

The Authenticity of Faith in Kierkegaard's Philosophy

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Edited by

Tamar Aylat-Yaguri and Jon Stewart

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

The existential challenge of attaining and preserving faith is as difficult today as ever before, and perhaps even more so in a rational, scientifically-oriented culture. Yet the means by which faith can turn into inauthenticity have not changed much since Kierkegaard's era. This book aims to present Kierkegaardian notions of a believer's answers to the existentially haunting questions of faith and authenticity.

I.

When he heard the voice that ordered him to sacrifice his son, should Abraham have been concerned that he might be mad? How does a believer handle the possibility that he might err? How does one tackle self-doubt, the possibility that one's faith is merely a form of self-deception? The quest for authentic faith is explicitly expressed in Kierkegaard's writing delivered under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. It is there that the clear connection between authentic faith and Christianity is formed. For Climacus, living in truth, that is, being authentic, is being concerned with one's religiousness.

The papers in the present volume follow his explorations, raising questions that focus on when and how authentic faith is achieved, and when and how inauthentic faith occurs. An inauthentic believer deceives himself, for example, through presuming, without internal questioning or pathos, a direct, unmediated experience of a divine revelation. Climacus warns that a would-be believer, swept up in what seems to be a genuine, immediate revelation, is like someone swept up in a party atmosphere, immersed in an unquestioned aura of lasting happiness. Faith should be a matter of arduous struggle and self-doubt, but the partygoer wants the experience to be easy, immediate and elevating. He is like someone who expects to fall in love at first sight. Climacus makes the point with humor:

if God had taken the form, for example, of a rare, enormously large green bird, with a red beak, that perched in a tree on the embankment and perhaps even whistled in an unprecedented manner—then our partygoing man would surely have his eyes opened; for the first time in his life he would have been able to be the first.¹

When one falls in love, he has the immediate sense of being “the first” to have had the experience. The man encountering God-as-a-large-bird is likewise sure he is “the first” to have had this experience. But Climacus portrays him as ridiculous. We imagine the partygoer and think: *Really!* God *can't* appear as a bird! The partygoer is inauthentic. He does not take his relation to love or God seriously—there is no self-doubt or pathos. Climacus knows that faith and intimacy with God are difficult. The man who claims to have seen God as clearly as if God appeared in the shape of a bird, like the casual partygoer who thinks he is surely in love, deceives himself. Self-deception

occurs when the person unknowingly or blindly omits the possibility of misunderstanding, thinking that matters of utmost difficulty—knowing one has encountered *God* or knowing one is in fact in *love*—are easy. For Climacus, wanting difficult things to be simple is a mark of inauthenticity. Knowing God, or being in love, cannot be as mindless as the dunce's report that he has encountered God in the form of a spectacular bird.

In a different book, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym imagines a man rushing from church having heard the parson praise Abraham. Ridiculously, he becomes bent on sacrificing his own son, in imitation of Abraham.² He is as thoughtless as the imbecile who believed he had seen God in the shape of a green bird. The biblical Abraham, we learn from the author of *Fear and Trembling*, is not at all like this thoughtless churchgoer. We are to imagine the *terror* of Abraham, to imagine his "fear and trembling." He is marked by *more* than tragic pathos, as he journeys three long days in arduous struggle. Abraham could *not* have *rushed* up the mountain.³ His authentic struggle with self-understanding and self-doubt secures him from self-deception.

II.

Kierkegaard's view on faith can be approached from many angles. In this introduction, we will take up the general orientation provided by S.U. Zuidema, a Dutch philosopher and theologian.⁴ Although one might want to argue with some parts of his account, it affirms the interplay of the existential and the theological dimensions in Kierkegaard's work. This orientation provides a useful context for considering the papers that follow.

Kierkegaard grew up under the influence of the Danish Lutheran State Church, and so it is natural to think that he should be read as a Christian writer. But Kierkegaard was also a scholar of Greek and modern philosophy. He endorses the Socratic emphasis on individual existence—on pursuing self-knowledge, dialogical critique, and leading an authentic existential life. So it might be just as natural to read Kierkegaard without religion. Zuidema situates Kierkegaard as a spiritual thinker, who can be viewed theologically, provided that the idea of personal existence is incorporated, and who can be viewed existentially, provided that the choice to become a person of faith is included.

Faith, in the sense of believing in the divine, demands both a human existence, someone concerned to find meaning, and a divine revelation, addressed to that person's concern. Kierkegaard (or his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus) aims to become a Christian, and his question, how to become one, is formulated in two ways. First, how can one gain the *self-consciousness* or inwardness needed for eternal happiness (or faith)? Second, how can one gain eternal happiness in *Christ*?

Whether or not one is concerned with faith, the idea of self-consciousness presupposes a quality of personal existence. From Climacus' point of view, the idea of eternal happiness in Christ presupposes the idea of "the absolute paradox"—the paradoxical idea that the divine can enter time as a

person. The believer is both self-conscious (*in charge* of his inner life) and dependent on something external to inner life—on a God who *grants* eternal happiness. Attaining faith as a Christian is formulated by a subsequent Kierkegaardian pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, author of *The Sickness unto Death*, as follows: “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.”⁵ Faith is tied to being one’s self (an existential idea), and simultaneously, to being grounded in God (a theological idea).

A believer who aspires to faith, to live in Christ, or under the sign of the absolute paradox, faces an arduous task. In words from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the believer must be alert

to watch for and at every moment to make the discovery of improbability, the paradox, in order then to hold it fast with the passion of inwardness. The improbable, the paradox, is ordinarily conceived of as something to which faith is related only passively; one will have to be satisfied temporarily with this situation, but little by little things will improve—indeed, this is probable.⁶

The believer’s inwardness is continuously engaged in appropriating this ultimate paradox into her own existence, where “faith, self-active, relates itself to the improbable and the paradox, [and] is self-active in discovering it and in holding it fast at every moment—in order to be able to believe.”⁷ This inward process, a matter of self-consciousness, nevertheless is not characterized as entirely subjective, for its aim is to grasp something outside itself, relate to something, objective—an *objective* uncertainty:

Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness, which is the relation of inwardness intensified to its highest. This formula fits only the one who has faith, no one else, not even a lover, or an enthusiast, or a thinker, but solely and only the one who has faith, who relates himself to the absolute paradox.⁸

A faithful believer struggles to attain understanding of the absolute paradox. This amounts to a struggle to transcend a relative time frame. Faith transcends a merely momentary grasp or a solution that *ends* the struggle to comprehend: “Faith...cannot be some temporary function....Faith *must not be satisfied* with incomprehensibility.”⁹

Kierkegaard’s portrait of faith brings to light the existential self’s pathos or passion, joined to a revelation of the absolute paradox. The two are reciprocally entwined. Existential pathos is heightened by the revelation, “because of...[the absolute paradox’s] objective uncertainty, its offence, its foolishness, and its hiddenness.”¹⁰ When existential passion comes into contact with the paradox of divine revelation, the passion of faith is intensified to the highest imaginable inwardness.

