method is sanctioned by the view of Kierkegaard’s authorship that one takes, it is a view that has to be defended against competing interpretations. Immediately, we are confronted with the question of whether we can know what Kierkegaard himself thought. Furthermore, what does it mean to say that something is the Kierkegaardian view? What is the value of the pseudonymous works when considered in light of Kierkegaard’s later works that bear his own name?

In the Epilogue to Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard emphatically answers the first question in the negative: “Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader…” (CUP 626). He goes on to make an appeal that if anyone wants to quote a particular passage of one of the books, they should cite the pseudonymous author and not himself. Taking Kierkegaard here at face value, and taking that for enough, it might seem that the matter is settled – we just can’t know what Kierkegaard himself thought from his pseudonymous works, since he disavows any special knowledge about them, placing himself on the level of any reader.

However, I think this would be hasty. It is interesting the reasons that he gives for this drastic distancing of himself from the works. Earlier in the Epilogue, Kierkegaard says that his pseudonymity didn’t have an accidental basis in his person, i.e. he didn’t publish under fake names in order to fly under the radar of censorship. Rather, the pseudonymity had an essential basis in the production itself. That is,

For the sake of the lines and of the psychologically varied differences of the individualities, poetically required an indiscriminateness with regard to good and evil, brokenheartedness and gaiety, despair and overconfidence, suffering and elation, etc., which is ideally limited only by psychological consistency, which no factually actual person dares to allow himself or can want to allow himself in the moral limitation of actuality (CUP 625).

Kierkegaard wanted to effect, both literarily and philosophically, a direct or unmediated encounter by the reader with the authors of the pseudonymous works – a directness that would have been dissipated by filtering their points of view through his own authorship. There is an irony here, in that for us the question is how to cipher Kierkegaard from the pseudonyms, i.e. the pseudonyms veil Kierkegaard, whereas Kierkegaard didn’t want, by his own name, to veil the directness of address by the pseudonymous authors. It might seem that the moral concern that Kierkegaard voices in this passage – not daring to allow oneself the
sometimes dubious views and practices of the pseudonyms (one thinks of A in “The Seducer’s Diary”) – falls under the accidental concern with censorship. However, I think this is best understood as a concern with pulling off the intended effect of pseudonymity. This, of course, raises the question, “What is that intention?”

In The Point of View for My Work as an Author, published posthumously by his brother in 1859, Kierkegaard alludes to Ecclesiastes and says that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak, and that the time has come for him to speak:

The content, then, of this little book is: what I in truth am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aim at that enormous illusion, Christendom, or the illusion that in such a country all are Christians of sorts (PV 23).

What Kierkegaard is in truth is a religious author. By this Kierkegaard means that his whole authorship aims at becoming Christian. Aims at whom becoming Christian? Not at Christendom, which, as far as Kierkegaard is concerned, is a monstrous illusion, but with those persons who live in Christendom, who assume or of whom it is assumed that they are all Christians “of a sort” merely because they are within Christendom. For all intents and purposes, we can immediately understand Christendom as Copenhagen, though its scope is broader than that. Significantly, Kierkegaard claims that he was always a religious author, even when he wrote the salacious “Seducer’s Diary,” or the high-minded ethical discourses of Judge Wilhelm in Either/Or II. On what grounds can he claim this? Or, rather, what considerations made Kierkegaard think this method was the best, or simply the necessary, one to employ?

One of the most illuminating passages in response to this latter question comes later in The Point of View, under the section heading (which says it all), “If One Is Truly to Succeed in Leading a Person to a Specific Place, One Must First and Foremost Take Care to Find Him Where He Is and Begin There” [bold in text]. Kierkegaard describes this as the entire art of helping: “In order truly to help someone else, I must understand more than he – but certainly first and foremost understand what he understands. If I do not do that, then my greater understanding does not help him at all” (PV 45). This desire to help people where they are coalesces with the avowed polemic against Christendom and the goal of becoming Christian, as well as with Kierkegaard’s playful insistence in the Epilogue to Concluding Unscientific Postscript that he has nothing to do with the pseudonyms, even as he reveals that he’s the author. To take the pseudonymous works as Kierkegaard’s would, in a fundamental way, misunderstand Kierkegaard’s entire project. From another point of view, however, we can make sense of the question, “What is Kierkegaard’s view on X?” but we can answer this in a way that is true to Kierkegaard’s purported goal only if we do so through constant reference to the pseudonymous works. This means not merely citing their names or pointing out that a particular work was written by this particular author, but by embodying, in some sense, or taking up the point of view of the author at hand, as something distinct and informative.
Scholars are divided on these issues. Some regard with suspicion Kierkegaard’s claim that he was always a religious author, i.e. that Kierkegaard had one intention from the beginning of his authorship to the end. According to these interpreters, the overarching story that Kierkegaard gives about his authorship in The Point of View is a retrospective invention. I myself am not inclined to altogether deny this, or to argue the point vigorously. On the other hand, even if Kierkegaard engages in reconstruction of his authorial project, it seems that the careful reader can, as Evans says, discern a telos to Kierkegaard’s writings that aligns with his express statement of their purpose. As Evans says, there are three broad groupings of Kierkegaard scholars on the pseudonym question: (1) there are those who ignore the pseudonyms and take Kierkegaard as a straight philosopher; (2) what Evans labels the “literary approach,” in which scholars assimilate Kierkegaard to deconstructionism and the general view that the texts undermine themselves and have no one point of view; and (3) a synthesis of these two, the literary-philosophical, where the pseudonyms, and the literary complexity resulting from the pseudonymity, are taken seriously, but where the texts are also taken as philosophically serious, but not in the sense of Kierkegaard as straight philosopher.

As will be apparent from the foregoing discussion, I assume approach three. This meshes well with Kierkegaard’s own view as expressed in The Point of View and elsewhere, which can be summarized from one angle as the idea that the philosophical significance of these works is inextricably bound up with the pseudonyms, which makes for complex, untidy, often perplexing interpretive work. It is very important to see that it isn’t simply a matter of the pseudonyms mattering and also of the works being philosophically serious. Rather, these two things are linked. The philosophical seriousness of the works is essentially connected with their pseudonymity via the concept of reason. Furthermore, one of the reasons why Climacus is of central importance in the Kierkegaardian corpus is that he brings to the fore the implicit understanding of reason which essentially connects the task of philosophy and the pseudonyms.

We can express this by way of contrast with method one, which ignores the pseudonyms and takes Kierkegaard as a straight philosopher. This method doesn’t simply prefer not to mention Climacus or Johannes de Silentio, etc. Rather, it distances itself from the way of thinking (or meta-thinking) which is the chief significance of the pseudonyms. This method implies a relation of Kierkegaard to his works in which he enjoys a bird’s eye view, and in which he develops his philosophical project in a way that is immune to the rational limitations implied by pseudonymity. In other words, the way of thinking about Kierkegaard’s project, and the way that Kierkegaard carries out the project, are entirely different between these two methods, and imply two different understandings of reason. In taking method three, I assume a particular relation of Kierkegaard to his works, a particular method by which he carries out his project of leading individuals to authentic Christianity, and most importantly, I think according to the mode of reason that is exemplified in this method. I take Climacus as the

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6 Evans, 1992, p.4.
pseudonym who most clearly articulates this view of reason. To him I now turn.

II.2 Climacus as Pseudonymous Author and the Puzzles of Philosophical Fragments

The view of reason that Climacus articulates is the link connecting the pseudonymity of Kierkegaard’s writings and his philosophical project. It is also this view of reason that reconciles reason with faith. So there is a twofold function of this view of reason. First, it makes clearer Kierkegaard’s philosophical purpose, and secondly, it clarifies the problem of reason and faith, showing how it is rational to believe. As Evans says in his study of Philosophical Fragments, “The reader who nosily insists on penetrating the incognito of Climacus can only do so by disentangling the knot he poses and deciding what he thinks about the claim of Christianity to rest on a revelation.”

The following analysis, building on the preceding thoughts about the philosophically significant function of the pseudonyms, attempts to unravel some strands of that knot.

In a long footnote in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Climacus discusses the critical reception of Philosophical Fragments (CUP 274-277). A review of it had appeared in a German theological journal, and Climacus says that this review gives an excellent didactic summary of Fragments, but nevertheless suffers from a flaw: it totally misunderstands the book. A more fatal flaw could hardly be imagined. What gave rise to this misreading? In short, the reviewer was oblivious to the irony pervading the whole work. Because of this, the reviewer took the contents of Fragments as straightforward argumentation, and missed the central feature of the book, namely that it is an extended thought-experiment. Why, in missing this feature of the book, did the reviewer thereby totally misunderstand it? As Climacus says, the review gave an accurate summary of the book’s arguments and so forth, so it would seem as thought the reviewer wasn’t completely in the dark. However, Climacus urges us to see that there is something about the ironical character of the book on which everything hinges.

Part of the reason why an accurate summary of the book’s arguments is not enough to understand the true point of it is indicated in the Preface of Philosophical Fragments. There Climacus tells the reader a few things he did not intend with the book. He says it is only a pamphlet, and it is not intended to contribute to or advance the philosophical (i.e. Hegelian) project afoot in Denmark at that time (the title, which can also be rendered as philosophical bits, hints at this non-systematic character); indeed, Climacus figures that he will do more good by refraining from contributing to the confusion of that project. Furthermore, Climacus says that Fragments is written mainly for himself and is not intended to give any reader insight or understanding, if that means sharing his opinion with them. For, Climacus insists, he has no opinion, and he asks the reader not to ask him about it. “Next to the question of whether or not I have an opinion,
nothing can be of less interest to someone than what my opinion is” (PF 7). Having an opinion is too much and too little in that it “presupposes a security and well-being in existence akin to having a wife and children in this mortal life” (PF 7). To have an opinion is too much in that it gives one a sense of security and well-being in one’s intellectual life. In its happy complacency, having an opinion is a lethal ally of Christendom, i.e. it fortifies the error of those people who, having been born and grown up in a nominally Christian country, assume that they are Christians.

Climacus, unlike Kierkegaard, is not interested in attacking Christendom per se, or with whether individuals are authentic Christians. He is, however, concerned with attaining eternal life⁹ – the Truth. And so having an opinion is also too little in that it simply isn’t adequate to the toil that must be expended and the readiness with which one must address oneself to the pursuit of Truth. Climacus says that he stakes his life every time a difficulty appears, but he can only do this with his own life and not another’s. Therefore, he would regret anyone taking up his opinion simply because it is his. In a sense, whether someone adopts the opinions of Climacus or notdoesn’t especially matter. What matters is that the level of opinionating must be left behind for something else. Interestingly, Climacus implicitly assimilates to opinion the philosophical arguments of Fragments, i.e. the straightforward arguments of his pamphlet. It isn’t that they are valueless. The point, rather, is that Climacus has learned to dance in the service of thought. In this dance, what matters is not the opinions that are spun off, but the dance. It is evidently with this perspective that Climacus wants the reader to approach the book.

What is most clear about Climacus is that he is elusive. But in keeping with the pervasive irony of Fragments, this elusiveness clarifies the work. That is, the elusiveness of Climacus, our inability to pin down his opinions or where he definitely stands, is intentional on Climacus’ part. Like a Wittgensteinian ladder, the opinion can be dispensed with in service of the Truth.

If opinion assimilates the philosophical arguments of Philosophical Fragments, what can we say of human reason and its productions vis-à-vis the contents of faith, i.e. the alternative that Climacus constructs via negation of the Socratic? In fact, there isn’t one single possibility for reason here. For example, one possibility, which some interpreters take Kierkegaard to exemplify, is fideism. Fideism would hold that, given the contents of the alternative hypothesis, the alternative hypothesis wholly excludes reason. According to this, there would be a stark discontinuity between what human reason is capable of knowing and what faith delivers. I hold that there is no stark discontinuity, nor hint of irrationalism, in the view of reason that Climacus holds.

When speaking of the contents of the alternative hypothesis, the notion of paradox comes into play. As Evans says, “A paradox is something that we cannot understand or comprehend. A paradox is something that may appear to us to be a contradiction. In general the discovery of a

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⁹ As his name indicates. Johannes Climacus means “John the Climber,” and alludes to a Syrian monk whose book, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, purported to give detailed instructions for attaining spiritual perfection, i.e. eternal life.
paradox is the result of an encounter with a reality which our concepts are inadequate to deal with, with a reality that ties us in a conceptual knot.”

Evans, 1992, p.104.
truth is not a possession of the human being. But, and here is the important point, it can be received by the human being.

Actually, the notion of reason’s limits becomes less important to reason once the truths of Christianity are revealed and accepted. This is what Climacus is getting at when he speaks of the acoustical illusion of the paradox. To those outside the truth, the paradox seems offensive; to those within the truth, the paradox remains in that the truths are still revealed and not originated by reason, but the offense dissipates. Reason remains intact, but its contact with the paradox gives it a new aspect. Just as the moment of birth leaves its mark on every succeeding moment by the fact of existence, so rebirth leaves its mark in part through a reorientation of reason away from fixation on itself as a dispassionate power of observation and truth-finding towards a capacity that has received some glimmer of the truths which have also redeemed the person.


ABSTRACT

One of the key aspects of Søren Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith, in Fear and Trembling, is silence. The Knight of Faith is silent because he realizes that his relation to the absolute is unmediated by the universal. He insists upon the chasm separating himself from the universal. Kierkegaard takes up this notion again in The Concept of Anxiety, where he posits silence as a response to anxiety: “... still less does he attempt to hold [anxiety] off with noise and confusion; but he bids it welcome [...]” (CA 159).

My paper elucidates this concept of silence in Kierkegaard’s works. In addition to a careful examination of the two aforementioned books, it compares Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith with examples from works of European fiction, namely Franz Kafka’s The Trial—in which K. tries to break his silence but is incapable of doing so—and Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha—in which Siddhartha realizes that his wisdom is incommunicable.

By comparing these literary examples to Kierkegaard’s writings, my paper defines a concept of silence found within them.

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In certain philosophers’ works, a positive concept of silence emerges as a result of their ontological positions. One of the most explicit presentations of such a silence occurs in Søren Kierkegaard’s writings, specifically in The Concept of Anxiety and Fear and Trembling. Kierkegaard acknowledges a negative conception of silence, as the absence of communication and the isolation of the individual person, but he also presents a positive one: “I always run up against the paradox, the divine and the demonic, for silence is both. Silence is the demon’s trap [...] but silence is also divinity’s mutual understanding with the single individual” (FT 88). It is the aim of this paper, then, to introduce this latter concept of silence. First, I shall elaborate and examine the concept of silence as it is found within Kierkegaard’s thought. Then, second, in an effort to clarify it further, I shall draw comparisons between Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith and literary examples, namely Josef K. in Franz Kafka’s The Trial and Siddhartha in Herman Hesse’s Siddhartha.