God Himself brings the believer to faith by providing an encounter with the historical figure of Christ. Whether one is of faith cannot remain entirely under a believer’s control. Nevertheless, the believer has control in

the capacity to affirm (or deny) his need of a saving encounter and to accept (or reject) an offered encounter with Christ. In contrast,

Unbelievers reject [divine authority] as an offense and retain their sovereignty. Believers accept it, denying themselves. They seek their salvation [eternal happiness], the truth of their “being” outside of themselves. In their faith they recognize the falsity in themselves, their sin and sinful state.¹¹

The situation requires that existentially (and before God), the believer will decide, at least tacitly, that he is not the be all and end all of existence; he denies all inflated versions of himself. And the believer will affirm or decide, at least tacitly, that help will come from the *outside*, and that receiving it means relinquishing his old self and moving outside the (former) self, into new territory. To receive help (a new self) is also a decision in the sense that one might reject the revelation of God in Christ or the offering of a new self. Zuidema sums up the situation this way:

The attitude of faith contains, therefore, both a conception of the essence of the man of faith and [also] embodies a Christological [along with] an anthropological aspect. The former is concerned with God-in-Christ, and the latter with the question, What is man? Both tendencies unite to ask: What really happens when a man believes in Christ and becomes a Christian? Kierkegaard’s entire thought and writings center around his philosophy of faith.¹²

Kierkegaard’s writings evoke a personal relation between God and man, and the existential experience in which the believer is alone before God. He moves within the polarities of his Christian existentialism and his humanistic, non-theological existentialism. For him, becoming a believer culminates in Christian faith, and faith is the highest and most intense mode of human existence.

Although Kierkegaard wants to *live* a full existence (rather than merely define it), Zuidema emphasizes that Kierkegaard in fact characterizes becoming as a complex process that eludes systematic logical exposition:

Becoming cannot be controlled, systematized, or known by means of logical thought....Being can be conceived of in logical categories, but becoming defies every logical analysis. A logical system of becoming is impossible. And since human existence is pre-eminently a process of becoming, it cannot be systematized logically. It is not possible to acquire logical insight and rational knowledge of becoming, change, and motion. Consequently, human existence is irrational.¹³

Perhaps Zuidema goes too far in saying that existence is “irrational”—or if it is, this would be to ask Heraclitus’ question: How can one understand becoming? How can one step into the same river twice? A Pre-Socratic tradition takes logic to be incapable of grasping the unruly flow of becoming (or existence). Later philosophers take brute existence or becoming to

precede thought or arguments *about* becoming. The view is, “I exist...*then* I think.” From Kierkegaard’s point of view, for change and movement to occur in life, a transition from potentiality to reality is required. Kierkegaard sees this as a free transition, the result, in the case of human unfolding, of a free human decision. Change in self is empowered and exemplified by freedom. Let us quote Zuidema again: “Man exists and becomes because he freely chooses between his many possibilities and realizes his choice. The continuity of human existence is, therefore, not a continuous development from one reality to another. It is rather a new product, the result of a new voluntary decision of the will.”¹⁴ Change in human becoming is a transition from a possible to a real act that issues from free acts of choice. The inner act of decision, eludes any strictly *scientific* approach. Science accurately predicts. If human choice is real, one cannot understand the outcome of a person’s choice as already determined and thus subject to accurate prediction. For there to be choice, one must consider one’s future to be open in the moment before choice. An open future is one not yet determinate, not open to accurate prediction. Kierkegaard makes this point by saying that the terms of a necessary logical system—in our language, a predictive science—cannot grasp the decisive transition enacted in voluntary choice. Such a transition is not just a quantitative alteration in a state of affairs but is a *qualitative leap*, made by someone whose future is not yet determined.

Faith depends on a decision. As Zuidema puts it, faith “is not the result of a conclusion but of a *resolution*.”¹⁵ Faith grasps a possibility and effects its actualization: “Faith is able to recognize...the process of becoming, prior to its becoming, prior to its reality, prior to its factuality.”¹⁶ In the process of becoming, man is in a relation to himself; he is his own project. He is preoccupied with himself in a two-fold sense. His inner existence is a self-realization, a spontaneous free act, conducted through self-reflection. He is occupied with himself as he reflects upon himself. He is a unity of spontaneity and reflection, of act and self-reflection, of becoming a self and of becoming conscious of himself. Hence, “The first ‘law’ of human existence is, therefore: Be what you become! Do not be what you are!”¹⁷

Referring to Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death*, Zuidema writes, “Human freedom, as the director of self-realization, has within itself its own typical existential pathos, its own *existential passion*.”¹⁸ By this passion, man is simultaneously finite and infinite, temporal and eternal, real and ideal, relative and absolute, physical and psychical. Man is a tension of opposites held together in a unity. The task of the finite believer, as a finite existence, is to realize oneself through holding on to one’s infinitude, transcending finitude in a relation to God. Denial of one’s self as finite is simultaneously choosing one’s self as infinite. This existential pathos drives the believer further towards self-realization, self-reflection, and self-consciousness.

Continual abnegation of his finite self enables the passionate believer to dialectically evolve in the direction of his infinite self. The calling of the believer is to seek his infinite self in the conflict between the finite and the infinite self. If maintained correctly, an absolute relationship to the absolute is attained. This is the fullest reward possible for existential pathos.