To begin, Kierkegaard’s concept of silence must be understood against the backdrop of anxiety, elaborated within The Concept of Anxiety. It is well to note that Kierkegaard’s anxiety is very different from any specific present day definition; it is neither a medical nor a socio-cultural concept. Rather, Kierkegaard’s anxiety must be viewed as a philosophical concept pertaining to the individual person. Unlike colloquial definitions, it is not an objective phenomenon. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is a fundamental
psychological concept. It is psychological in the sense that it pertains to people singularly, to an individual’s personal experiences and understanding. Nevertheless, it pertains to all individuals; everyone experiences it. “This is an adventure that every human being must go through—to learn to be anxious in order that he may not perish either by never having been in anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety” (CA 155). Understanding anxiety, therefore, ought to be one of our most urgent concerns: “Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate” (CA 155).

A key aspect of learning to be anxious well, according to Kierkegaard, is a cultivated self-understanding that he calls inwardness. It is not however merely thoughtfulness or reflection. Inwardness cannot be arrived at through abstraction since its object, the individual person, is always “in the process of becoming and consequently cannot be something completed for contemplation” (CA 143). Rather, individuals achieve inwardness when they understand themselves actively as concrete beings: “[inwardness] can be attained only by and in action […]” (CA 138). Thus, it is only through action and experience in the world that inwardness is achieved. Kierkegaard elaborates his concept of inwardness by equating it with earnestness. Being earnest, then, is a matter of how we handle truth: “the question is whether a person will in the deepest sense acknowledge the truth, will allow it to permeate his whole being […]” (CA 138). Inwardness as earnestness is an individual’s constant returning, in every action and experience, to this truth, which is a fundamental self-understanding. This returning, however, is not a mere habit: “The earnest person is earnest precisely through the originality with which he returns in repetition” (CA 149). In other words, each time earnest people return to the truth, they experience it as though they were coming upon it for the first time; through the repetition of earnestness, the truth does not lose its effectiveness. Earnest repetition does not dull into a habit that is mindlessly carried out. Thus, to be earnest means being earnest about earnestness itself! “Only an earnest personality can do anything with earnestness […]” (CA 149).

For Kierkegaard, the truth—that understanding of the individual person that is returned to in earnest—is specifically ontological. In short, it is the understanding of oneself as an eternal being and as a being of possibility. First, inwardness understands “the constituent of the eternal in man” (CA 151). The eternal, for Kierkegaard, is not a merely temporal notion; it does not specifically have to do with immortality or an afterlife. Rather, it is the distilling of oneself to what is essential, to what is ontologically necessary; “all this vanishes, except for the soul that was essentially in this […]” (CA 154). Second, and pertaining to eternity, is possibility: “only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude” (CA 156). To be shaped by possibility means to be aware of the contingency of our lives. Since possibility exposes the contingent, to be aware of possibility is to also be aware of what is essential, of what is not contingent. Thus, to see through the finite contingencies of one’s life, to see only what is essential about oneself, is to understand the truth that is arrived at through inwardness.
Finally, through this inwardness that implies an earnest understanding of oneself as an eternal being in possibility, an attitude of silence emerges that leads the anxious person to faith. “Whoever has not become earnest about [himself], but about something else, something great and noisy, is despite all his earnestness a joker” (CA 150). Earnestness about oneself orients the individual’s anxiety toward eternal concerns rather than finite trivialities. When individuals learn to be anxious well, they are made aware of the inconsequentiality of their finite situations. Where they would have been loudly asserting their finite perspectives, they instead understand their trivialness and, although they still acknowledge their finite positions, they understand them in the light of eternity. “He does not shrink back, and still less does he attempt to hold [anxiety] off with noise and confusion; but he bids it welcome [...] he shuts himself up with it and says [...] Now I am ready” (CA 159). Through silently accepting this anxiety, individuals ready themselves for faith, which, according to Kierkegaard, will subdue and yoke anxiety, putting it to work for them. “He knows no finite evasion by which he may escape. Now the anxiety of possibility holds him as its prey until, saved, it must hand him over to faith. In no other place can he find rest, for every other place of rest is mere chatter [...]” (CA 158).

Now, I shall clarify the relation between faith and silence through an examination of Fear and Trembling. In this work, Kierkegaard lays out his concept of the Knight of Faith as the individual who truly understands his ontological position as an eternal being in possibility. Thus, he relates himself, through faith, to the absolute without mediation from the universal. In other words, he is able to relate himself to absolute being, God, without appealing to any universal reasons or values. For Kierkegaard, the ultimate example of the Knight of Faith is Abraham, who is shown as such in the biblical story that depicts him sacrificing his son Isaac. In this story, Abraham’s relation to the absolute, to God, is unmediated by the universal or ethical realm. Abraham understands that, as an individual, he goes beyond the ethical in relating himself to the absolute through faith: “the knight of faith relinquishes the universal in order to become the single individual” (FT 75).

To encourage an understanding of Abraham as the Knight of Faith, Kierkegaard compares him to the Tragic Hero, who does not go beyond the universal through faith. “The difference between the tragic hero and Abraham is very obvious. The tragic hero is still within the ethical” (FT 59). Historical or mythological characters such as Jephthah, Agamemnon, or Brutus make sacrifices similar to Abraham’s but they are motivated by comprehensible concerns, ones that can be communicated; their motives for their actions can be justified ethically. Jephthah sacrificed his daughter to fulfill the promise to God he made in public, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to win the Trojan War, and Brutus sacrificed his sons because they were traitors to the State. Thus, they can be understood by others; their reasons are clear and communicable and they can be empathized with. “The tragic hero needs and demands tears, and where is the envious eye so arid that it could not weep with Agamemnon, but where is the soul so gone astray that it has the audacity to weep for Abraham?” (FT 61). Abraham, conversely, cannot be empathized with because he cannot give reasons for
his sacrifice; in the eyes of the universal, in the realm of ethics, he is a murderer. Abraham’s reasons are beyond ethics, they are found only in faith, in his unmediated relationship with the absolute, which cannot be placed within the universal, or ethical. “The tragic hero relinquishes himself in order to express the universal; the knight of faith relinquishes the universal in order to become the single individual” (FT 75). Thus, Abraham understands himself as a particular individual who is not reconciled with the universal while the Tragic Hero renounces this individuality, shunning any part of himself that cannot be understood universally.

Because of this unmediated relationship, the Knight of Faith sees himself as an individual and realizes that he is not able to reveal himself ethically. “The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed. The single individual, qualified as immediate, sensate, and psychical, is the hidden” (FT 82). The Knight of Faith, then, having accepted himself as an individual in the deepest sense, is hidden in concealment, which is founded and maintained in relation to the absolute, beyond the ethical. Therefore, in Kierkegaard’s view, this concealment does not condemn the Knight of Faith to an unethical position but, instead, through faith, raises him above it.

Furthermore, unlike the Tragic Hero, who desires to be reconciled with the ethical, the Knight of Faith remains in his concealment. He has resigned himself to being alienated from the ethical and he accepts that his motives cannot be revealed. For the Tragic Hero this is unthinkable. “He cannot do this, because ethics loves him for the very reason that he always expresses the universal” (FT 87). Thus, ethics requires disclosure but the Knight of Faith – who is not rooted in ethics, in what is universal, but instead in the absolute – resolves himself to concealment.

When the Knight of Faith accepts his concealment by relating himself to the absolute, he takes on an attitude of silence. Because he is aware that he cannot be the object of ethical contemplation, he does not try to reveal himself. He does not try to speak out about the understanding he has: “[He] remains silent—but he cannot speak. Therein lies the distress and anxiety” (FT 113). This brings up an interesting point about the silence of the Knight of Faith: he is not silent because he chooses to be, he cannot help but be silent. “Even though I go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking” (FT 113). This is because the individual, as particular, is separated from the universal ontologically. The Knight of Faith understands this. He realizes that it does not matter what he, as an individual, thinks or does on the surface of things; at a fundamental level, he is unable to completely reveal himself in universal discourse. Thus, if he breaks his silence and tries to express himself as that eternal being in relation with the absolute, he will inevitably fail. His words will not be understood as he understands them. He will only succeed in misrepresenting himself. “He can say everything, but one thing he cannot say, and if he cannot say that—that is, say it in such a way that the other understands it—then he is not speaking” (FT 113).

The Knight of Faith, who understands himself as being incapable of breaking his silence and revealing himself ethically, may additionally be
contrasted to the aesthete, who, as a character in Kierkegaard’s thought, voluntarily chooses concealment: “Hiddenness is his free action, for which [aesthetics] also makes him responsible” (FT 85). The aesthete keeps silent but this silence is only superficial and, eventually, by some extraneous circumstance, his motives are revealed. “[The aesthete] has a way out [...] now everything is in order” (FT 87). The Knight of Faith, conversely, does not freely choose concealment. His motives are not capable of being exposed. Since they are rooted in his relation with the absolute, they cannot be revealed to others, even if this was his desire. Thus, even if the Knight of Faith wanted to, he has no mechanism with which to escape concealment. To reiterate, the Knight of Faith realizes that he cannot help but be silent, while the aesthete chooses to be.

This notion of silence as necessary for the Knight of Faith can be applied to all human beings. As previously mentioned, Kierkegaard insists that every person experiences anxiety and that it pervades all of our actions. In other words, it is not only the Knight of Faith who is an individual in the sense of being an eternal being capable of an unmediated relation to the absolute. All individuals, regardless of their acknowledgment of it, are eternal beings with this capacity. Thus, all human beings betray themselves – they betray their deepest ontological truth – when they attempt to break their silence. When someone speaks about this subject, he or she cannot avoid being misunderstood. Instead, then, the only way to be honest with oneself and others is to take on a silent disposition as the Knight of Faith does: “He remains silent in order to sacrifice himself – or he speaks in the awareness that he will throw everything into disorder” (FT 110).

Now, in order to elucidate this concept of silence, Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith will be compared to Josef K, the protagonist of Franz Kafka’s The Trial. Both Kierkegaard and Kafka present, as a theme of their writings, a fundamental ontological aspect of the individual as eternal and unmediated by the universal. They both bring to light the aspect of the individual human being that cannot be disclosed to others. Kierkegaard, on the one hand, presents this notion positively in the Knight of Faith, who accepts this aspect of himself and rests in the silence of faith. On the other hand, Kafka can be interpreted as offering a negative presentation of this notion. His character, K, does not accept the unmediated aspect of himself and seeks feverishly to reconcile himself with the universal.

First, Kafka’s underlying ontological assertion of the human being in The Trial must be elucidated. It is implied in the relation K has with the Law, which becomes apparent at the very beginning of the novel. “Someone must have slandered Josef K, for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested.” Far from a merely subjective assertion, this introduction can be taken as stating outright K’s judicial position: he has done nothing illegal to warrant his arrest. If K has done nothing against the Law, then why is he arrested? If we take the Law in Kafka’s work to be the universal or ethical and the Court to be that institutional arm of the Law that seeks to bring everything under it, into disclosure, then the answer becomes clear. K is arrested because, being an eternal individual, he is not contained fully under the ethical; he is not reconciled fully with the

1 Kafka, 1998, p.3.
universal. An aspect of K, the indeterminate possibility within him, is beyond the universal or ethical. Kafka, therefore, assumes the deep ontological position of the human being that is asserted explicitly in Kierkegaard’s writings. Like Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith, or any other person in anxiety, K is an individual set apart from the universal.

Throughout the novel, K attempts to resolve his case. He attempts to bring himself, as an individual, under the umbrella of the Law, of the ethical or universal. At one point, this endeavour leads him into a conversation with a Court painter regarding his trial. The painter offers to K the possibility of three favourable outcomes: actual acquittal, apparent acquittal, and protraction. First, the unrealistic option is actual acquittal. In this scenario, K would be permanently absolved of his charges. He would win the trial and be rid of it. To be actually acquitted, K would have to prove his innocence: “the defendant’s innocence alone is probably decisive.”

This pure form of acquittal, however, is referred to as a legend. The painter tells K that there is no record of an actual acquittal. This option, therefore, is not available to K. Although the Law gives him this option, he could never actually prove his innocence. K cannot show, in the parameters of the Law (i.e., the ethical or universal), that he, as an individual, is contained within it. Since K is an individual who is never concluded for objective discourse, he is unable to completely disclose himself to the Court.

Second, then, is apparent acquittal. To receive an apparent acquittal, K would have to convince a number of judges of his innocence. He would have to influence their opinions of him. In this solution, K simply has to convince other individuals that he is fully disclosed to them, that he does not harbour individuality beyond what they know about him. The problem is, however, that K would not truly be free from his trial; K is not reconciling himself with the universal as such but rather merely with its representatives, with other particular human beings. “Judges on the lowest level, and those are the only ones I know, don’t have the power to grant a final acquittal [...]” Though K can continually disclose himself to other individuals, strengthening the opinion that he is innocent, there will always be an element of the universal with which he has not reconciled himself. As with actual acquittal—since K, as an individual, contains within himself an eternal aspect—he can never entirely disclose himself.

Third is protraction, which differs from apparent acquittal in method but accomplishes the same thing. In protraction, K can indefinitely stall his trial by immersing himself in it, spending all his time and energy talking with judges and organizing his affairs. In so doing, he would be convincing even himself that he is contained within the Law. He would spend his whole life maintaining this façade. “The trial must be kept spinning within the tight circle to which it’s artificially restricted.” This solution, obviously enough, has the same problem as apparent acquittal: K is never free from his trial. He must constantly hide the concealed aspect of his individuality by absorbing himself in his trial.

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2 Ibid., p.152.
3 Ibid., p.158.
These are K’s options, and throughout Kafka’s novel, K. attempts the latter two. He associates himself with a lawyer suggested by his uncle, spends time in his job at the bank working on his case, and even visits the Court offices. This is all in an attempt to disclose himself to the Court and to reconcile himself with the Law. In thus acting, K. is trying to break the silence required of him from his original ontological state. Since he is an eternal being in possibility, unmediated by the universal, he must be silent. But he attempts to speak, to disclose himself. K., however, grows tired of attempting this, he never gets closer to a resolution of his case and his efforts appear futile. He is repulsed with what he will become by continually disclosing himself. Eventually, he accepts the incommunicable element within himself, falling into silence. He breaks ties with his lawyer and ignores his case. Finally, in the end, K is not reconciled with the Law; he resolves himself to concealment. The Law, however, sentences him to death and he is consequently executed.

Thus, *The Trial* can be interpreted as pointing out the tragi-comedy of our human situation: we are individuals of infinite complexity and possibility but we find ourselves subject to universalization—the Law—that we cannot fit ourselves in. We are forced to choose between remaining silent in our individuality, thus isolating ourselves from the universal and finding ourselves at odds with the Law, or disclosing ourselves in the universal, thus misrepresenting ourselves and betraying our fundamental ontological position.

Through this application of Kierkegaard’s ideas to Kafka’s *The Trial*, an unfortunate consequence of silence has emerged. Individuals must be silent or they misrepresent themselves but this silence isolates them from the universal and leaves them in despair. Kierkegaard’s solution to this, then, is the faith of the Knight of Faith, who elevates the individual in his silence above the universal to the level of the absolute. But Kafka’s *The Trial* offers no such mechanism. The individual is trapped in his silence and succumbs to the pressure of the universal, which either crushes him, as it did K., or bends and breaks him into a preconceived mold that limits who he can be.

In contrast to Kafka’s presentation of silence in *The Trial* is silence in Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*. Like Kafka, Hesse implicitly presents the individual as an eternal being unable to be contained within the universal. Unlike Kafka, however, Hesse’s protagonist, Siddhartha, finds rest in his ontological position as an eternal being. It can be shown that Siddhartha makes the same movements as the Knight of Faith does on the path to silence.

First, Siddhartha makes the realization that the individual cannot be seen abstractly, as separate from his concrete reality. He makes a turn away from the abstracting religion of his father and the ascetic religion of the Samanas, which deny the individual as the Self: “I wanted to rid myself of the Self, to conquer it, but I could not conquer it, I could only deceive it,

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5 K.’s future under the Law, which will warp and distort him, is embodied in Block, the merchant who K. meets at his last meeting with the lawyer.
6 As it did with Block, the pitiful merchant K. meets at the Lawyer’s house.
could only fly from it, could only hide from it.” 7 Thus, Siddhartha understands himself as an ever-changing individual in the world who cannot be justly dealt with through abstract contemplation.

Siddhartha then dives headlong into that concrete world, concerning himself with material possession and pleasure. But he eventually turns from this life, becoming unsatisfied with its contingencies: “It seemed to him that he had spent his life in a worthless and senseless manner; he retained nothing vital, nothing in any way precious or worth while.” 8 Siddhartha, like the Knight of Faith, realizes the contingency of his life and seeks to distill his understanding of himself to what is necessary and vital. Thus, he strives for an understanding of himself similar to Kierkegaard’s individual as an eternal being in possibility.

After this realization, Siddhartha despairs, abandoning his egoistic life. He eventually comes to the river’s edge, where he is given a sense of calm. He comes to realize that his previous years of hedonism and pleasure seeking do not now determine him: “The past now seemed to him to be covered by a veil, extremely remote, very unimportant.” 9 Just as, from one moment to the next, Siddhartha sees that the river’s waters are carried away, so too does he see all that is finite and inconsequential in his life carried away. Again, like the Knight of Faith, Siddhartha comes to an understanding of himself as a being of possibility; his past does not determine him. Unlike Kierkegaard’s portrayal of this realization, however, Hesse does not portray this understanding as an anxious experience.

Understanding himself as an indeterminate being full of possibility gives Siddhartha joy; it does not weigh heavily as Kierkegaard suggests. Now, Siddhartha takes up residence by the river, through which his understanding of himself as an eternal being in possibility is bolstered, this understanding reveals itself as something that can only be experienced, not taught: “a true seeker could not accept any teachings, not if he sincerely wished to find something.” 10 Siddhartha learns this lesson through his interactions with his son, who refuses all the wisdom he wants to bestow and runs away. He is saddened by this but realizes that his attempts at teaching were futile; the son must instead experience for himself that deep self-understanding. “Siddhartha realized that the desire that had driven him to this place was foolish, that he could not help his son, that he should not force himself on him.” 11 This, then, leads Siddhartha to an attitude of silence. He cannot teach passersby how to understand themselves. He cannot disclose the understanding he has of himself. “Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, live it, be fortified by it [...] but one cannot communicate and teach it.” 12 Thus, instead of becoming a teacher or sage, he becomes a ferryman, who is only able take people where they are already going.

Unlike K., then, Siddhartha comes to rest in silence. A universalizing force does not crush him and he finds peace. Hesse’s Siddhartha thus denies

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7 Hesse, 2012, p.95.
8 Ibid., p.142.
9 Ibid., p.150.
10 Ibid., p.173.
11 Ibid., p.190.
12 Ibid., p.207.
the tragi-comedic element of silence found within Kafka's *The Trial*. But Hesse's account of silence in *Siddhartha* does not therefore line up completely with Kierkegaard's. For the latter, silence is grounded in anxiety. The Knight of Faith does not abolish anxiety by taking on an attitude of silence. He merely learns how to be anxious well. For Hesse, however, Siddhartha stops his anxious search and comes to rest in his silent self-understanding.

This paper has presented the positive concept of silence found within the works of Kierkegaard and has clarified its shape further through a comparison to themes found within Kafka and Hesse's works. Through examining and comparing these writings, silence has been introduced as a philosophical disposition taken in light of the individual's understanding of her or himself as an eternal being in possibility.
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FAITH IS A MARVEL: THE CONCEPT OF FAITH IN SØREN KIERKEGAARD AND LARS VON TRIER

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ABSTRACT

Kierkegaard’s dialectical lyric *Fear and Trembling* and Lars von Trier’s film *Breaking the Waves* are expressions of the ancient quest for understanding faith. In this paper I shall combine the fortitude of these two works. Taken together, they can aid us in our struggle to understand faith. I shall apply Kierkegaard’s radical account of Abrahamic faith as presented in *Fear and Trembling* to the movie’s protagonist Bess. Part I of this paper will be a thorough discussion of Kierkegaard’s account of faith. I shall begin with a short description of what he dismisses as immediate or naive faith. A more detailed account of the radical faith that Abraham shows in his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac will follow. Part II will then interpret *Breaking the Waves* by means of an application of the concept of radical Abrahamic faith. I will attempt to show that Bess can serve as a modern example of the hero of faith who instantiates the teleological suspension of the ethical. Kierkegaard’s account of faith can help to gain a deeper understanding of Bess’s internal struggle, and of the concept of faith in general.

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INTRODUCTION

*Fear and Trembling* is a Dialectical Lyric written by Søren Kierkegaard under his nom de plume Johannes de Silentio. Published in 1843, a time when Denmark was still deeply Christian, it discusses the role faith plays in the individual’s life. It is lyrical in its ability to draw the reader in, to fascinate with its poetic language and its free retelling of old tales. It is dialectical in that it uses the philosophical method of contrasting opposing arguments in order to reach a higher understanding through a synthesis of both positions. On the one hand, de Silentio celebrates faith with the aid of the biblical tale of Abraham. Abraham is a great man because he showed faith even in face of God’s most difficult, heart-wrenching command to sacrifice his only son. He is a hero, a hero of faith. But how, de Silentio asks on the other hand, can a man be celebrated who was willing to kill his own son? How can we accept such unethical behaviour? I would like to argue that Lars von Trier’s movie *Breaking the Waves* struggles with a similar problem. Together with the main characters of *Dancer in the Dark* and *Dogville*, secondary literature often interprets the movie’s protagonist Bess
as a female Christ figure.¹ Sacrifice, love, and saintliness are identified as the main themes, whereas faith is seen only as a secondary topic. I shall give an interpretation that posits faith as a central theme of the movie by applying Kierkegaard’s radical account of Abrahamic faith as presented in Fear and Trembling to the protagonist’s unwavering faith. Thereby I will show that Breaking the Waves is a deeply philosophical work that may aid us in our struggle to understand faith.

I. A KIERKEGAARDIAN ACCOUNT OF FAITH

Immediate Faith

Let me begin with a short description of the naive faith which de Silentio denounces. Naive, immediate faith, he claims, “has never existed simply because it has always existed” (FT 56). Immediate faith has always existed, precisely because it is immediate. Kierkegaard uses the term immediate here in Hegel’s sense: that the immediate is the un-mediated, the directly experienced, unreflected upon. Kierkegaard criticises his contemporaries who he blames of never questioning their faith but for whom faith is a given that did not require any reflection to reach. It is in this sense naive, childish even. This faith as the mere acceptance of pregiven values is one that de Silentio cannot accept. In fact, it is one that is not even in line with the teachings of the Bible, namely the story of Abraham and his son Isaac. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Abraham was willing to do so. He rode to Mount Moriah with his beloved son, he built the fire for the burnt offering and he drew the knife to sacrifice Isaac. Only in the last instant an angel appeared and ordered him to spare his son and sacrifice a ram instead. Isaac lived. Abraham’s faith in God was strong, he never questioned His command. He was willing to give what was most dear to him in this world, his only son, the son he loved. He had faith. This story provides the reader with a very different version of faith. Either this is faith, writes Kierkegaard, or faith is done for, and it “has never existed simply because it has existed always” (FT 56). In Fear and Trembling, de Silentio presents Abraham’s radical faith as the only faith that ought to be accepted as such; either this, or there is no faith worth speaking of.

Radical Faith

The kind of faith that de Silentio accepts is the radical faith that Abraham showed in his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son. This faith, although deemed impossible to communicate, is attributed several characteristics throughout the work; it is absurd, unreasonable, uncommunicable. Alastair Hannay expresses it in the introduction to Fear and Trembling in the following words: “The faith that Kierkegaard is concerned with here is not plain belief in the existence of God; it is belief that the projects on which one sets one’s heart are possible even

¹ Shiloh, 2005, p.81.
when they prove humanly impossible to carry through.\(^2\) The knight of faith believes in the impossible, on the strength of the absurd.

Faith, for de Silentio, is a paradox. The individual has faith on the strength on the absurd. Abraham believes—he is absolutely convinced of the truth of this—that Isaac will live. He knows Isaac will die at his own hands that he, Abraham, himself will be the direct cause of his death, but at the same time he believes that Isaac will live. God promised him that through Isaac he will become the father of nations: “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”\(^3\) Abraham never doubts this. The absurdity in faith is that the individual lives with an impossibility. Abraham has faith because he confidently accepts the impossibility that his son will live to be the father of nations, although he will sacrifice him. Precisely because faith is a paradox it is inaccessible to reason. It cannot be grasped with the rational mind because the absurdity of it is inaccessible to thought. Faith is unreasonable. In order to have faith, the individual is forced to abandon his rational understanding, to stop thinking. It is impossible to rationally understand the belief that Isaac will be both sacrificed and the father of nations, both dead and alive. It’s a paradox and thus impossible to understand. De Silentio himself is stunned by this movement: “to be able to lose one's understanding and along with it everything finite, for which it is the stockbroker, and then to win the very same finitude again by virtue of the absurd – this appalls me” (FT 36).

This is exactly what makes faith not only inconceivable but also uncommunicable. The hero of faith necessarily remains concealed because it is impossible for him to make himself understood. Even if he was able to explain his cause, no-one would be able to understand him. “This position cannot be mediated, for all mediation takes place only by virtue of the universal; it is and remains for all eternity a paradox, impervious to thought. And yet faith is this paradox” (FT 56). Faith goes beyond reason. The hero of faith therefore lives in isolation because there is no-one he could possibly talk to: “higher there winds a lonesome trail” (FT 76). He knows that this is his deed, to climb the lonely path in isolation, not to meet a soul on his journey. The concealment is not a choice of the hero of faith but unavoidable due to the impossibility to communicate, yes even to understand faith. That concealment is a treat of the demonic is only half of the truth. According to de Silentio “…silence is both […] the demon’s trap, and the more that is silenced, the more terrible the demon, but silence is also divinity’s mutual understanding with the single individual” (FT 88). The concealment is demonic if the individual chooses to remain silent, but it is divine if the individual cannot disclose himself, even if he wanted to.

**Faith Beyond the Ethical**

According to de Silentio, the individual in faith stands outside of the universal. Kierkegaard refers in *Fear and Trembling* to the Hegelian conception of the ethical as the universal. He begins the three chapters entitled Problema I-III with this assumption, only to show thereafter that

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\(^2\) Hannay, 2003, p.25.

\(^3\) Genesis 21
faith requires a transcendence of the ethical as the universal. The first sentence of Problema I reads: “The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times” (FT 54). The ethical is a set of values that is universally applicable to every member of the respective society. Like every father, Abraham has an ethical duty to love and care for his son irrespective of time and place. The ethical as the universal prescribes that “Any particular which is not in accordance with the moral law, any action which cannot be interpreted as an instance of this generality, is not allowed, or, if it occurs, is without moral worth.” 4 The first sentence of Problema II states that “The ethical is the universal and as such it is also the divine” (FT 68). This implies that all ethical duties are also duties to God, as they are made in reference to God. Hannay explains further that, if the ethical is the universal, “There are no duties to God other than duties that are in the first instance to the universal.” 5 God and the universally ethical Good are taken to be congruent. Problema III begins with the assumption that “The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed” (FT 82). Any moral action can be explained and thus justified. The reasons for its execution ought to be disclosed. Killing one’s child—or the intention to do so—is and must always be unethical, because it does not fulfil any of these requirements: it does not serve the common good, it is not in accordance with a divine universality, and it cannot be rationally explained.

Abraham must therefore be ethically condemned. He was willing to sacrifice his son, not like Agamemnon for another ethical purpose but for the sole reason that God asked him to do so. Nevertheless he is celebrated as a great man, as the father of faith. This, de Silentio argues, is only conceivable because faith transcends the ethical. “By [Abraham’s] act he transgressed the ethical altogether and had a higher telos outside it, in relation to which he suspended it” (FT 59). He terms this the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical, which is a necessity for faith. The ethical is no longer the telos of the individual’s actions; instead he turns towards the absolute, towards God, and stands in an absolute relationship to the absolute. Instead of the ethical life he now lives the religious life. In faith “the single individual is higher than the universal” (FT 54). It is therefore the individual, not the universal moral law that decides what is good and what is not. “Whether the single individual actually is undergoing a spiritual trial or is a knight of faith, only the single individual himself can decide” (FT 79). De Silentio states. There are no universally valid rules to establish what the right thing to do is. Abraham’s absolute faith in God involves an absolute duty to God. The right thing to do is whatever He commands, whether it is ethically good or not. Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son cannot be judged according to ethical standards because it transcends these. This links back to the absurdity of faith discussed earlier. Faith cannot be understood, it cannot be expressed, and therefore it cannot be justified; a justification can only take place on a rational level, which lies within universal. It is therefore impossible to argue rationally for a teleological suspension of the ethical; likewise it is impossible to argue rationally against faith.