The inner being of human existence is important anthropologically and existentially. The inwardness of a person is hidden for others and escapes the grasp of *objectivity*. In this sense, Zuidema holds that “Man is a mystery. He does not possess a mystery, he *is* a mystery.”¹⁹ His inwardness is the seat of his freedom. There is no objective grip on his freedom. If freedom is the truth he must live by, then his *subjectivity* is truth. Zuidema explains,

This thesis is the conclusion of Kierkegaard’s theory of human existence. The truth of man is not a truth *about* man; it is the true-being of man. Truth consists of passionately being one’s self. It consists of man’s freedom, and of his being freedom. A logical truth concerning man is a lie. What can be *discursively* distinguished in man, the eternal [essence] and the *objective*, is not the authentic man, it is not what is truly human. Man is a mystery, a hiddenness. He is innerness.²⁰

This view of human existence has many variations in Kierkegaard’s writings. It is famously linked with Climacus’ definition of Christianity: “Christianity is spirit; spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity; subjectivity is essentially passion, and at its maximum an infinite, personally interested passion for one’s eternal happiness.”²¹ According to Zuidema, the view of human beings as spirit is in tension with Kierkegaard’s theory of the absolute paradox, and his account of Biblical revelation. Human existence is juxtaposed with faith. Thus Kierkegaard’s “romantic view of man is dependent upon the dogma of human freedom, radicalized to an idea of self-determination and self-realization. As such it is in principle atheistic.”²² Of course, this follows only if we see a contradiction between a) the “self-determination and self-realization” in the self’s relation to its inwardness, and b) the fact, that the self is simultaneously “transparently in the power that established it.”²³

A number of the essays that follow will contest, at least implicitly, Zuidema’s radical analysis of Kierkegaard, but it is worth discussing because it highlights the tension between an existentialist and a theological reading of Kierkegaard quite dramatically. Zuidema believes that Kierkegaard’s stress on existential inwardness and choice grounds a humanistic world-view that does not entail faith. However, Kierkegaard’s stress on the absolute paradox is not a necessary part of that humanistic world-view and in fact conflicts with it. In Zuidema’s view, to speak of the paradox, or the Incarnation, is to reject humanistic existentialism. The papers that follow will negotiate, in one way or another, the purported tension between human self-determination and a Christian transcendental power. In our view, this tension is not destructive but creative.

Let us summarize at this point. Kierkegaard connects his version of Christianity, with its emphasis on the paradox of the Incarnation, and philosophy, with a powerful emphasis on bare human existence. He finds them inseparable. Zuidema stresses these opposed and interdependent strands of thought:

In an unprecedented manner he [Kierkegaard] related the concept of the “essence” of man to the idea of human *existence* and oriented our conception of the character of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to the idea of *Absolute Paradox*. In Kierkegaard the idea of human existence was increasingly dependent upon the idea of Absolute Paradox and vice versa. Both conceptions are correlative and interdependent.²⁴

Kierkegaard develops an idea of the meaning of human existence in order to answer questions raised in his struggle to become a Christian. But the meaning of existence can be pursued without thinking that the Christian doctrine is a necessary part of that meaning. Zuidema goes so far as to hold that Kierkegaard “must do violence to his idea of [humanistic] existence in order to unite it with the idea of Absolute Paradox.”²⁵

For right or wrong Zuidema’s critique offers a useful challenge for understanding what might be conceived as tensions between Kierkegaard’s religious thinking and his reflections on human existence, between the task of becoming authentically human and becoming authentically Christian.

III.

What is involved in the quest for authentic faith? For Kierkegaard, this is not just an intellectual puzzle or question but the central ingredient in a personal aspiration. The question is an *existential* challenge for him. The first four articles in this collection explore whether Kierkegaard’s existential quest can escape self-deception. If the quest is vulnerable to self-deception, the authenticity of faith is at risk.

In the opening piece, Jacob Golomb, offers an original, sober and realistic answer to Kierkegaard’s confession of insufficient faith. Kierkegaard confesses that if he had had *enough* faith, he would have married Regine Olsen. He could not manage to live simultaneously ethically (in the mundane and universal, in marriage) and religiously (in an absolute and particular transcendence toward God). His inability to live loyally both to Regine and to God is the reverse of Abraham’s *ability* to live loyally to Isaac and to God. Thus Kierkegaard substantiates his own self-criticism: Abraham’s faith is higher than his own.

There is a dilemma contained in Climacus’ exposition of truth. Shai Fogel brings this out in the second article. He notes that Climacus calls perception of God a kind of acoustical illusion. But if there is awareness of something that is an illusion, then it must be rejected since it cannot be truth. And if, in spite of the recognition of the illusion it is nevertheless still held as truth—then this is a case of self-deception. Fogel leaves us wondering if an awareness of God can ever be more than self-deceptive and inauthentic.

Roi Benbassat sees faith as a struggle against specifically *ethical* self-deception. Authenticity can be an issue for someone in any one of Kierkegaard’s life-spheres. One can be inauthentic in aesthetic, ethical, or religious life. Benbassat suggests that authenticity (or its lack) connects the stages or spheres around a single ideal. But it also is the movement from

one stage to the next. Successfully facing one's inauthenticity at a lower stage brings one to a higher stage. More specifically, Benbassat shows how Kierkegaard's wrestling with authenticity at the ethical stage leads to a subtle and original perception of the religious stage. There may be a gap to leap between the ethical and the religious, but the motivation for a leap is found as ethical inauthenticity begins to surface.

Is it possible to consider authentic faith *without* taking belief in God, explicitly religious practice, or the absolute paradox, to be indisputably central? Edward F. Mooney claims that faith is not susceptible to self-deception—given the account in *Fear and Trembling*. On the contrary, faith *eliminates* any possibility of self-deception. He proposes, given *Fear and Trembling's* tax collector, for instance, that an open and undeceived *trust in the world* lies at the heart of faith. It is a trust that *embraces* rather than suppresses the world's manifold confusions and contradictions. Abraham, Job, or Kierkegaard may not share a common creed or religious institution, but they share a struggle for authenticity and consider themselves persons of faith. Among other things, their faith is an open trust enabling living among ineradicable contradictions. Far from dogmatism, faith is the most worthy way of life.

Moving away from considering Kierkegaard's quest for authentic faith on its own terms, the last five articles consider how Kierkegaard's conceptions of faith and self-deception are related to historical understanding, selfhood, Judaism, and the importance of specifically Christian content.

In "Faith and the Uncertainty of Historical Experience," Darío González poses the problem of understanding the Incarnation. How can one avoid deception, or self-deception, in taking up a belief in something that is not a phase in the evolution of a substantial reality, yet is not a purely mythical rendering of a historical existence, either? A central challenge for a believer is to specify what the *reality* of the Incarnation amounts to.

Without willing faith existentially, there would be no faith. Yet, as we have seen, whether one has faith is not entirely under one's control. A believer is dependent on God's grace to present him with the God he can choose to affirm. Jerome (Yehuda) Gellman claims that there is no contradiction between the idea that the believer chooses a position of faith and that faith is given apart from his choice. Gellman proceeds by distinguishing two occasions where the will is at work. First, a person might will to accept the *assignment of a task*, and second he might will to *complete a task*. Humans leap in accepting an assigned task, in the case at hand the task of attaining faith. Whether a person *achieves* the goal—completes the task—is *not* in his hands. To presume that one can complete becoming a self entirely without help is to fall into sin. To presume that one can take up the task of becoming a self is to be righteous. The outcome of taking it up will be in God's hands.