5 Hannay, 2003, p.28.
II. BESS’S FAITH IN ‘BREAKING THE WAVES’

Bess and the Absurd

Since its premier in 1996, Lars von Trier’s movie Breaking the Waves has sparked an abundance of critical interpretations. It has been deemed a movie about “holy fools, women who sacrifice everything and achieve sainthood,” ⁶ about “religion, eroticism and possession,” ⁷ or “Bess’s fervent faith, her ethical seriousness, her goodness, and, above all, her self-sacrificial love.” ⁸ As I have mentioned earlier, I would like to shift Bess’s faith further into focus. So far it has been treated rather marginally. In the following, I shall therefore employ the account of radical Abrahamic faith as presented in Fear and Trembling to get a better understanding of Bess’s faith.

Breaking the Waves follows the evolution of faith of the young, innocent protagonist from her wedding to the day of her funeral. At the beginning of the movie Bess is an active part of a deeply religious community, devoting much of her time to the church; not—as a priest points out during her wedding—to please the community but “out of [her] love for God in heaven.” ⁹ In her early conversations with God, she places great emphasis on being good: “Yes, I’ll be good. I’ll be really, really good,” she pledges and repeats later: “I promise to be a good girl.” ¹⁰ At this stage Bess conforms to the strong moral framework of her community. At least she tries to. “Why should you be any different?” Her mother scolds Bess when she suffers from the distance between her and Jan: “every woman around here has to learn to be alone when their man is away at sea or on the oil rigs. Even you can learn how to endure.” ¹¹ Endurance and the abolition of particularity are the themes of the Hegelian ethics that Bess is urged to follow. She is expected to be an integral part of her community, which, in Kierkegaard’s words, is “absolutely related to the universal,” (FT 54) i.e. urges his members to follow a set of universally valid rules. Bess is in the position of the single individual within the universal in Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Hegel: “The single individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy, is the individual who has his telos in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to express himself in this to annul his singularity in order to become the universal” (FT 54). At this point, Bess is still acting within the ethical, according to her community’s moral rules which are taken to coincide with God’s commands.

This changes dramatically after Jan’s accident that brings him back from the oil rig and his peculiar request: he asks Bess to sleep with other men in order to keep him alive. “Love is a mighty power... Isn’t it? If I die, it

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⁶ Beltzer, 2002.
⁸ Shiloh, 2005, p.87. My emphasis.
⁹ von Trier, 1996.
¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid.
will be because love cannot keep me alive."\textsuperscript{12} This is where Bess begins to believe “on the strength of the absurd,” to borrow from Kierkegaard. She believes that her sleeping with other men will heal Jan, although there is no causal relation between her actions and Jan’s health. Her faith is absurd. Just like Abraham believed that Isaac would live despite being sacrificed, so Bess believes that Jan will be healed despite the doctor’s diagnosis pointing to the opposite. It is impossible that Jan will be healed because Bess sleeps with other men. And yet, once Bess overcomes her initial doubts and puts herself in situations unbearable to even follow on screen, each time she sexually engages with another man Jan gets better. In order to have faith, Bess has to abandon her rational understanding. From the beginning of the movie her character is devised as “mentally unstable,”\textsuperscript{13} “stupid,”\textsuperscript{14} and “not right in the head.”\textsuperscript{15} Her rational understanding has never been her principle way of interacting with the world. It is a minor step for her to abandon it completely. It only takes one instance to convince her of the power of her faith. Jan gets better after she sexually satisfies the man on the bus. “You’re not going to die, I know you’re not. I promise you.” Bess tells him in the ensuing scene, and sounds convinced when she tells Dodo: “I’m the one who saved his life. I can save it again... You see, love can save Jan.”\textsuperscript{16} As mentioned earlier, the absurdity of faith is what makes it not only inconceivable but also uncommunicable. When Bess tells Dodo about her faith, her sister in law yells at her: “Don’t talk like that. It’s stupid!”\textsuperscript{17} Bess cannot be understood, just like Abraham, the hero of faith. She does not choose concealment but is forced into it. She tries to explain herself but no-one is able to understand her. Her initial ethical defence: “He is my husband, and God has said I must honour him”\textsuperscript{18} is rebuffed by Dodo’s harsh rationality: “What you’re doing is making things worse. It’s nonsense.” To the rational individual the act of faith can only be nonsense. Bess has begun her evolution out of the Hegelian ethical in the name of an absurd, unreasonable, and uncommunicable faith; the radical Abrahamic faith Kierkegaard describes in \textit{Fear and Trembling}.

\textit{Bess and the Ethical}

Jan’s request is an offence against the ethical as the universal in the Hegelian sense, as discussed above. Fornication, adultery, and prostitution certainly cannot find a place within the ethical system of Bess’s community. It does not come as a surprise when she is cast out. Heath argues that...

the degradation [that] is redeemed by love, is not, in fact, degradation but sacrifice, a cause of action that involves what Kierkegaard [...] calls the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Heath, 1998, p.95.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} von Trier, 1996.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
‘teleological suspension of the ethical’: a recognition of a higher authority or purpose in relation to which the ethical life of the community’s norms, the universal public law, becomes merely relative. [...] Bess, supreme believer (‘I can believe’ - this, she says, is her special talent), stands out from shared religious or social values in the name of faith, of love: she, like Abraham, transcends the universal, is placed scandalously ‘as single individual in an absolute relation to the absolute.’

Bess instantiates the teleological suspension of the ethical. She is cast out of the ethical and stands now as the particular above the universal (FT 54-55). Her God, in confirming her husband’s request, can no longer be identified with what is, ethically speaking, good. The ethical is no longer the divine and vice versa. Hence her actions are not good in the ethical sense, but they are faithful; her duties are no longer ethical duties, but duties to God. They cannot be generalised. After her first act of faith she stands alone on the abandoned Scottish highway and—not before throwing up from the disgust that is shaking her—thrusts her face upwards to God and begs: “Forgive me father for I have sinned.”

He replies conciliatorily: “Mary Magdalen sinned and she is among my dearly beloved.” As Heath remarks “faith, not virtue, is here the opposite of sin.” Bess has transcended the ethical as the universal and is now standing outside of it. Her actions are faithful despite being unethical. She no longer does what is good, instead she does what is required. She is the only one who can judge whether they are the right thing to do. It is, in fact, never refuted that her sexual encounters help Jan to recover. The outcome of the film confirms Bess in her faith—Jan does not only survive, but is able to walk after Bess finds her tragic end through the wounds inflicted by the sadistic sailors. She resigned herself and, post mortem, receives everything back on the strength of the absurd; her husband’s health and her own propinquity to God (represented by the bells ringing in heaven after her burial at sea). She transcends the ethical, as well as the logical and the reasonable. She has become a “knight of faith who, in the loneliness of the universe never hears another human voice but walks alone with [her] dreadful responsibility” (FT 80).

While within the ethical, the moral rules of the community provide the individual with guidance. This is the paradox of responsibility Derrida elaborates on in The Gift of Death. The individual within the universal can give up all responsibility to the ethical; he thus acts irresponsibly. As long as the justification of actions is possible in terms of the ethical, the individual does not take absolute responsibility for them: “Speaking relieves us, Kierkegaard notes, for it ‘translates’ into the [universal].” Once the ethical is surpassed, the absolute responsibility rests on the individual alone. He cannot turn towards universally valid rules to look for a confirmation of his actions. Bess has reached this absolute responsibility. She no longer exhibits the fragility and susceptibility she was identified with at the outset of the narrative. Instead she acts of her own accord. Not to please herself, it must

21 von Trier, 1996.
22 Ibid.
be said, for selfishness is her greatest concern. Her only wish is Jan’s wellbeing. Her faith is grounded in her love for him. She readily accepts the suffering, the fear and trembling that await her in order to save him. When Jan asks her to stop her mad quest (“Let me die. I’m evil in head” he manages to scrawl on a piece of paper) she won’t listen. “I love you, no matter what is in your head” she tells him. In the subsequent scenes, first her mother, then Dr. Richardson urge her to acknowledge the grave consequences of her actions. However, Bess no longer listens to them: they who represent the ethical, universally valid rules that she has transcended. I shall therefore argue that Dr. Richardson was right in his request to exchange the words “neurotic” and “psychotic” for the word good: “The deceased was suffering from being good.” Bess, the knight of faith was not good as in ethically virtuous, but she was good understood as loyal to her faith, selfless, and full of love for her husband. It is indisputable that her goodness involved a great deal of suffering, but it did not stop her from believing. She is a hero of faith who believed on the strength of the absurd that she will be able to save her beloved husband.

CONCLUSION

“What is left out of the Abraham story is the anxiety,” Kierkegaard complains about the sermons of his contemporaries (FT 28). Lars von Trier certainly did not leave the anguish out of the story of Bess. Breaking the Waves is a movie about love, about self sacrifice, and saintliness. But it is also a movie about faith. It is about the kind of faith that takes a hero to bear it, the radical faith that Kierkegaard identifies in Fear and Trembling. This faith, represented in Kierkegaard’s work by Abraham is paradoxical because it is grounded in an impossibility; absurd because it cannot be grasped by reason; and uncommunicable, because it cannot be understood. It is possible only outside of the Hegelian ethical because it is neither universal nor disclosed but an isolated, singular experience that transcends the ethical. There is no justification for it, because only the faithful individual himself can tell whether he is acting in faith or not. I have shown in the second part of this paper that Bess develops this radical faith in face of her husband’s illness, believing in the impossibility of healing her beloved Jan through the unethical tasks he has given her. She suspends the ethical. She takes up all the courage it takes, isolated and cast out she suffers the responsibility of being a knight of faith. It becomes clear in Breaking the Waves, as well as in Fear and Trembling, that there is only a fine line between faith and madness. Neither of the works can be understood as urging the reader/viewer to have faith. Rather, both works are illustrations of faith in its most radical form and advocate not to talk about it halfheartedly. It is a severe topic, and the Gretchenfrage must be left to the individual alone.

25 von Trier, 1996.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p.107.
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REGARDING THE FINITE: ON BAD INFINITY IN *FEAR AND TREMBLING* AND NEGATIVE DIALECTICS

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I will present a critical reading of Søren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. I will argue that Kierkegaard’s notion of the infinite, as it is presented throughout the book, resembles what Hegel calls the *bad Infinity* in his *Encyclopaedia Logics*. I will argue that passion in its infinite form is as arbitrary as what Kierkegaard calls a mere *aesthetic emotion*. Consequentially I will argue that in presenting the dialectical movement towards faith, Kierkegaard fails to do justice to the non-identical. What he considers faith, I will argue, is a form of self-contemplation fit for the justification and rationalisation of finite suffering. On the contrary, I will outline Theodor W. Adorno’s concept of negative dialectics with its emphasis on the *preponderance of the object* and Adorno’s concept of aesthetic experience as a corrective counterpart to a merely instrumental reason. I will argue that Adorno, contrary to Kierkegaard, presents a philosophy that aims to hold on to the non-identical through critical self-reflection. Consequentially I will compare Adorno’s negative approach to utopian thought to the notion of faith presented in *Fear and Trembling*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Søren Kierkegaard and Theodor W. Adorno are both aware of the boundaries of reason in the shape of an abstract universality. Adorno’s answer to this problem – *preponderance of the object* as a paradigm for a critical philosophy in the face of despair – however, is fundamentally different from the Kierkegaardian notion of faith. By pointing out the limits of universal reason, Adorno is holding on to a universality that aims to do justice to the non-identical. In contrast, I will argue, that Kierkegaard’s radical subjectivism, expressing itself in his notions of resignation and faith, bears evidence for a disregard of the finite non-identical. In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard outlines his conception of faith in reference to the case of Abraham in Genesis 22. He points out, that reason cannot sufficiently prepare the ground for a movement into a faithful state. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of passion, which he distinguishes from merely *aesthetic emotions*. Kierkegaard presents a dialectic movement from a finite emotional state, through a stage of infinite resignation, and finally into faith. I will argue, however, that what Kierkegaard presents as infinite does in fact resemble Hegel’s notion of *bad Infinity* (*schlechte
In its disregard for the finite and non-identical, I will argue, the infinite remains as arbitrary as the finite which it seeks to overcome. Based on the ground of an abstract negation, I claim, there is nothing left to believe in; and that in this light the very notion of faith becomes meaningless.

Consequentially I will compare Kierkegaard’s notion of faith to Adorno’s negative approach to utopian thought. Despite all differences, Kierkegaard’s and Adorno’s works can be read as attempts to hold on to the thought of deliverance under the impression of despair. Facing despair and suffering, the proposal of a positive notion of faith becomes an impossibility for Adorno. Only through determinate negation (bestimmte Negation), one might keep hold of the thought of deliverance and perpetuate the utopian thought. On the contrary, despair or anguish seems to be a mere condition of possibility to make the movement into an infinite state of faith for Kierkegaard. What he proposes as faith in the face of despair is a form of self-contemplation rather than the perpetuation of utopian thought. As such, I claim that faith is prone to relativism as well as the rationalisation of finite suffering.

2. FAITH AND REASON IN FEAR AND TREMBLING

In his pseudonymous work Fear and Trembling Soren Kierkegaard aka Johannes de Silentio reflects on Abrahams intended sacrifice of Isaac in Chapter 22 of the book of Genesis. The case is deeply troubling for Kierkegaard since it suggests a fundamental contradiction between reason on one hand and faith on the other:

The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he meant to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he meant to sacrifice Isaac — but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that can make a person sleepless, and yet without this anxiety Abraham is not who he is (FT 30).

Abraham’s immediate willingness to obey God’s command would under normal conditions be considered a deep violation of the ethical law\(^1\), and hence reason – for many enlightened thinkers identical to the very notion of God. Kant, for example, did not miss the opportunity to comment on the case of Abraham. In The Conflict of The Faculties, he notes that if God was to speak to a human, it would be beyond human capabilities to recognize his words as the words of God. Nonetheless, Kant notes, one can be certain that the voice is an illusion if it contradicts the moral law\(^2\):

We can use, as an example, the myth of the sacrifice that Abraham was going to make by butchering and burning his only son at God’s command

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\(^1\) I will assume that in using the term ‘ethical’, Kierkegaard is referring to Kant’s practical philosophy in general and the categorical imperative proposed on different formulations in the groundworks of the metaphysics of morals, in particular. Kant expulses the possibility of any reasonable justification for acting contrary to the moral law since he proposes an identity between the reason and the ethical.

Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice: “That I ought not kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God — of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even is [sic, read: “if” (M.B.)] this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.”

For Kant, what Abraham witnessed could not possibly have been an emergence of the voice of God, since it contradicts its very notion: reason. The suspension of reason, however, turns out to be a keystone of Kierkegaard’s concept of faith. While faith and reason for Kierkegaard might not necessarily contradict each other, their relation is certainly one of tension.4

Only by his alacrity to follow God’s demand Abraham receives the Lord’s blessing and becomes the father of Judaism and therefore Christianity. For Kierkegaard, Abraham is perhaps to be considered not only a Knight of Faith but one “greater than all” — not because of finite qualities such as wisdom or love for the son and the following generations. Abraham is not great for “expecting the possible” or “expecting the eternal” (FT 16). It is the unshakable commitment to God, and his willingness to suspend reason in favour of faith that distinguishes Abraham from any regular human agents:

There was one who was great by virtue of his power, and one who was great by virtue of his wisdom, and one who was great by virtue of his hope, and one who was great by virtue of his love, but Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself (FT 16).

Given that the father is obliged to protect the son from harm, one might have expected Abraham to beg for mercy or to bargain for Isaacs life. However, though he had any reason to do so, Abraham did not complain about or even doubt God’s command. Faithfully he trusted in the just nature of the demand and acted accordingly. As Kierkegaard remarks, by any standards of reason, Abraham’s unquestionable willingness to obey must be considered insane.

Kierkegaard argues that this insanity is precisely the distinguishing quality of Abraham’s commitment. Reasoning about the just nature of God’s command would have indicated a lack of faith. But Abraham’s faith was so strong that he did not fall for any distractions. On more than one occasion Kierkegaard makes clear that reason cannot sufficiently prepare the ground for the famous leap. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of passion (Lidenskab) for the movement into faith:

This requires passion. Every movement of infinity is carried out through passion, and no reflection can produce a movement. This is the continual leap in existence that explains the movement, whereas mediation is a

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4 Evans, 2010, p.204.
chimera, which in Hegel is supposed to explain everything and which is also the only thing he never has tried to explain (FT 42f).

Passion, rather than reason, becomes the foundation for the movement. In his reservations towards the capabilities of philosophical reason for preparing the movement into faith, Kierkegaard may have anticipated elements of a critique of instrumental reason proposed by thinkers associated with critical theory in the twentieth century. When emphasizing the importance of passion before reason, he might have aimed at a similar direction as Max Horkheimer when he remarked the impossibility of proposing an argument against murder out of mere reason in the Dialectic of Enlightenment. Kierkegaard’s effort, however, does not aim to present an argument against murder. On the contrary: he investigates the possibility of a teleological suspension of the ethical.

For understanding the Kierkegaardian position, as presented in Fear and Trembling, it might be helpful to further investigate the relation between faith and passion. Kierkegaard makes clear that passion, as well as faith, is not to be confused with a mere aesthetic emotion or a momentary feeling:

Everyone, to be sure, has momentary feelings, but if everyone, therefore, would do the dreadful thing that love has sanctified as an immortal achievement, then everything is lost, both the achievement and the one led astray (FT 31).

In the tradition of enlightened thinkers such as Kant, Kierkegaard associates emotions with finitude and chance. Hegel similarly describes a finite will which is defined by its desires as „arbitrariness“, „contingency in the shape of will.“ For him, emotions are to be mediated through a process of history so that freedom becomes their main objective. Kierkegaard, however, does not trust in the principle of mediation. To elevate passion from a mere finite emotion which is bound to nature as the other to a self-relating subjectivity, one must go through a stage of resignation. In accepting the impossibility of fulfilling one’s finite desires, one must renounce their finite nature and turn to the innermost and infinite nature of one’s passion. To illuminate this stage of resignation Kierkegaard draws an analogy:

A young lad falls in love with a princess, and this love is the entire substance of his life, and yet the relation is such that it cannot possibly be realized, cannot possibly be translated from ideality into reality (FT 41).

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7 The subjective spirit (Subjektiver Geist) has to realize itself through the process of history in the form of the ethical life in the realm of objectivity (Objektiver Geist); only then for Hegel, Spirit can come to itself in form of the absolute spirit (Absoluter Geist) – art, religion, and philosophy. The absolute idea, as the ultimate realization of freedom, is inseparably linked to the finite individual existences of members of society; though by its very nature it cannot be the content of an isolated individual mind. Emerging from the process of history, the absolute spirit is, so to speak, an intersubjective subjectivity.
As a Knight of Resignation, the lad does not just abandon his love for the princess and turns to something else. Instead, he makes this love the whole content of his life. This does not mean that his actions do in any way serve the realization of his wish to win the princesses’ love; “He is no longer finitely concerned about what the princess does, and precisely this proves that he has made the movement infinitely” (FT 44). In making his love the whole content of his life, the lad is not affected by anything outside the most inward nature of his love. He does not seek satisfaction of erotic desires for example. The lad’s love has been transformed to its merely inward form which is no longer affected by anything apart from its inward nature. It is thereby elevated from being a mere finite feeling to an infinite passion in a state of resignation.

His love for that princess would become for him the expression of an eternal love, would assume a religious character, would be transfigured into a love of the eternal being, which true enough denied the fulfillment but nevertheless did reconcile him once more in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take away from him (FT 43).

The so-called infinite resignation is a necessary condition for the movement into faith, but not a sufficient one. To make the movement into faith, one must lay trust in the strength of the absurd. In making this movement the lad says: “Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her — that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible” (FT 46).

This trust in the virtue of the absurd is what Kierkegaard considers the constituent of faith. In the case of Genesis 22, Abraham went through a state of infinite resignation; he knew the loss of the son was inevitable. Turned to the innermost and infinite nature of his love, however, he found the absurdity of existence — God.

he had faith that God would not demand Isaac of him, and yet he was willing to sacrifice him if it was demanded. He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question, and it certainly was absurd that God, who required it of him, should in the next moment rescind the requirement (FT 35-36).

Not only did Abraham accept the inevitability of Isaacs fate. In believing in the strength of the absurd, he knew Isaac would be spared. In other words, Abraham abandoned hope and his finite and mere emotional love for Isaac. Faithfully, he laid his trust in the infinite love of God. In acting as a faithful servant, Abraham eventually saved his son and proved himself to be a true Knight of Faith.

Kierkegaard points out that the movement into resignation, and finally into faith, is not just an abandonment of the finite in favour of an abstract universality. As he makes clear in The Sickness unto Death, this would be a form of self-denial as well as to give oneself up for the satisfaction of one’s finite desires. It is crucial that for Kierkegaard it is precisely the movement into faith, which allows the agent to hold on to the
finite. In the case of Genesis 22 one might argue that Abraham saved Isaac through his faith – in the end, however, it is God, who prevents Abraham from murdering his son. When we focus on the state of Abraham’s love and the question how this love is preserved through the dialectical movement towards faith, the case turns out to be even more problematic.

Kierkegaard considers Abraham’s faith and his love for Isaac to be of much more value and of a higher state than any emotional love an unfaithful agent could offer:

Precisely because resignation is antecedent, faith is no esthetic emotion but something far higher; it is not the spontaneous inclination of the heart but the paradox of existence (FT 47).

He remarks that he himself would not have been able to love Isaac in the way Abraham did since he would have “held back at the very last minute” (FT 35). While in Hegel, it is mediation or a form of determinate negation that elevates the absolute drive from its arbitrariness, for Kierkegaard, mere emotions are to be abandoned for the sake of the more authentic commitment – love in its infinite inward facing form in the stage of resignation. The movement into a state of resignation can be read as a movement of negation – a negation of the finite love in favour of its eternal form.

In its aesthetic form the agent’s love is bound to the particularity of its object and the arbitrariness of the agent’s desires. In making the movement to resignation the agent distances herself from the merely aesthetic desire in favour of an infinite love. The infinite love is no longer bound to the finitude of her desires or its object – the particular human being. Distancing itself from its object however, love remains stale compared to its once vital nature. Or as Freud puts it: “A love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value, by doing an injustice to its object; and secondly, not all men are worthy of love.”

In the form of inwardness, the agents love is infinite in the sense of what Hegel calls the bad or negative infinite in the Encyclopaedia Logic:

Something becomes an other; this other is itself somewhat; therefore it likewise becomes an other, and so on ad infinitum.

This Infinity is the wrong [read: bad, (M.B.)] or negative Infinity: it is only a negation of a finite: but the finite rises again the same as ever, and is never got rid of and absorbed.

I argue that the Kierkegaardian faith is infinite in the form of bad Infinity, and that Kierkegaard’s thought yields to the same contradiction as observed by Ludwig Feuerbach in his Essence of Christianity. Feuerbach argues that Christian faith turns out to be a religious commitment to an abstract universality. In his understanding faith separates the human being from

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9 Hegel, 1975, §§ 93–94.
itself – it fails to realize that God is a universalisation of the particular human being. Consequentially, the Christian God for Feuerbach is a form of bad infinity in the sense that is a merely abstract negation of the finite. Faith, that is directed upon God in this sense, fails to acknowledge the virtue of the finite nature of human existence. Accordingly, Feuerbach points to a contradiction between love and faith. For Feuerbach, it is (finite) love that enables us to come to a universal notion of humanity (Gattungsbegriff); faith on the other hand separates the human being from itself – and consequently, human beings from each other.\footnote{10}

Turned towards the innermost nature of her love, what Kierkegaard’s agent has in mind is merely an abstraction of her finite love. She therefore fails to discriminate between what is to be loved and what is not. As a mere negation of the finite, the infinite that is to be achieved through the movement into resignation, is in fact only particulate – as a bad infinite it is hence no less arbitrary than what Kierkegaard calls an aesthetic emotion. Kierkegaard’s dialectical figure consists of another movement. Presupposing the emptiness of love in a stage of infinite resignation, however, it remains questionable what element of this love is to be regained by faith. The Knight of Resignation is indifferent towards anything external to his own subjectivity – he is indifferent to whether the former object of his love is saved or not. Presupposing this state of resignation, or indifference, there is simply nothing left to believe in. The discrimination between good and evil is as arbitrary as whether Isaac is saved or not.

3. NEGATIVE DIALECTICS AND THE PREPONDERANCE OF THE OBJECT

Like Kierkegaard, Adorno was aware that reason is simply not capable of generating any meaningful normative statements out of itself. As Adorno explicates, enlightened reason (and for Adorno, this includes the German Idealism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth as well as the Logical Positivism of the twentieth century) is characterized by what he calls the principle of identity. In proposing the identity of being and thinking, the idealists have ventured to dispose of anything that did not fit into their philosophical systems:

Idealism – most explicitly Fichte – gives unconscious sway to the ideology that the not-I, l’autri, and finally all that reminds us of nature is inferior, so the unity of the self-preserving thought may devour it without misgivings.\footnote{11}


\footnote{11} Adorno, 2000; pp.22–23.
Abstract reason focuses merely on itself. What does not fit into its system – the nonidentical – is therefore understood as inferior. Turned towards itself, for Adorno, reason is without its own purpose while open to serve any. Adorno makes clear that enlightened reason once emerged to emancipate humanity from the threat of an unmastered nature. Focussing on itself, however, reason fails to hold on to this purpose and hence becomes unreasonable. What Adorno recognises in enlightened reason is a tendency to abstractly universalize the particular. The abstract universal (similar to the before mentioned bad Infinity) fails to hold on to the finite and nonidentical and becomes arbitrary.

Adorno’s critique is not just of epistemological nature. In the social order of the twentieth century for Adorno the principle of identity has enforced itself in the shape of an instrumental reason. It is shaping the markets and societies of the capitalist era. As a mode of production, the capitalist society is determined by the barter principle as the social equivalent of the principle of identity:

The barter principle, the reduction of human labour to the abstract universal concept of average working hours is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter is the social Model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no barter. It is through barter, that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical.

In consequence, Adorno considers the verwaltete Welt the social realization of the self-destructing tendencies of enlightened instrumental reason. Facing the ubiquity of identity, the Hegelian notion of freedom – an intersubjective subjectivity, aware of its particular nature, shaping the world after its own image – becomes inconceivable for Adorno. Capitalist societies for him are determined by identity in shape of exchange value. The non-identical – that is the particular human being with its needs, passions, and desires – is marginalized. The concept of a human being as an end in itself is therefore out of the question. As a representative of exchange value, the human being remains foremost an instrument to produce surplus. In this light, concepts like human rights lose their meaning. Individuality, as well as individuals, becomes redundant.

Realizing the self-destructing potential of instrumental reason, in his Negative Dialectics, Adorno suggests preponderance of the object as a paradigm for a critical philosophy. On one hand, thinking must recognize itself as a being entity, that does not add up to mere identity – in other words: thinking needs to reflect its material conditions and be aware of its own limits. On the other hand, preponderance of the object has a constructive element to it: experience provides thinking with a critical impulse so that it can go beyond mere reproduction of identity. It is experience, and more precisely the experience of suffering in face of the

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12 Ibid., p.146.
reality of capitalist social order (and for Adorno this includes the Shoah as well as the terror in the Soviet Union) that forces thinking to go beyond itself. Experience comes across as a reminder that there is something beyond identity. Mediated through art, it becomes a stumbling block which forces reason to question its own boundaries.

This thought can be illuminated by reference to Adorno’s *Metacritic of Hegel’s critique of the beauty of nature* in his *Aesthetic theory*. For Hegel art is a form of absolute spirit. As such, it is a form of intersubjective self-relation: in the work of art, spirit appears (scheint) and through its appearance, spirit can recognize itself. Contemplating nature on the other hand for Hegel is a contemplation of the arbitrary, non-subjective. The beauty of nature is, therefore, inferior to the beauty of Art. Adorno rejects Hegel’s position on the beauty of nature. For him it is precisely its otherness, its non-intelligible, even arbitrary element, that makes the experience of nature stand out. Nature is withdrawn from the sphere of identity – it serves no purpose. It should be noted that Adorno understands nature primarily as a counterpart to the conceptual order. As such, nature for Adorno is not without history. On cultivated landscape (an object of the experience of the beauty of nature) he writes, that as an expression of history, it is stained with suffering of the past. While not reproducing nature, the authentic artwork for Adorno aims to reproduce the experience of the beauty of nature, serving as a reminder of the non-identical.

Experience of the non-identical for Adorno is bound to finite and physical existence. Acknowledging its finite nature, negative dialectics does not aim to elevate the non-identical to an infinite universality. Its aim is to hold on to the non-identical without eliminating its finite qualities. In the mode of negative dialectics, philosophical reason remains critical towards abstract universalisations and is expressing its own boundaries. Adorno however is not making the case for a suspension of reason in favour of a contemplation of nature (As mentioned earlier, in itself, he considers nature a threat). Rather, the expression of non-identity is a corrective element to the self-threatening tendencies of enlightened reason.