Peter Šajda asks, "Does Anti-Climacus' Ethical-Religious Theory of Selfhood Imply a Discontinuity of the Self?" He points out that if authentic faith is possible, we must assume continuity and persistence in the believer's self-awareness. We must assume that it is the *same person* who exists before and after any change in his being. In many respects, however, the believer

does change, often in deep and meaningful ways. If continuity in self is broken, how can the self be authentic? To answer this question, Sajda claims that the *reflexive dimensions* of a self secure the possibility of continuity in a self and the possibility of faith's authenticity.

For Kierkegaard, a believer's authenticity is dependent on a specific perception of Christianity and the ways of life it supports. In "Being in Truth and Being a Jew: Kierkegaard's View of Judaism," Tamar Aylat-Yaguri shows that Judaism is essential to the task of becoming a Christian, even if only by presenting what to avoid or negate. Kierkegaard identifies the defects of Judaism as the defects of the so-called Christianity that surrounds him, the defects that provoke his polemical attacks. The Jewishness he asks his reader to transcend is no less than Danish Christendom, Golden Age Christendom.

Jon Stewart addresses the apparent lack of content in Kierkegaard's picture of belief. In the *Postscript*, Climacus suggests that if only one prays in the right manner, even if one worships an idol, one can attain a faith that is truer and more authentic than that of one who prays to the true god, but in a false manner. In "Kierkegaard and Hegel on Faith and Knowledge," Stewart raises the question of how one can properly distinguish correct from incorrect belief if there is no difference in content. From a Hegelian point of view everything cannot rest on the *how* rather than the *what* of belief. Some concrete content is required to distinguish Christianity from other religions, pagan or otherwise.

Our desire is that this collection will make a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussions about authenticity and faith in Kierkegaard. We hope that this volume will serve to stimulate further research and critical debate on this important issue.

Tamar Aylat-Yaguri (Tel Aviv)

Jon Stewart (Copenhagen)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Danish Abbreviations

- Pap.* *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, vols. I to XI-3, ed. by Peter Andreas Heiberg, Victor Kuhr and Einer Torsting, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1909-48; second, expanded ed., vols. I to XI-3, by Niels Thulstrup, vols. XII to XIII supplementary volumes, ed. by Niels Thulstrup, vols. XIV to XVI index by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1968-78.
- SKS* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1-28, vols. K1-K28, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1997-2013.

English Abbreviations

- BA* *The Book on Adler*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.
- CA* *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.
- CD* *Christian Discourses*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997.
- CUP1* *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982.
- EO2* *Either/Or*, Part Two, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987.
- FT* *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983.
- FTP* *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1985.
- JC* *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985.

- JP* *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1–6, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (vol. 7, Index and Composite Collation), Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1967–78.
- KJN* *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1–11, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2007ff.
- M* *The Moment and Late Writings*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.
- PC* *Practice in Christianity*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991.
- PF* *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985.
- PV* *The Point of View* including *On My Work as an Author*, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, and *Armed Neutrality*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.
- R* *Repetition*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983.
- SUD* *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.
- UD* *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993.

CHAPTER ONE

WAS KIERKEGAARD AN AUTHENTIC BELIEVER?

JACOB GOLOMB

I want to introduce a certain revision of what I once thought was Kierkegaard's stance on authentic faith.¹ I will present this revision by dwelling upon his rather puzzling statement found in one of his journal entries: "If I had had faith I would have stayed with Regine."² We can read this confession as virtually admitting that "If I were a true believer like Abraham—I would marry Regine." And indeed what were his biographical reasons for acknowledging himself as not being a genuine Christian? He was not actually an arch-sinner any more than other people. He never committed heinous crimes for his or some other profits. He actually was more pious than his father who sinned before God—if we take the mysterious stories about him seriously enough.³ So why did Kierkegaard think that he would never attain the stance of authentic belief? And even more pertinent is the question: why did he think that his marriage with Regine would testify that he is a true believer? I believe that on the present account, the answer will appear quite obvious. Kierkegaard was well aware that the utmost authentic belief is impossible for us to attain. He also believed that we have to live a life that attests to the fact that, despite this awareness, we still are trying our best, and we still are committed to live the greatest paradox of all: to believe in the *what* and the *how* and to try and walk toward the kingdom of heaven despite our realization that such a kingdom is unattainable for us. This is Kierkegaard's existential version of the *credo quia absurdum est*.

In what follows I will speculate about the *philosophical reasons* for this confession using Kierkegaard's portrait of an authentic believer. I will emphasize the *philosophical reasons* since I am not interested here in what many of Kierkegaard's fans are interested in, namely, his rather flamboyant life, all kinds of gossip, etc., etc.⁴ I will not deal with the real Regine and their bizarre love affair, but will regard marriage as Kierkegaard had regarded it: as the highest expression of the ethical sphere of existence. Being myself married—I will not dare argue such a viewpoint.

I. Authentic Faith is Sincerity of Intention along with Passion Directed at One Object

As is now well known, the search for authenticity in modern Western thought begins with the desperate journal entry, dated August 1, 1835, of a twenty-two year old Dane: "the thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*."⁵

Kierkegaard was not talking here about objective cognitive truth; nor was he referring to the intellectual act of rationally grounding some kind of philosophical system. He wanted to create a pattern of life that would be *true for him* and would enable him to be true to himself. The creation of authentic life is an existential vocation; it is not relevant to various theoretical speculations. Kierkegaard asked himself in his journal: “What is truth other than living for an idea?”⁶ Here we encounter the insight that authentic life has less to do with a specific content, a *what*, and more to do with some particular existential walk of life, with a *how*. This is the background for his rather “scandalous” utterance, in his more philosophical book—the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, that “Truth is Subjectivity.”⁷ When I say “scandalous” I refer here to the many fans of the positivist, scientific or linguistic philosophy who could not stomach such an anti-scientific and anti-logical attitude, though one of their most eminent representatives and enlightened philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein, admired Kierkegaard, as is evident from his remarks that refer to Kierkegaard: “An honest religious thinker is like a tightrope walker. He almost looks as though he were walking on nothing but air. His support is the slenderest imaginable. And yet it really is possible to walk on it.”⁸ How do we know that this is a reference to Kierkegaard? Simply because Kierkegaard had used the very same description of an authentic believer whose back is like a “tightrope dancer’s.”⁹

But what is exactly an authentic faith in Kierkegaard’s eyes? The clue to the answer is to be found in his eloquent maxim presented under his own name in his *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits* from 1847: “Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing.”¹⁰ Thus, authenticity is sincerity of intention (“purity of heart”) along with passion (“to will”) directed at “one” object. This “thing,” according to Kierkegaard, is “God,” but especially, one’s own self. That is, authenticity consists in acts of willing passionately and sincerely to become a genuinely authentic individual, despite one’s awareness that becoming authentic requires a perpetual movement without definite results: “and where if there is indeed any truth in his willing one thing, this also assists him to the good.”¹¹

At the beginning of his torturous search for personal authenticity, Kierkegaard held the rather anti-Kantian view, based on his popular adoption of Kantian ethics, namely, that in the ethical sphere of life alone one cannot become an authentic moral agent. Because of its reflective and abstract nature, the ethical object, though preserving the sincerity of intent (sincerity being in itself an ethical category) cannot enlist the optimal intensity of passion required for authentic acts. Hence, Kierkegaard used to assert that it was only in the religious sphere that the *what* does not destroy the *how*. Appearing as an infinite being, it incites the most intense passion, and vice versa: a certain manner of willing and intending—like the absolute and unconditional passion—gives the *what* of faith.

However, Kierkegaard could not point to any concrete individual who has manifested the extremely subjective pathos of an authentic belief and hence he had recourse to the semi-fictive portrait of Abraham of the Bible.¹² The impossibility of being able to point to concrete living or dead

individuals as authentic figures¹³ does not stem *solely* from the fact that authenticity “begins precisely where thought stops,”¹⁴ thereby making the ethos of objectivity and rationality quite irrelevant to the personal quest for authentic existence. This existential concern cannot rely any more on all public criteria of judgment. Kierkegaard believed that it also has to do with the intrinsic nature of authenticity that revolves around one’s innermost self and the subjective “inwardness” of passion. Outwardly, the authentic hero may even look like a “tax collector,”¹⁵ like any philistine exercising his conventional and ethical modes of living. But inwardly, it is a different story altogether. Abraham’s self, tested and forged by the dreadful encounter with the Absolute, acquired a qualitatively new nature. Kierkegaard uses this point to reject the familiar philosophical maxim of Hegelian philosophy, that “the outer is higher than the inner.”¹⁶ Thus, in the ethical sphere, the moral agent’s rational duty (namely, in the Kantian version) has to “become revealed” and to express one’s subjectivity. While the ethic of honesty and sincerity is objective, public, and transparently manifested, the pathos of authenticity is concealed, radically subjective, and is externalized only rarely, in momentous acts of existential “truthfulness” rather than in the cognitive acts that, at most, help us to attain certain truths that are mostly irrelevant to our happiness and well-being.¹⁷

Furthermore, the individual always finds it difficult to be sure of his or her authenticity. In diametrical opposition to Hegel’s image of man, the “knight of faith,” renouncing the universal language of reflective thought, cannot become intelligible even to himself. “Abraham,” the paradigmatic “knight of faith,” “remains silent—but he *cannot* speak.”¹⁸ His immediate, faithful and private relation to God makes it impossible for him to speak to Isaac or to anyone else. I believe that this description stood before Wittgenstein’s eyes when he uttered the rather mystical sentence at the end of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.”¹⁹

In any case, Kierkegaard interprets the Biblical story as Abraham’s attempt to test his religious commitment by an extraordinary act of sacrifice. Only such an act can attest to the authenticity of the believer. In other words, by his determined act to sacrifice his dearest for the sake of God, Abraham proves to be an authentic believer. This explains why, in an essay on authenticity in the sense of *auctoritas* (i.e., possessing original or inherent authority), Kierkegaard answers as follows the question of how an Apostle can prove he has authority: “An apostle has no other evidence than his own statement, and at the most his willingness to suffer everything joyfully for the sake of that statement.”²⁰ In other words, one cannot prove that one is authentic, but one can feel in one’s innermost self the need for authenticity and thus seek it for one’s life.

Abraham cannot analyze himself or immerse in endless reflection. Because of his great passion, he is not paralyzed at the moment of truth or rather of truthfulness. For Kierkegaard, the ideas of passion and uncertainty are interrelated; it is the most uncertain thing that excites our most burning passion. Thus Abraham has to risk the possibility that it is not God who summons him to sacrifice Isaac, but Satan, or an unconscious urge, or a

delusion. After all, Abraham's decision to sacrifice Isaac might be a horrible ordeal, a "*temptation*"²¹ (what Kierkegaard calls "*Fristelse*" or in German *Anfechtung*.) This is the "anxiety" which faces Abraham in his ordeal on Mount Moriah. This is an anxiety he freely has chosen to take upon himself:

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.²²

Even when the "knife gleamed," Abraham, by virtue of his absurd faith, still believed that "God would not require Isaac."²³

According to ethical standards the universal always takes precedence over the particular. Yet the paradox of faith is that the particular becomes higher than the universal by virtue of its passionate relation to the Absolute.²⁴ Even the murder of one's son can be a holy act if done at the behest of God. Faith is a passion that begins at the point where reason ceases to operate; it means believing the absurd, contrary to all rational, earthly calculations. Because it is a relationship between the finite and the infinite, between the ephemeral and the absolute, it supersedes all else. The "absolute duty" to God renders all other ethical obligations relative. But are we ready, for the sake of our authenticity, to perform the "teleological suspension of the ethical" and behave like Abraham, who "by his act...transgressed the ethical altogether?"²⁵

Thus it seems that at the beginning of his pseudonymous authorship, the first modern philosopher of authenticity was willing to involve us in a serious clash between this authenticity and ethics. His version of the story of Abraham seems to suggest that the road to authenticity may even pass beyond rational communication and everyday ethics. But to attain authentic life we should not hesitate to enter this twilight zone even at the terrible price of "crucifying" our understanding.

Here it is possible to argue against Kierkegaard that if the crucial factor in authenticity is the *how* of passion, does it not follow that on his view it is better to be a zealous Nazi than a lukewarm Christian? Is Abraham a highly esteemed "knight of faith" or just a zealous murderer? If an authentic mode of living requires an individual's total and passionate commitment and uncompromising rejection of anything that is alien or contradictory to it—could it be that a passionate Nazi or religious fanatic is to be regarded as an authentic subject deserving our highest esteem? Such questions were directed to Kierkegaard by various unsympathetic critics. According to my first version of his position,²⁶ I thought that a partial defense against such attacks could be easily raised.