Accordingly, Adorno is sceptical to any positive notion of the utopian idea. Like Benjamin’s *Angelus*, critical philosophy cannot turn itself away from the historical reality of suffering. The only way to hold on to the thought of deliverance is through determinate negation (bestimmte Negation). The dialectical thought must preserve its original – nonidentical – position throughout its negation. Therefore, no utopian ideal can be proposed without critical reference to the reality of suffering. Claiming the possibility of a complete reconciliation would ignore the suffering of generations. The imperative that Auschwitz must not repeat itself takes the place of a positive conception of utopia.

4. Final Considerations

Søren Kierkegaard and Theodor W. Adorno present critical accounts on the potential and limits of reason. Both propose a corrective element to its abstract universality. For Adorno, critical philosophy becomes the “effort to say that of which one cannot speak; to help the nonidentical to an expression, while yet the expression always identifies it.” As a “somatic element”, the experiences of pain and negativity become “the moving force of dialectical thinking” — and by its very nature, this experience is not to be separated from the physical body. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, it is passion that allows the individual to go beyond reason. The movement into faith through the stage of resignation as presented in Fear and Trembling, however, bears evidence for a deep disregard of finite desires. For Kierkegaard, the finitude of a mere emotional state is to be overcome by a form of self-contemplation. In its inward form, though, passion resembles a merely self-relating abstract universality. In Hegelian terms: it is an abstract negation; its infinite form is that of an bad infinity. The Kierkegaardian Knight of Resignation, and respectively the Knight of Faith, lacks any basis for distinguishing between good and evil. Detached from the finite, faith is prone not only to indifference and moral relativism. Terry Eagleton correctly remarks:

Once Reason cuts loose from the sensuous constraints of the body, it turns on humanity like a lunatic and tears it limb from limb. A rationality unhinged from human fleshliness is a Lear-like form of insanity. Rather as God is portrayed by the Hebrew Bible as a destructive force, burning up all idols and pious illusions with his intolerably unconditional love, so reason can murder and maim with its elegant abstractions. One can kill for all sorts of motives, but killing on a spectacular scale is almost always the consequence of ideas.

Facing human suffering, the faithful agent can be certain that in his infinite gratitude, God will eventually lessen this suffering; or that it is at least justified for the sake of some greater good. In its disregard of the finite, the Kierkegaardian notion of faith leaves no room for finite emotions like pity. It is far from evident how Kierkegaard’s radical subjectivism is fundamentally different from enlightened or idealistic reason in its disregard for the finite non-identical.

Adorno’s Negative Dialectics begins with an answer to Marx’ well-known proposal in the thesis ad Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it.” Adorno

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20 Eagleton, 2015, p.32.
answers: “Philosophy which once seemed redundant remains alive because the moment for its realization was missed.”\(^{22}\) Adorno’s answer expresses a disappointment in the failure of historic materialism. Instead of progress and a lessening of human suffering, the first half of the twentieth century had seen an unimaginable amount of terror, violence, and annihilation. Adorno’s concept of negative dialectics can be understood as an endeavour to pay justice to experience of despair; holding on to the other through identity. Facing the reality of human suffering, a positive expression of the utopian thought becomes an impossibility. Only in critical reference to the past, the idea of a reconciled humanity can be upheld.

The Kierkegaard of *Fear and Trembling* on the other hand removes the other from the sphere of interest. Passion does not present a “somatic element”, that forces thinking to go beyond itself for Kierkegaard. Through it, thinking alienates itself from its object and its finite conditions – reconciliation and deliverance become a matter of faith as an inward facing contemplation. If Kierkegaard were to answer to Marx’ proposal, he might have agreed that the philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point, however, for Kierkegaard would be to change oneself, rather than it.

\(^{22}\) Adorno, 2000, p.15.
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THE NEIGHBOUR AS A DESIGNATION OF THE WILL IN

WORKS OF LOVE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss the problematic attempt to build an ethics based on the inner-outer tension by shedding light on the issue of the unreflected and the reflected will in Kierkegaard's Works of Love. I do so by showing how Kierkegaard expects the will to change from unreflected to reflected. Consequently, I claim the neighbor is a designation of the will, which is also found in de Beauvoir's philosophical development of the issue of the I-other relationship.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Love for the neighbor is therefore the eternal equality in loving, but the eternal equality is the opposite of preference. This needs no elaborate development. Equality is simply not to make distinctions, and eternal equality is unconditionally not to make the slightest distinction, unqualifiedly not to make the slightest distinction. Preference, on the other hand, is to make distinctions; passionate preference is unqualifiedly to make distinctions (WL 58).

Arne Grøn, in his influential work, The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, introduces the idea that it is possible to read Kierkegaard through a close look at his pseudonymous figure Vigilius Haufniensis’s work, The Concept of Anxiety, 1844. George Pattison, in his analysis of Kierkegaard’s upbuilding discourses, appropriates an idea from Heidegger to suggest that Kierkegaard’s works, as different as they are from one another, can be read as a whole and that the upbuilding discourses should be taken into account.¹ Thus, by analyzing these works by Kierkegaard, one could have a clear philosophical picture in mind. According to M. Jamie Ferreira’s reading of Works of Love, it is quite clear that Kierkegaard uses categories to differentiate between preferential love and non-preferential love. She suggests that self-denial is to choose what is unlike us, or rather, that in preferential love one chooses what is like oneself; therefore, in self-denial, one denies preference and makes the other equal to oneself by removing the preference.² The recognition of the other in self-denial is in the foundation of Kierkegaard’s ideas. Since only a few authors have understood

² Ferreira, 2001, p.47.
this interesting and peculiar concept of other, like the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, there is enough reason to suggest that de Beauvoir develops a view about the category of the other that both bolsters and provides grounds for criticizing the Kierkegaardian idea of ethics. Taking this discussion into account, I will claim that the category of the other as the neighbor is a designation of the will within its own shift from unreflected to reflected. Moreover, the I-other relationship appears at the heart of Works of Love, where the neighbor may not exist.

II. THE NEIGHBOR IS A DESIGNATION OF THE WILL

If therefore someone, quixotic and fanatical or hypocritical, wanted to teach that love is such a hidden feeling that it is too exalted to bear fruit, or such a hidden feeling that the fruits demonstrate neither for nor against—indeed, that not even the most poisonous fruits demonstrate anything—then we will recall the Gospel verse: “The tree is to be known by its fruits.” We will recall, not in order to attack but in order to defend ourselves against such persons, that what holds true of every word of the Gospel holds true here, that “he who acts accordingly is like a man who builds upon a rock.” “When the heavy rains come” and destroy the exalted frailty of that hypersensitive love, “when the winds blow and beat against” the web of hypocrisy—then the true love will be recognizable by its fruits. Truly, love is to be known by its fruits, but still it does not follow from this that you are to take it upon yourself to be the expert knower (WL 15).

The unrealistic individual, who thinks that the outside world is full of benevolence and fair compensation for those who work hard, not only, as the passage suggests, unavoidably loses track of the reality itself, but is also paralyzed. The individual is either fanatical, as Kierkegaard warns against, or hypocritical. Kierkegaard uses two different metaphors. The first gives the reader the notion of characteristic, and consequently, the image of the tree signals the characteristic fruits it entails, and Kierkegaard criticizes broadly the idea of trace. According to this idea, the fruit has nothing to do with the tree. In other words, the outer has nothing to do with the inner (EO1 3). While in the second metaphor, a notion of strength based on moral value surfaces. Kierkegaard is talking straightforwardly about love in both a religious and a moral sense, sometimes even making the two equivalent. At least in its language, the text provides the reader with the author’s beliefs on the outcome for those who can maintain their faith through difficult times. The actions of the I and their outcome are intrinsically linked to the inner self; the intention of the self is the goal, whether its outcome is right or wrong. It seems part of Kant’s ethics, but Kierkegaard firmly believes that intentions modify outcomes. Accordingly, the deontological maxim

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4 “Whether or not such things as giving alms are genuine works of love depends on how they are done. Hence the question to be asked is whether sinful humans have the capacity to perform works of love in the right way.” See: Quinn, P. L. (1998), “Kierkegaard’s Christian Ethics”, in: The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard, eds. A. Hannay, G.D. Marino, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.249-375; p.363.
would be based in faith. On the fruit, the trace of the inner makes itself manifest on the outer.

The impossibility of knowing if the outcome of one action is the fruit of faithful or unfaithful work comes as a great difficulty. This seemingly metaphysical problem\(^5\) is the reflection of Kierkegaard’s own struggle with the sphere of reality, with the faith of the individual involving a certain degree of transcendence. The individual herself plays the role of the tree. The works of love have the trace of the inner self. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to know how to differentiate between unfaithful and loving works in concrete life. In addition, it is necessary to establish who is the object of the works of love, for the neighbor is introduced. In the relationship between I and neighbor, the inner must have a qualitative relation to the outer.

"There is not a single person in the whole world," Kierkegaard writes, "who is as surely and as easily recognized as the neighbor. You can never confuse him with anyone else, since the neighbor, to be sure, is all people." Kierkegaard adds: "If you confuse another person with the neighbor, then the mistake is not due to the latter, since the other person is also the neighbor; the mistake is due to you, that you will not understand who the neighbor is." Therefore, the primarily problem is to acknowledge the object of love, and Kierkegaard claims that "if you save a person's life in the dark, thinking that it is your friend – but it was the neighbour – this is no confusion. However, it is indeed a mistake if you want to save only your friend," and the same is true for the friend: "If your friend complains that you, in his opinion, mistakenly do for the neighbor what he believed you would do only for him, rest assured – it is your friend who is mistaken" (WL 51-52).

The neighbor, according to Kierkegaard, is everyone. Yet, it is possible that the I confuses the neighbor with the friend.\(^6\) A quick look at the above (WL 51-52) suggests that the difference between neighbor and friend is actually a misinterpretation. Darkness is used as a metaphor to express the inner difference between these objects of the will (friend and neighbor). In theory, there is no outer difference, and yet they are not the same. Accordingly, the difference is only understood subjectively by the will through meditation. Kierkegaard urges the reader to recognize the neighbor.


Kierkegaard points out that one should “…not forget that even when you rejoice over the fruits of love, when by them you know that love dwells in this other person, do not forget that it still is even more blessed to believe in love.” The love lives in the object of love, where love dwells, and “this is a new expression for the depth of love—that when one has learned to know love by its fruits one again returns to the first point, that is, to believe in love—and returns to it as the highest.” The deontological demand sets the goal for the will: to recognize and love, and it must be done in the cultivation of one’s life, since “the life of love is indeed recognizable by its fruits, which make it manifest, but the life itself is still more than the single fruit and more than all the fruits together that you could count at any moment” (WL 16). The appropriation of love as a concept is not possible, and the I-other relationship is its manifestation.

III. Works of Love and the Question of Otherness

Kierkegaard’s distinctions show contrasting ways of viewing life, as is the case for A and the Judge William in Either/Or, but some of them are potentially problematic from moral and conceptual viewpoints. Now, I shall examine the fragility of the neighbor in this distinguishing process.

The other is both the neighbor and the friend, but the neighbor only exists when she is recognized by the I; therefore, one can ask whether the neighbor exists, yet the existence of the friend is a given from the beginning. One may ask if love dwells in the neighbor prior to the work of love, or does the existence of the latter depend exclusively on the existence of the former? It seems that without the I there is no neighbor. Nonetheless, the friend exists. In Kierkegaard’s account, the friend is closer to being an individual than the neighbor ever will be. The neighbor is only the vessel for the I’s love.

Simone de Beauvoir sees the same pattern in relation to women. She perceives that the delegitimization of women is supported by claims of their physical weakness, but it is not their weakness that makes them the subject of oppression, but their objectification. It has a striking similarity to the domination of the poor supported by claims of their incapacity. De Beauvoir claims that “woman’s powerlessness brought about her ruin because man apprehended her through a project of enrichment and expansion.”

De Beauvoir’s fight is not only against men’s oppression of women but rather against all oppression. She is launching an ethical project involving a substantial interest in the concept of the other. De Beauvoir’s project applies to any instance where the other is objectified. In this sense, an individual who objectifies trying to help the neighbor improves only her own ethical sense of worth, which does not help the other at all in concrete life.

The objectification happens as follows: the I finds the fragile neighbor, in order to assist her. At the same time, the objectification of women, poor and otherwise is similar: (1) find the weak; (2) aid the weak

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through political and monetary power; so (3) be transformed into a better, higher self without really helping the other, but the / herself. Kierkegaard is trying to do something for the greater good following an old Greek philosophical principle, while de Beauvoir is denouncing the greater evil of oppression. Despite their divergent agendas, both note that the difference between neighbor and friend (for Kierkegaard; WL 135) and men and women (for de Beauvoir) is a matter of consciousness. De Beauvoir highlights this idea, particularly in the case of illusory physical differences, for "had there not been in human consciousness both the original category of the other and an original claim to domination over the Other, the discovery of the bronze tool could not have brought about women's oppression."

Kierkegaard and de Beauvoir are dealing with the difficult task of operating with the individual’s responsibility toward the other. De Beauvoir’s view, in particular, addresses an inequality deeply rooted in the history of philosophy, a history in which Kierkegaard also fosters his ideas. Úrsula Tidd suggests that "the ethical parameters of the Self-Other relation were a source of philosophical concern to Simone de Beauvoir from the beginning of her career. All of her literary and philosophical writing can be described as marked by concern to map an ethical relation with the Other." De Beauvoir believes in an ethics that not only brings about equality for every minority but also for these minorities which have their external condition philosophically justified, i.e. women and the poor.

As such, de Beauvoir is aware of the relationship between self and other, just as she is aware of the reluctance of the / to change with respect to the other, particularly in the case of men and women. Even Engels, whose writings substantively fight for the emancipation of the poor and the worker class from capitalist oppression, tries to justify the inequality between the sexes as natural. Kierkegaard also justifies the problem of privileges, and his alternative is self-denial. His ethics is not concerned with the outer just yet but hopes instead to persuade the inner of the importance of self-denial.