As we saw, Kierkegaard held that authenticity is formed by a kind of correlation between the *what* of commitment and the *how* of committing oneself. Kierkegaard seems to think that any *idée fixe* or ideology directed toward a finite and limited object, even such as "the thousand-year Reich," cannot in principle incite the "endless passion" required for acting

authentically. Only an infinite and absolute object or paradox, can evoke the required absolute passion. Our authenticity may emerge only through the “suspension” of reason and logic. But for this we need an object, like that of a religious faith, which will demand that we do exactly that, namely, bracket out our morality codes.

However, one may object and argue that psychologically at least, it is still plausible that even a finite object, such as my love for a woman, can incite me to such a degree of passion that I may sacrifice everything to preserve my absolute commitment to her. And indeed Kierkegaard describes love in terms similar to those he uses for faith, saying, “To love is plain and simple pathos.”²⁷ It seems that there is no obstacle to becoming passionately committed to a contingent and finite object, whom I may love just as authentically as I may believe in the Absolute. Why then is my faith in the Absolute God the exclusively genuine expression of an authentic commitment?

To “rescue” Kierkegaard from any criminal charges, I once provided a possible answer to this question, which might be regarded as scandalous by believers in any version of a transcendent God, namely, this kind of faith is actually an expression of the ultimate paradox and requires man’s most sustained creativity. To “create” God requires the utmost passion possible of man. I do not refer here, of course, to an actual creation but to *the intentional constitution* of the relation to an object which, by this very relation, becomes the Absolute. In his version of the story of Abraham, Kierkegaard implies that the existential experience, which makes the “knight of faith” affirm the command subjectively and regard it as coming from God, grants this God the status of being an absolute entity *for* Abraham. In order for the Absolute to become an Absolute for me and to demand of me “an absolute duty,” this Absolute is dependent upon my subjective interpretation of Him as *the Absolute*. Here we reach the climax of the paradox: despite Abraham’s awareness that the Absolute is dependent upon his decision to make Him so, a fact that may destroy the “immediate” or unmediated relation towards Him, Abraham acts as if this Absolute has an objective authority to be the Absolute! Though the Absolute depends upon one’s subjective decision, one has to accept Him, as does Abraham, as if he is the objective Absolute *per se*. Thus, God is intentionally created in our hearts, though we obey Him as ontologically aloof in heaven.

Furthermore, I even claimed that Kierkegaard maximized and sharpened the distinction between man and God in order to make religious faith the most authentic and authoritative thing imaginable. The gap between God and man is infinite because it is man who made it so, creating religions of transcendence. We should remember that both Abraham and Jesus were founders and originators of specific faiths, and since originality is part of the meaning of the notion of authenticity, both may legitimately be regarded, as indeed they were, as authentic “knights of faith.” Whereas the most passionate lover only forms passion in his inwardness and directs it to an *already existing* individual, the “knight of faith” creates, first the object of his faith, and then the passion involved in the faithful commitment to this object. Thus, the intimate correlation between the *how* of faith and its *what*

is entirely of his making. Therefore, only this formative relation can create the self's authenticity. To create one's own self, one must first overcome one's sensual nature (aesthetics), then the universal (Kantian-ethical) Reason; only then can one become the genuine knight of Faith: the sole creator of one's self and God.

For this, the utmost passion, commitment and self-overcoming are needed. One must be deeply immersed in the search for authenticity. In ethics, we have a similar *what/how* correlation, but because of the abstractness of its objects, and the amount of rational reflection involved, passion evaporates and the subject cannot become truly committed to the object of his creation. In his understanding of the ethical sphere, Kierkegaard was dependent on Kant's popular version of moral philosophy. Hence he believed that the ethical domain lacked the passion required for authenticity, that duty swallowed up love.

II. A Viable Co-Existence of Authentic Faith with Morality

This romantic and rather immature view was held by the young Kierkegaard and by his no older present commentator. But this view is far from explaining Kierkegaard's sincere confession that he could not believe like Abraham. Why? Had he not renounced his most beloved Regine to exist alone vis-à-vis God? Had he not the passionate commitment Abraham had? The scenario portrayed above could not explain exactly what was wrong with Kierkegaard that he could not become the "knight of faith" like his sublime model, Abraham. Hence I reread certain passages in Kierkegaard's writings and realized that I (with many other commentators) did not take seriously Kierkegaard's insistence about the necessarily required viable *co-existence* of the religiousness with ethics.

In this context it became clear to me that the most important decisive claim of Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* is the following: "it is great to give up one's desire, but it is greater to hold fast to it after having given it up; it is great to lay hold of the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up."²⁸ Hence, what is really at stake here is not exactly the double-movement, about which so much was written, but actually the *double co-existence* of the infinite *and* the finite, of the transcendent and the empirically given, of love for God and love for other human beings.

This is further substantiated by Kierkegaard's revealing statement in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to the effect that "the ethical and the religious stages have an essential relation to each other."²⁹ To understand this claim, we have to realize that Kantian and Hegelian ethics of sincerity and honesty, which constitutes a social and bourgeois way of life, actually paved the way for Kierkegaard's authentic faith since sincerity is the *sine qua non* condition (but not the only one) of every authentic stance. Thus it appears that the mature, post-romantic Kierkegaard maintains now that it is almost impossible to be an authentic believer without being a moral agent. Abraham was such an example that Kierkegaard could not imitate.

He could not become Abraham—"knight of faith," and because he did not have enough passion to be able to live a *viable synthesis* of the ethical and the religious, his mental and spiritual resources were humanly lower than those of his religious "knight of faith," i.e., the sublime Abraham.

Furthermore, if our faith in God is of our own intentional making—so is our love for another person, and from the point of intentionality there is really no difference between these cases. Thus, Abraham could love his God and have an absolute relation to Him, but he also could love Sarah and be able to return to her tent after the ordeal on Mount Moriah. Moreover, when one ceased to love one's God, one's God no more intentionally exists for that one because, according to Kierkegaard, "Truth is Subjectivity."³⁰ However, the same is true of one's love for another significant person like, for example, Kierkegaard's Regine. When one stops loving her she virtually becomes nonexistent, and one slowly becomes indifferent, from that moment on, to her very well-being. So, from the subjective point of view, both cases, the love for God and the love for Regine, entail the same intentional acts. But when one lacks enough spiritual stamina and utmost sincere passion for *both* of these intentional objects—the inner equilibrium is shattered and one is left either with one's God or with one's earthly love or with none at all.

This is what I think has happened to Kierkegaard, and hence his confession that I quoted at the beginning of my paper. And then I realized that the crux of the Abraham story, as presented by Kierkegaard, a part rather too hastily omitted by his once immature commentator (namely, myself), is the motive of a *return*. By "return" I mean here, one's ability to *co-exist* with the infinite Absolute and *also* with the finite and earthly relations, such that might bestow upon us, mortals, that mundane, everyday happiness.