Kierkegaard maintains the tension between inner and outer, the tension between will, faith, and the outcomes of the works of love. "Paganism", Kierkegaard claims, "has never dreamed of this. Because paganism has never had an inkling of self-denial's love for the neighbor, whom one shall love, it divided love this way: self-love is abhorrent because it is love of self, but erotic love and friendship, which are passionate preferential love, are love." For Kierkegaard, self-denial is the ground for equality, but paganism, which does not know self-denial — as Kierkegaard elaborates — cannot see the neighbor. "Christianity," Kierkegaard believes,

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13 De Beauvoir, 2010, p.35.
14 Ibid., pp.88-94.
"which has made manifest what love is, divides otherwise: self-love and passionate preferential love are essentially the same, but love for the neighbor—that is love" (WL 53).

The neighbor is an unequivocal abstract experience of the I. The neighbor only exists through love. This love has a moral grounding constituted by faith. This ethics based on love seems to lose its moral universality on purpose; for example, all human beings who are not Christians would not know the neighbor. Of course, Kierkegaard assumes that the truth of Christianity can be known by every human being (WL 16), especially those to whom he addresses his discourses (SKS 20, 54-56). To love the friend and to love oneself is essentially the same; egoism is also rooted in love. For Kierkegaard, love can be championed against superficiality and hedonism; even self-love has deep significance. Accordingly, while de Beauvoir tries to create equality by showing the spreading roots of the problem of inequality, Kierkegaard shows that the problem has its solution in its roots: the will. While de Beauvoir emphasizes the necessity of questioning the differences, Kierkegaard reinforces that they are somehow positive when they are recognized.

IV. MORAL GAP AND METHOD

Kierkegaard wants to create equality in the inner sphere, but he does so by showing inequality without a project to fix it in the outer. It is far from an unproblematic method. Kierkegaard wants to solve one problem in the inner: the moral gap. Because there are distinct views between Christians and pagans, Kierkegaard implies that only in Christian love one possesses the power to overcome inequality. The concept of love is apprehended as a phenomenon that is bonded and grounded in the love for others but only in Christianity. Ontologically, while the friend exists in reality, the neighbor only exists in the manifestation of the phenomena of love.

Thus, I wish to argue that what distinguishes friend from neighbor is the will. The friend exists in direct relationship with the self. The friend is a predicate of the I, where the friend is another I. In this account, the self determines who the neighbor is. Kierkegaard alludes to this ambiguity by pointing out the confusion in the process of recognition. To be sure, Kierkegaard is able to see the ability of the I to change her will (WL 57). And as such, Kierkegaard makes clear that a friend is not an absolute other, but this other is only a relative I. It all comes to the way one sees the other, and in consequence, the neighbor is a designation given by the will.

18 Dalferth, 2013, pp.178-9; Pattison, 2013, p.199.
I and friend are subjectivities which recognize one another. The friend is the I and the I is the friend\[^{19}\], and there is no law that says, "you ought to love your friend as yourself." The designation is the same. For that reason, there is no need for a commandment (WL 55-6). Love is a natural necessity. The application of a deontological ethics is unnecessary. The I is already concerned with the I to the extent that even pagans (WL 141) do the same. The friend is never more than an I. As such, Kierkegaard points out that "whether we speak of the first or of the other, we do not come a step closer to the neighbor, because the neighbor is the first you. The one whom self-love, in the strictest sense, loves is basically the other, because the other is he himself." It is perceptible that Kierkegaard is expressly dialect if one considers that "...it is self-love to love the other, who is the beloved or the friend" (WL 57).

Under those circumstances, self-love is the most important unreflected designation of the will. "So deeply is this need rooted in human nature, and so essentially does it belong to being human, that even he who was one with the Father and in the communion of love with the Father and the Spirit, he who loved the whole human race, our Lord Jesus Christ, even he humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual human being" (WL 155). Even Jesus, Kierkegaard emphasizes, needed love in the unreflected sense, because love is an immanent designation of the human will. Love is something present in all people. Love is the ground for analyzing human relationships (WL 155).

V. THE RECOGNITION OF THE OTHER

Kierkegaard separates I and other into different categories and makes clear that it is necessary to recognize their difference. However, the moral gap probably will interfere with the establishment of equality between I and other, making recognition almost impossible. In a sense, Kierkegaard melancholically bellows for equality, asking the reader to recognize the differences (WL 143). Kierkegaard does not aim to reinforce inequality by recognizing what de Beauvoir recognizes, there are oppressors and oppressed people; however, when de Beauvoir distinguishes between I and other, she tries to abolish ignorance about the power imposed upon the other. On the other hand, Kierkegaard tries to stipulate that one’s obligation is to eliminate the moral gap between I-friend and I-other (WL 149).\[^{20}\] Kierkegaard tries to convince the reader that self-denial is possible, but as de Beauvoir shows, again and again, it is extremely difficult to make the privileged give up their privileges,\[^{21}\] and these privileges are justified in both philosophical thinking and in a deterministic view of what the strong I and weak other deserve.

In Kierkegaard’s view, the orientation of the will provides equality as it becomes reflected. The individual will be able to finally see that "the neighbor is one who is equal. The neighbor is neither the beloved... nor your

\[^{19}\] In a sense, it is the you-you relationship Dalferth discusses in "Selfless Passion: Kierkegaard on True Love", pp.159. See above.

\[^{20}\] Also in: de Beauvoir, 1992, p.44.

friend.... Nor is your neighbor, ...the cultured individual with whom you have a similarity of culture—since with your neighbor you have the equality of a human being before God” (WL 60). Kierkegaard and de Beauvoir agree that for equality to take place, it is the I who needs to close the moral gap. But Kierkegaard plans to get equality in a passive way. To be able to close the moral gap, the I will need to shift her orientation from an unreflected will to a reflected will. However, as we have seen in de Beauvoir, the I has the power already. The privileges and external conditions belong to the I, and the I is not likely to change on its own. As such, Kierkegaard gives the power to the I and believes the I will be ethical with the help of love, while de Beauvoir finds that, given the conditions, the other needs to be powerful, to overcome the will of the I, whatever its designation may be in the inner, and change the outer, what love in Kierkegaard has not the duty to do.

Søltoft claims that for Kierkegaard, “the Christian concept of true love can show itself as a passionate transformation of the will.” To agree with Kierkegaard, one must first believe that the deontological ethical demand—you ought to love your neighbor—will change the will from selfish to a will which regards others. Such change is achieved, of course, through self-denial and reflection "...because it is no 'art' to praise love, for just that reason to do it is a work. 'Art' pertains to the accident of talent, and work pertains to the universally human" (WL 359). Reflection changes the designation of the will. Therefore, Kierkegaard has an almost naive hope that, based only on faith, one can close the moral gap. Kierkegaard’s hope is naive because while the I is the friend, the other is only an object. Any change at this point, for Kierkegaard, requires self-sacrifice.

Therefore, in order to be able to praise love, self-denial is required inwardly and self-sacrificing unselfishness outwardly. If, then, someone undertakes to praise love and is asked whether it is actually out of love on his part that he does it, the answer must be: "No one else can decide this for certain; it is possible that it is vanity, pride—in short, something bad, but it is also possible that it is love” (WL 374).

Lastly, the change of the will on the I presupposes the domestication of the other. The I needs to deny and to sacrifice herself for others because the other is understood as weak. It is easy to find philosophical and political justification to maintain the power of the I because it is seen as potentially positive. In this sense, it is only the I who has concrete subjectivity. The neighbor may not even exist, as far as it is only a designation of the inner self. Furthermore, why would the I change her will if she is the only one who exists in the inner and the outer spheres? The other itself becomes empty, abstract, and domestic.

De Beauvoir makes the unavoidable change in the deontology of the "ought to love" and the "ought to self-sacrifice" required from the I. "Far beyond the limits of the master-slave relation formulated by Hegel," Lawrence D. Kritzman claims, "(...) Beauvoir engaged in what might be called...

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22 De Beauvoir, 1992, p.29.
an abstract idealism and believed that oppression can be overcome. She recognized the possibility of human relations leading to an ethical life through our ability to learn that we can be both separate from and dependent on the other, and much closer to the sense Kierkegaard gives to human existence in The Concept of Anxiety, "Beauvoir regard[s] freedom as relational and based on the need for reciprocation." She shares the full responsibility with the other, since for her, I and other are dependent on each other, and both have subjectivity, i.e., they exist. It is not surprising that de Beauvoir takes the next step in the problematic issue of I-other relationship. If this relationship between I and other is to be made concrete, the other would need to exist. Kierkegaard's efforts are not trivial. On the contrary, Kierkegaard's I-other relationship is on the foundation of the discussion about the will and ultimately the individual's possibility to change it. However, as one learns from de Beauvoir, there is not enough reflection about the designation of the other, and this constitutes a dangerous problem. While Kierkegaard's recognition of the existence and importance of the unreflected and reflected will is positively radical, the designation of the other is still too abstract.

VI. CONCLUSION

There is so much more that could be said about the issue of the will and the I-other relationship than I could possibly develop in these pages. However, it is sufficient to claim that the existence of an unreflected and a reflected will is the cornerstone of the I-other relationship and human interaction. In Kierkegaard's own account of the other, the confusion in the categories is not only caused by abstraction, but it is primarily due to ambiguity. There is no other philosopher whose work has dealt with the objectification of the other in the relationship between I and other as has the work of Simone de Beauvoir. It is clear that further work needs to be done; therefore, I hope my claim that the neighbor is a designation of the will can motivate supplementary research.

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VÆLGE DET AT VILLE – WILHELM VALG BELYST MED FICHTE

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ABSTRACT

The following article explores Wilhelm’s concept of choice in part two, chapter two of Kierkegaard’s Either/Or. This is done in relation to the philosophy of Fichte and the choices presented in Fichte’s Die Bestimmung des Menschen (BM). I use the choices presented in BM to apply to Wilhelm’s understanding of choice. Four possible life-view choices are presented in BM: 1) The world is determined by natural laws. The self is causally determined by these laws. Therefore there is no free will or self. 2) Freedom exists, but no outer world exists. 3) Doubt/not choosing between 1 and 2. 4) Willfully choosing freedom and world.

I argue that A and Wilhelm can be understood in the light of choice 3 and 4. A’s either-or is between two opposing life-views (1, 2), which have the result that it’s either not possible to choose (lack of knowledge), or that the choices are undesirable (not possible to act in a real world). Therefore A does not choose. Wilhelm’s either-or is between seeing the world as determined (1) or using the will to found freedom and reality which enables selfhood and morality.

INDLEDNING

Denne artikel præsenterer en læsning af Wilhelms valg i Søren Kierkegaards Enten-Eller, som bygger på Johann G. Fichtes filosofi. Fichte bliver som regel ikke set som en central skikkelse ift. Kierkegaard, men der er kommet større opmærksomhed på Fichte, som en vigtig indflydelse på Kierkegaard1 som David Kangas skriver: “Fichte may very well be the most overlooked resource for Kierkegaard’s thought.”2 Michelle Kosch har lavet en sammenligning mellem Wilhelms og Fichtes moralfilosofi, hvor hun peger på, at Wilhelms etik i højere grad minder om Fichtes end Immanuel Kant og Georg W. F. Hegel.3 Jeg vil argumentere for, at det ligeledes kan være frugtbart at sammenligne Fichtes forståelse af valget med Wilhelms forståelse af denne. Denne sammenligning kan gøre det tydeligere, hvilke livsanskuelser der er på spil hos Wilhelm, og hvorledes de adskiller sig fra hinanden.

2 Kangas, 2007, p.68.


**Fichtes valg**

Fichtes filosofi er utrolig svær at få greb om. I hans egen tid eksisterede der forskellige udlægninger af hans system, og hos Fichte selv opstår der en splittelse mellem hans første *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* og hans anderledes udlægning i *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*. Det er dermed ikke muligt her at gå i dybden med hans filosofi, men jeg vil forsøge at vise de temaer, som jeg mener går igen i Wilhelms valg.

Valget i Fichtes filosofi kan formuleres på forskellige måder, men et af de grundlæggende spørgsmål er, hvorvidt frihed er mulig eller ej. I FFV kredser undersøgelsen omkring, hvad det grundlæggende princip i erkendelsen er. Fichte kritiserer Kant for, at hans filosofi ikke er systematisk nok til at kunne give en forklaring på menneskets frihed og erkendelsen af en objektiv verden. Hos Kant får vi dermed både frihed og naturkausalitet side om side, men for Fichte giver dette ikke mening. For at få et sikkert grundlag for erkendelsen, så kan kun en af de to påstående være sand. Dette skaber for Fichte to forskellige filosofiske systemer, dogmatisme og

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4 Guilherme, 2007, p.82.
5 Brachtendorf 2002.
6 Nielsen, 2016, p.89.
7 Kant, 2008, p.396.
idealisme med hvert deres grundlæggende princip, hvorfra erkendelsen af genstande bliver mulig. Det betyder, at det enten objekterne ude i verdenen som påvirker menneskets erkendelse, eller også er det menneskets erkendelse der skaber objekterne. Det har den konsekvens, at hvis man er tilhænger af den første: dogmatismen, så er den menneskelige frihed ikke mulig, da jegets eksistens er betinget af genstandene: ”Han [dogmatisten] benægter ikke det faktum ved bevidstheden, at vi anser os for frie [...] han beviser ud fra sit princip falskheten i dette udsagn. Han benægter helt og holdent jegets selvstændighed, hvorpå idealisten bygger.” 8 Hvis man er tilhænger af idealismen, så er mennesket delagtig i det højeste princip, hvilket muliggør frihed 9. Begge filosofiske systemer kan ikke bevise sig selv, da det de præsenterer, er selve grundlaget for erkendelse: ”Hvilken af de to skal nu gøres til den første? Det er ikke muligt at afgøre dette ud fra fornuften; for der er ikke tale om at forbinde et led med kæden [...] men der er derimod tale om begyndelsen på hele rækken.” 10 De to systemer er dermed absolut uforenelige, og hvilket system der skal være det grundlæggende princip, kan kun afgøres ved et valg: ”Hvilken filosofi man vælger, afhænger alt det, hvad for et menneske man er.” 11


Han er dog fanget i den tvivlsituation, at han ikke kan vide om det er muligt at handle, da begge anskuelser hypotetisk er mulige: ”Ich kann nicht handeln wollen, denn ich kann nach jenem Lehrgebäude nicht wissen, ob ich handeln kann [...].” 16 Han overkommer denne uheldige situation ved at indse, at det er viljen, der er det centrale princip, og denne skal gøre hans

8 Fichte, 2001, p.37.
11 Ibid., p.41.
12 Breazeale, 2013.
13 Fichte, 1879, p.17.
14 Ibid., p.40.
15 Ibid., p.91.
16 Ibid., p.95.
viden gældende: “Ich habe das Organ gefunden, mit welchem ich diese [...]
Realität ergreife [...] kein Wissen kann sich selbst begründen und beweisen [...]
Er [das Organ] ist kein Wissen, sondern ein Entschluss des Willens, das Wissen
gelten zu lassen [...] ich [weiß] von welchem Punkte alle Bildung
meiner selbst [...] ausgehen müsse: Vom dem Willen, nicht von dem
Verstande."17 De to tidligere standpunkter var blot en ‘tankens virksomhed’,
for at låne et udtryk af Wilhelm, som ikke førte til andet end tomme
spekulationer, og dermed bliver det beslutningen om, at en af dem skal
være gældende, der skaber grundlaget for selvet: "Von dem Willen, nicht
von dem Verstande. Ist nur der erstere unverrückt und redlich auf das Gute
gerichtet, so wird der letztere von selbst das Wahre fassen. Wird lediglich
der letztere geübt [...] so entsteht nicht weiter, als eine Fertigkeit, ins
unbedingt Leere hinaus zu grübeln, und klügeln."18 Med Fichtes valg af
frihed, eller måske rettere, valget af viljen, ophører han med at tvivle på
verdens eksistens, og bliver klar over dannelse som et moralsk væsen. Med
denne indsigts ændrer valget karakter, og det bliver dermed et spørgsmål
om: "der Mensch muss sich entschließen, diese seine Freiheit entweder
gänzlich aufzugeben, und geduldig ein leidendes Rad in der großen
Maschine des Ganzen zu werden, oder dieselbe auf das Gute zu wenden."19

KIERKEGAARDS VALG 1835

Det eneste direkte citat vi har af Kierkegaard til et af Fichtes værker er fra den 29. juli 1835, og angår værk BM: "den Fichteske Bemærkning (i hans: ‘die Bestimmung der Menschen’) om et Sandskorn som
constituerende Verden, en Sætning, der ligger Afssindighed meget nær.”
(SKS 17, 16). I denne periode er der derudover optegnelser, som jeg finder
interessant ift. Fichte. Kierkegaard skriver formodentligt to breve til
naturforskeren P. W. Lund. Det første er dateret 1. juni 1835 og det andet
den 1. august 1835. Det første brev har karakter af at finde en stilling i livet,
det næste har karakter af at finde sig selv. Citeringen af Fichte finder sted
mellem disse to breve. I det første brev skriver Kierkegaard:

Ethisælig ønsker naturligvis at virke efter sine Evner i Verdenen,
men deraf følger igen, at han ønsker at uddanne sine Evner i en bestemt
retning, i den nemlig, som er meest passende for hans individualitet. Men
hvilk en denne? [...] Her står jeg som Hercules men ikke paa Skilleveien
– nej, her viser sig en langt større Mangfoldighed af Veie, og desto
vanselegere er det altsaa at gribe den rette [...] jeg interesserer mig for
altfor Meget og ikke afgjort for Noget; mine Interesser staar ikke alle
subordinatede een, men alle staare coordinatede. (SKS 17, 20)

Denne form for valg kan ses i lyset af Wilhelms kritik af A: “Naar et Menskes
æsthetisk overvejer en Mængde Livs-Opgaver, saaledes som Du i det
Foregaaende, saa faaer han ikke let et Enten-Eller, men en heel

17 Ibid., pp.96-97.
18 Ibid., p.97.
19 Ibid., p.117.
Mangfoldighed, fordi det Selvbestemmende i Valget ikke her bliver ethisk accentuert” (SKS 3, 163).

Denne tilgang ændrer karakter to måneder senere, hvilket er få dage efter, at Kierkegaard kommer med Fichte-citatet fra BM. Kierkegaard leder stadig efter en måde at virke i verden på, men det har ændret karakter fra at være en 'æstetisk' søgen, til en søgen hvor selvet er centralt: "Det, der egentlig mangle mig, er at komme paa Rene med mig selv om, hvad jeg skal gjøre […] Det kommer an paa at forstaae min Bestemmelse” (SKS 17, 24), hvilket ligger tæt op af det der indleder Fichtes søgen: "Was bin Ich selbst, und was ist meine Bestimmung?”20; "Nicht bloßes Wissen, sondern nach deinem Wissen Thun ist deine Bestimmung”.21

Kierkegaard forsøger at finde "Noget som hænger sammen med min eksistens’s dybeste Rod” (SKS 17, 26). Fodnoten til denne sætning er særdeles vigtig, da den minder meget om valget hos Fichte. Kierkegaard skriver i fodnoten: "Hvad er Sandhed andet end en Leven for en Idee? Alt maa til syvende og sidst basere sig paa et postulat; men i det Øjeblik det saaledes ikke længere staer udenfor ham, han men lever deri, først da er det ophørt at være ham et Postulat”, hvilket Fichte også formulerer som: "Alle meine Überzeugungen ist nur Glaube, und sie kommt aus der Gesinnung, nicht aus dem Verstande.”22 Kierkegaard skriver derefter, at "Det er denne Menneskets indvortes Handlen […] det kommer an paa, ikke en masse Erkjendelser.” (SKS 17, 26). Den indvortes handling er central for Fichte, og først med denne bliver frihed muliggjort. Fichte kalder det Thathandlung, og er det første princip, som er grundlaget for det idealistiske system.23 Kierkegaard beskriver herefter, at han har forsøgt at finde denne ide/system (’Brændpunkt’) for sit liv gennem forlystelser, erkendelse og ved at se tilværelsens som determineret, det ene af Fichtes mulige valg: "Jeg har søgt at finde dette princip for mit Liv ved resignation, ved at forstille mig, at Alt gik efter uransagelige Love, det ikke kunde være anderledes” (SKS 17, 27).

Dette finder Kierkegaard ikke tilfredsstillende, og peger på selvet som det centrale: "ilgesaalidet nyter det Mennesket først at ville bestemme det Udvortes og siden det Grundconstituerende. Man maa først lære at kjende sig selv, inden man kjender noget Andet […] Først naar Mennesket saaledes inderlig har forstaaet sig selv og nu seer sin Gang hen af sin Bane, først da faaer hans Liv Ro og Betydning” (SKS 17, 27), hvilket kan ses ift. Fichte: "Aber ich soll die Augen eröffnen; soll mich selbst durchaus kennen lernen; Ich soll jene Zwang erblicken; dies ist meine Bestimmung.”24


20 Fichte, 1879, p.17.
21 Ibid., p.91.
22 Ibid., p.96.
23 Ibid., 2001, p.73.
24 Ibid., 1879, p.98.
Wilhelms Valg


Pointen hos Fichte, Kierkegaard i 1835 og Wilhelm er, at for overhovedet at kunne danne et selv, må man vælge det grundlag, der skal være gældende som grundlag. Valget hos Fichte er mellem frihed og naturkausalitet, hvilket det også er hos Kierkegaard i 1835, dog ikke udtrykt med disse begreber. Hos Wilhelm er forholdet mellem frihed og nødvendighed også centraalt: "For Friheden kæmper jeg derfor (deels her i dette Brev; deels og fornemlig i mig selv), for den tilkomne Tid, for enten – eller.” (SKS 3, 172). Dette skaber hos Fichte fire forskellige forhold til det at vælge sit grundlag: 1) At vælge at betragte sig selv under naturkausalitetens lys, hvorved der ikke eksisterer et egentligt selv og heller ikke et egentligt valg. 2) At se sig selv under frihedens lys, hvorved der eksisterer et valg, men ingen ydre verden. 3) At tvive/ikke at ville vælge. 4) At vælge at ville friheden og at kunne handle i verdenen. Jeg vil udlægge Wilhelms syn på valget efter denne struktur og gøre tydeligt, hvad A og Wilhelms valg beror på.


Valget selv er afgjørende for personligheden Indhold; ved Valget synker den ned i det Valgte, og naar den ikke vælger, henviser den til Tæring. Et Øjeblik er det saa, et Øjeblik kan det synes saa, at det, der skal vælges mellem, ligger udenfor den Vælgende, han staarer i intet Forhold dertil, han

25 Ibid., p.95.
kan bevare sig i Indifferens ligeover derfor. Dette er Overveielsens Øieblik
(SKS 3, 160)

Dette udtrykkes også hos Kierkegaard i 1835: "Hvad er Sandhed andet end
en Leven for en Idee? Alt maa til syvende og sidst basere sig paa et Postulat;
men i det Øieblick det saaledes ikke længere staar udenfor ham, men han
lever deri, først da er det ophørt at være ham et Postulat" (SKS 17, 26). A
forsøger dermed, jf. Wilhelm, at holde sig på dette "Valg-Øieblikkets Spidse"
(SKS 3, 160), og vælger ikke at vælge nogen af dem, eller rettere, han vælger
ikke: "min Betragtning af et Valg er væsentlig forskjellig fra din [...] thi Din er
netop deri forskjellig, at den forhindrer et Valg." (SKS 3, 161). A bliver
dermed hos Wilhelm beskrevet som en fødende: "Du er som en Fødende [...]
den vilde overveie med sig selv, hvad hun egentlig skulde føde, saa
vilde hun have en vis Lighed med Dig" (SKS 3, 198). Dette er, jf. Wilhelm, en
forkert opfattelse af det at vælge. Hvis man ikke vælger, så bliver valget
taget for en: "[der kommer] til sidst et Øieblick, hvor der ikke mere er Tale
om et Enten-Eller, ikke fordi han har valgt, men fordi han har ladet det være,
hvilket ogsaa kan udtrykkes saaledes, fordi Andre have valgt for ham, fordi
han har tabt sig selv." (SKS 3, 161). Det centrale Wilhelm dermed forsøger at
få A til at indse er, at der findes et egentligt valg, som det er nødvendigt at
tage: "jeg vil kun bringe Dig paa det Punkt, at dette Valg i Sandhed faaer
Betydning for dig. Derom er det at Alt dreier sig. Naar man først kan faae et
Menneske til at staae på Skilleveien saaledes, at der ingen Udvei er for ham
uden ved at vælge, saa vælger han det Rette." (SKS 3, 164).

Da det ikke er muligt at vide, hvilken af de to livsanskuelser der er
den sande, så bliver det viljen der er det centrale i dannelsen, som Fichte
skriver: "Von dem Willen, nicht von dem Verstande. Ist nur der erstere
unverrückt und redlich auf das Gute gerichtet, so wird der letztere von
sich selbst das Wahre fassen. Wird lediglich der letztere geübt [...] so ensteht
nicht weiter, als eine Fertigkeit, ins unbedingt Leere hinaus zu grübln, und
klügeln."26 Dermed ophører den tomme tankevirksomhed, og en egentlig
livsanskuelse og dannelse bliver mulig. Dette ser man også hos Wilhelm,
som kalder valget ‘viljens dåb’: "Det er derfor ikke saa meget Tale om
til at vælge, at ville det Gode eller det Onde, som om at vælge det at ville
[...] Her seer Du igjen, hvor vigtigt det er, at der vælges, og at det, det
kommer an paa, ikke saa meget er Overveielsen som den Villiens Daab" (SKS
3, 165-166). Wilhelm betegner også senere denne vilje som
dannelsesdriften: "thi det, et Menneske føder ved i aandelig Forstand, er
Villiens nisus formativus [ty: Bildungstrieb], og den staar i Menneskets
egen Magt." (SKS 3, 198). Det er dermed, som Fichte skriver, en
viljesbeslutning om at lade en bestemt anskuelse gælde som viden: "ein
Entschluss des Willens, das Wissen gelten zu lassen."

Denne viljesbeslutning om at lade friheden gælde skaber en
dobbelt handling. For at muliggøre frihed skal man vende sig bort fra
naturkausaliteten, da det ikke længere kan gælde som første princip, og
man skal sætte sig selv som første princip. Dette ses hos Fichte med hans

26 Ibid., p.97.
27 Ibid.
udtryk *Thathandlung*\textsuperscript{28} eller i BM, som en indvortes handling: ”eine innerer Act auf sich selbst;”\textsuperscript{29} Kierkegaard i 1835 ser også dette som vigtigt: ”Det er denne Menneskets indvortes Handlen, denne Menneskets Guds-Side det kommer an paa, ikke en Masse af Erkendelser” (SKS 17, 26), og hos Wilhelm: ”Den første Form, som Valget giver sig, er en fuldkommen Isolation idet jeg nemlig vælger mig selv, sondrer jeg mit ud fra mit Forhold til den hele Verden” (SKS 3, 229).


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 2001, p.73.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 1879, p.135.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 1802, p.41.
\textsuperscript{31} Spinoza, 1996, p.133.
\textsuperscript{32} Fichte, 1879, p.117. Min kursivering.
\textsuperscript{33} Min kursivering.
**KONKLUSION**


Hos både Fichte og Wilhelm præsenterede der sig dermed fire sammenlignelige måder at forholde sig til valget på. Hos Fichte er det: 1) At vælge at betragede sig selv under naturkausalitetens lys, hvorved der ikke eksisterer et egentligt selv og heller ikke et egentligt valg. 2) At se sig selv under frihedens lys, hvorved der eksisterer et valg, men ingen ydre verden. 3) At tvivl/ikke at ville vælge. 4) At vælge at ville friheden og at kunne handle i verden. Disse fire valgmuligheder kunne også findes hos Wilhelm: 1) Kan betegnes som den æstetiske livsanskuelse. Her er det enkelte menneskes styret af naturkausalitet. Der eksisterer dermed ikke moralske vurderinger, men blot vurderinger der angår behag og ubehag. 2) Kan betegnes som den mystiske livsanskuelse. Her er der tale om et egentligt valg og et indvortes handling, der muliggør frihed. Dog vælger mystikeren at forblive indvortes og overtager ikke sig selv som konkret individ. 3) Kan betegnes som overvejelsens Øieblick. Her bliver der ikke valgt. Ikke-valget er grundet i, at man enten ikke kan opnå viden om, hvilken af de to livsanskuelser (1 eller 2) der er den sande, eller at man ikke vil vælge, da begge umuliggør at kunne handle i verden. 4) Kan betegnes som den etiske livsanskuelse. Her bliver der foretaget et egentligt valg og en indvortes handling, men hvor individet samtidig overtager sig selv i sin konkretion. Der opstår dermed en etisk dimension, hvor et moralsk godt og ondt træder frem. Man kan dermed læse Wilhelms enten-eller som et valg mellem 1 og 4, og læse Wilhelms udlægning af A’s enten-eller, som et valg mellem 1 og 2, hvor A selv forbliver 3.
LITTERATURLISTE


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- Essays must include an abstract of no more than 200 words (not included in the essay word count).
- Essays must be submitted in Calibri; size 11; with 1.5 spacing.
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