This motive is gastronomically portrayed in *Fear and Trembling* by Kierkegaard describing the believer as a kind of a "postman" or tax collector who, upon returning from the Mount Moriah,

thinks that his wife surely will have a special hot meal for him when he comes home—for example, roast lamb's head with vegetables....In the evening, he smokes his pipe...he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher.... He resigned everything infinitely, and then grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd.³¹

All in all, the young Kierkegaard had deceived himself about the analogy he had drawn in his life and thought: thus as Abraham renounced his earthly life and happiness (and his son Isaac and his mundane status as father of many nations), so Kierkegaard will renounce Regine and his possibility for ethical and earthly happiness and love. However, the mature Kierkegaard caught his self-deception and realized that actually Abraham renounced nothing! On the contrary, he gained the status of *sub specie aeternitatis* simultaneously with the earthly fulfillment. Abraham believed that he would be able to live with the eternal transcendent *alongside* the temporal

and the empirical. This attitude Kierkegaard could not adopt in his life. He felt that he could not live the normal ethical life after the encounter with the Absolute. It was not in his power to live a mundane ethical life alongside the unmediated relation with the Absolute.

To have eternity in one's heart and to hold dear earthly values of marriage and family—this is the real story and moral of the *Akedah* as poetically presented by Kierkegaard. Not the drama of the *Akedah* proper but the ability to live prosaic everyday life—for example to enjoy Sarah's dishes—and at the same time to dwell in the transcendental lofty domain is what made Abraham what he was: an authentic “knight of faith.” This is the tension and the real ordeal that Abraham passed with flying colors but Kierkegaard could not embrace.

Abraham could carry on the dialogue with the Absolute and, at the same time, with a significant other. He could do it because he strongly and passionately believed that his dialogue with God would not disrupt, or come at the expense of, his other earthly commitments. Kierkegaard did not believe that, and henceforth he would not become the “knight of faith.” To put it more precisely, the real problem is not the intentional creativity of different objects of worship and/or of love, the eternal and the mundane, but the problem is how to *co-exist* with these objects simultaneously without losing the ethical or the religious and how to maintain intensively passionate relations with both of them.

Kierkegaard was not sure that he would be able to contain and withstand the possible clash between the authentic belief and ethical-communal life, namely, to believe in God and to love Regine unconditionally at the same time. In other words, he did not feel that he had enough passion to be able to love his God unconditionally and to co-exist in an earthly relation and express an earthly love toward Regine. But if Kierkegaard could not—could we, mortals, climb the lofty and sublime peaks of an authentic faith? In any case, it became clear to me that if Kierkegaard would authentically believe, that is, had an unmediated and absolute faith, he would be sure that all other relations, being only relative and finite, would not be able to stand in his way toward the authentic belief.

Thus I think that Kierkegaard would gladly adopt Nietzsche's famous saying, to the effect that “in reality there has been only one Christian, and he died on the Cross.”³² The fact is that Kierkegaard never spoke about how one is a Christian or a believer but only of the excruciating process of *becoming* a Christian or a believer. The truth is the way and never dwells on the final steps of our existential ladder.

Vis-à-vis the Nietzschean secular authentic hero of the fictive Zarathustra whose book is “For Everyone and No One”³³—also Kierkegaard's authentic “knight of faith” Abraham is a sheer fictive imagination of a truly committed believer, who finally became a citizen in both sublime human worlds: the transcendental and the mundane; the world of earthly ethics and the lofty world of transcendence and the infinite faith and infinite sacrifice. Nietzsche thought that nobody can in reality attain the genuine stance of an authentic atheist who optimally manifests in his life the “patterns of positive power,”³⁴ namely, that of the fictive Zarathustra. Whereas, Kierkegaard, fifty years

before him, thought that nobody, with the exception of the fictive Abraham and Jesus, could attain the religious and ethical patterns of an authentic belief. I hope and believe that he was quite wrong—otherwise we really will find ourselves in a big mess and deep troubles when the zealous religious fanatics (of all creeds) commit numerous acts of bloodshed and sheer terror.

Only God could act within the finite empirical sphere and, simultaneously, within the sublime eternal realm. Those among us who, out of various religious and messianic reasons, tried to become new and militant “Abrahams” by claiming, for example, some finite earthly territory for their own “salvation” and “salvation” of their people, will not only bring havoc upon themselves but will vainly sacrifice other “Isaacs” who will perish because nobody can believe like Abraham did and like Kierkegaard could not.

The important lesson for us all is that Kierkegaard did not think that a zealous and fanatical believer can sacrifice other human beings on the altars of his uncompromising belief. Genuine and authentic belief can only be realized within the sphere of the ethical and within a society of humans. Without a society there can be no meaning for authentic faith, and, Kierkegaard, by withdrawing from society and by breaking his relations with Regine, could not become a “knight of faith” as could Abraham, his sublime model for authentic religiousness.

III. Epilogue: “And all three of them would be together in the hereafter, Fritz and Søren and Regine”

In an apathetic age, devoid of passion and genuinely Christian sentiments, an unchristian age that “recoils and gets lost in an endless and fruitless reflexion,”³⁵ Kierkegaard tried to instill within us the thirst for an authentic faith. He did so, in order for us to try our best to at least approximate, as far as we can, the committed individual who rejects the seductions of shallow Christianity or Judaism, for something more sublime and more invigorating than the daily business of paying our taxes and gaining material profits at the cost of spiritual exaltation. In contradiction to the Kantian ethical view that “you ought because you can,” we can hear Kierkegaard’s whisper in our ears, “you ought to try hard because you cannot.” This, in my view, is the ultimate paradox, or rather absurdity, of his religious attitude which is religious and sublime precisely because we are exerting our best efforts to obtain what, in principle, is not given to us humans: to become genuine Christians or Jews or Moslems, the true “knights of faith.”

However, we still can attempt to attain the unattainable. This requires the optimal faith in ourselves and in our God and the most powerful passion that can withstand even the possibility of an impossibility and can live a full and earthly life, including the marriage with Regine, despite our full awareness that we shall never enter the eternal kingdom of Heaven. In other words, we had to do the utmost in order to make our mundane existence into a kind of heaven on Earth. This quite unexpected conclusion turns Kierkegaard’s attitude into the most humanistic one, possible for us humans.

By the end of his stormy romantic rebellion against Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard came to think in Kantian terms not only of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, but of the authentic faith within the limits of ethics alone. Abraham could dwell and prosper within these limits alone but not Kierkegaard. Hence he could become neither an authentic believer nor an authentic moral agent. He is thwarted from entering either of these kingdoms—hence his disparate confession I quoted at the beginning of this paper.

Kierkegaard wanted us to adopt a genuine believe in the Absolute, not because of the Church's enticement that in this way we will gain eternal life and resurrection after death, but on the contrary, despite the painful awareness that the gates of eternity and heaven are closed before us, we will still try to do the utmost and believe in the possibility of salvation without renouncing our finite and earthly happiness and ethics. To be an ethical person without any theological rationalization for ethics is for Kierkegaard—as for Kant, the ultimate bravura of morality. Specifically, to become a moral person—without needing any recourse to the belief in the transcendent, is to be a genuinely moral person. However, to be able to adopt a religious faith and to hold firmly to the ethical one no matter what—is to become a genuine knight of faith. And if Regine is a necessary part of it—so much the better.

Thus, one may speculate, that by this stance Kierkegaard wanted to help attain the lofty morality of Kant, without using any pathological (from *pathos*, feeling) or non-moral means. He shifted the unattainable Kantian ethics to the domain of faith and consigned the humanly possible ethics (without using the religious enticement within the “domain of reason alone”) to reign on earth. The Kantian “kingdom of telos” as portrayed in his abstract ethical compositions became in Kierkegaard's humanistic approach an earthly domain of morality.

The crucial point Kierkegaard was trying to make is how one can return from the “Heart of Darkness” (to use Joseph Conrad's famous title³⁶) to live the civilized life despite one's knowledge of the human abyss and one's ability to do evil. By the same token the real test of the authentic believer is not to face the test that Abraham was confronted with but to *return* from this test and to live a trivial ethical civilized life with the bliss of faith in one's heart. The more powerful the passion of one's faith is, the better are the chances of one's return to the normal. Kierkegaard did not feel such a passion, which he attributed only to Abraham, and thus he felt that he was not an authentic believer. Who are we to argue against his own condemnation and perhaps also his self-inflicted damnation?

Thus the answer to the question implied by the discussion so far—was Kierkegaard an authentic believer?—is, like most answers in philosophy generally, that we cannot know for sure. The extremely subjective pathos of authenticity prevents any attempt of an outsider to know if one is an authentic believer or not.³⁷ The lack of any rational and objective criteria to judge or justify one's authenticity, makes any such attempt a sheer speculative enterprise. But by the same token, Kierkegaard himself could not know whether he was or was not an authentic believer—only actions, sacrifices and existential tests can attest to one's authenticity or the lack of

it. By not marrying Regine and by abstaining from any resolute and positive action, Kierkegaard realized, quite correctly one must add, that he was not an authentic believer like his idealized model, Abraham, who managed to live spontaneously in two spheres of life, the ethical and the religious, by finding a viable *modus vivendi* and a living synthesis between the two. Not marrying is not doing and not daring to live the ethical life with the religious ones. Thus Kierkegaard was right about himself and also about the other humans struggling to make the leap of faith and the leap of love simultaneously.

Kierkegaard could renounce his relation with Regine, like Abraham renounced his standing as the future father of nations (of *Goiim*), and the husband and father of his family (Sarah and Isaac). This was the easier task, and the fact is that indeed Kierkegaard renounced his marriage with Regine. But to return from his confrontation with the Absolute and return to Regine, like Abraham to the tent of Sarah after his ordeal on Moriah, was beyond Kierkegaard's power. For this one needs the absolute faith which was that of Abraham, the epitome of authentic faith. Kierkegaard knew it, or more precisely *felt* it—hence his confession that he had fallen short from the religiousness of Abraham. He was, of course, right since being right or wrong on the matters of faith is not part of a cognitive judgment, but of an arational, existential faith, that only Abraham could achieve—but Kierkegaard in his own life could not.

Let me end this piece with a fascinating description by Kierkegaard's biographer, Joakim Garff who, after informing his readers that Kierkegaard was buried not far from his Regine's husband, presents his exciting speculation:

When Regine left her apartment...to visit her spouse's grave—since she was in the memorial park *anyway*—might she not have walked over, quietly and unobserved, to Kierkegaard's grave? ...And *him*, the man down there, it was he, after all, who had once told her that since in Heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, all three of them would be together in the hereafter, Fritz and Søren and Regine.³⁸

CHAPTER TWO

ACOUSTICAL ILLUSION AS SELF-DECEPTION

SHAI FROGEL

I'm neither a Kierkegaard scholar nor a believer. As a matter of fact, I think that (religious) faith necessarily involves self-deception since faith means accepting something as true even though one does not really know whether it is true or not. Yet philosophical thinking has a special interest precisely in this process of self-deception. Socrates was the first to claim this when he defined the goal of philosophy as a struggle against our inherent tendency to imagine we know what we do not know. Kierkegaard continues Socrates' legacy and makes every effort not to fall into self-deception, which, for him, means sinking into a mistaken mode of existence. His discussion of "An Acoustical Illusion" in *Philosophical Fragments* is very stimulating in this respect and will be the focus of my paper.¹

Since, as I confessed at the outset, I'm not a Kierkegaard scholar, I limit myself to this text alone without claiming that my interpretation is compatible with other texts by Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, I don't believe the same philosopher can have different faces, not even when he escapes into symbolic pseudonyms. If all the pseudonyms do indeed refer to the same person, I think that common traces can be found in all of them. This issue, however, belongs to a different discussion. My point is that from a philosophical perspective, it is the truth that matters, not the historical reference. If a certain text serves to advance our philosophical thinking, it really does not matter whether it is by Climacus, Kierkegaard or some unknown writer. For this reason, I don't find much philosophical value in arguments such as "but this is Climacus and not Kierkegaard," or "but Kierkegaard argues differently in other texts," or "but Kierkegaard has no consistent or constant view."² It is obviously possible that my interpretation is defective, and it is most certainly not comprehensive, but it does attempt to follow a close reading of the text. The goal of my analysis is to examine the idea of "acoustical illusion" as a form of self-deception.

What is "acoustical illusion"? "Thus, although the offense, however it expresses itself, sounds from somewhere else—indeed, from the opposite corner—nevertheless it is the paradox that resounds in it, and this indeed is an acoustical illusion."³ Climacus' description of acoustical illusion evokes the prisoners in Plato's cave, who wrongly associate the echo they hear with the shadows on the wall. Climacus, however, is not speaking here about sensual illusion, but rather about existential illusion (actually, Plato refers to existential illusion as well). An "acoustical illusion" might cause one to reject the paradox and thus to miss the truth of faith. How does Climacus arrive at the problem of acoustical illusion? And how can it be interpreted as a form of self-deception?