

SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S VIEW OF FAITH FOUND IN *FEAR AND TREMBLING*
AND *PRACTICE IN CHRISTIANITY*

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Søren Kierkegaard's view of Faith found in *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity*

In this paper I discuss two key works written by Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity*, under the pseudonyms Johannes de Silentio and Anti-Climacus respectively. I focus on three questions: what is Johannes' view of faith, what is Anti-Climacus' view of faith and how are these Kierkegaard's conclusions? I argue that stemming from Johannes' and Anti-Climacus' points of view, Kierkegaard's view of faith is the aligning of the self in a trusting relationship with the God-man. One outside of faith can perceive faith to be a paradox or find faith offensive; one must have faith to avoid offense and overcome the paradox.

Chapter 1 focuses on the connection between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms using his work *The Point of View*. In this chapter I map out Kierkegaard's method of communication and the purpose for his use of pseudonyms.

Chapter 2 focuses on Johannes' view of faith in *Fear and Trembling*. Johannes says that faith is formed through a private relationship with God. One with faith is silent about this relationship from the point of view of one who is in the ethical. Johannes understands faith dialectically. Faith is a paradox to Johannes because he does not understand the justification for Abraham's action.

Chapter 3 focuses on Anti-Climacus' view of faith in *Practice in Christianity*. Anti-Climacus presents a rigorous account of faith. He says faith is being a contemporary of the God-man and meeting the requirements of believing the God-man's words. When one becomes a contemporary with the God-man one can become offended by the God-

man because the God-man is in collision with the established order, he, as man, claims to be God, he, as God, appears to be man, or the God-man speaks indirectly.

Chapter 4 focuses on explaining how Johannes' and Anti-Climacus' view complement each other. Out of these two points of view Kierkegaard's view of faith is the aligning of the self in a trusting relationship with the God-man. One outside of faith can perceive faith to be a paradox or find faith offensive; one must have faith to avoid offense and overcome the paradox.

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Chapter 1

I. Introduction

In this paper I will compare two views of faith in Søren Kierkegaard's writings, *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity*, which were written under pseudonyms, Johannes de Silentio and Anti-Climacus, respectively. A pseudonym is a fictitious name used by a writer to conceal his identity. I will be asking three questions: what did Johannes de Silentio conclude about faith in *Fear and Trembling*? What did Anti-Climacus conclude about faith in *Practice in Christianity*? Are these conclusions Kierkegaard's conclusions?

I use the term "Kierkegaard" generally to refer to the writer of *Point of View* and assume that this Kierkegaard is the person behind the Kierkegaardian corpus. There are points where I change my use of this term. But when I do so, I give the appropriate qualification. I use the terms "Johannes de Silentio" and "Anti-Climacus" to refer to the authors of *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity*. As we will see, Kierkegaard used this literary tool to do more than just conceal his identity. These pseudonyms are the names of personae that, although both "created" by Kierkegaard, hold different points of view and so have separate identities from each other. Johannes comes from a perspective that lacks faith, whereas Anti-Climacus has a perspective of faith. They provide different accounts of faith.

Faith in *Fear and Trembling* is unknown and unreachable by one without faith. Faith in *Practice in Christianity* is being a contemporary with the God-Man and lacks

being “offended at”¹ the God-man. Out of these two points of view of faith I will argue that Kierkegaard’s view of faith emerges as the aligning of the self in a trusting relationship with the God-man. One outside of faith can perceive faith to be a paradox or find faith offensive; one must have faith to avoid offense and overcome the paradox.

A key part of my method is using *Point of View* as a source for understanding the purpose of Kierkegaard’s writings and his pseudonyms. Kierkegaard’s purpose for writing gives us the basis to make claims about Kierkegaard’s view while discussing his pseudonyms’ points of view. It knits together the apparently disparate claims as Kierkegaard’s. Kierkegaard’s purpose for writing and using pseudonyms is the underlying purpose that allows for us to make an attempt at getting at what Kierkegaard concluded.

In order to show that Johannes’ and Anti-Climacus’ conclusions about faith are Kierkegaard’s conclusions, it is necessary to map out the connection between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. To do so, I give a brief overview of *Point of View* and its purpose specifically addressing Kierkegaard’s claim to be a religious and Christian author. Then I discuss Kierkegaard’s attempt at indirect communication through pseudonyms. Lastly, I answer three objections.

II. Overview of *Point of View* and its Purpose

Point of View is not a roadmap for Kierkegaard’s works, intended to guide the reader through each twist and turn. It does not explain how each work is positioned in the Kierkegaardian corpus or the exact point of view of each pseudonym. Rather, *Point of View* is a map of the general purpose for the Kierkegaardian corpus. It shows the whole

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard H. Hong & Edna. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1848/1991), 71.

forest, leaving out the particular details of the individual trees. As one can look at a forest in many different ways, so one can look at Kierkegaard's works in different ways. *Point of View* is one such view that espouses a specific viewpoint of the Kierkegaard corpus.

Point of View begins with "The Accounting." In it Kierkegaard explains the evolution or movement of his authorship from *Either/Or* up to *Discourses at Communion on Fridays*. Kierkegaard says, "...the authorship, regarded as a totality, is religious from first to last, something anyone who can see..."²

It's not that at the time of each writing Kierkegaard had religious intentions. Rather it is in hindsight that one can see the religious motive. "The movement [of his authorship] was...the religious completely cast into reflection, yet in such a way that it is completely taken back out of reflection into simplicity – that is, he will see the traversed path is: to *reach*, to *arrive* at simplicity."³ This arrival "at simplicity" is referring to the growing focus of his works toward the religious. Early works, called aesthetic works, have tendencies toward the religious. As Kierkegaard's writing developed, his works became increasingly focused on the religious.

Kierkegaard writes in his journals that he intended *Point of View* to accompany the second edition of his popular work, *Either/Or*.⁴ Worried that some might misunderstand the second publishing of *Either/Or*, an aesthetic work, Kierkegaard intended to clarify the "whole" of his work in *Point of View*. Concerned that this "direct communication" might cause even more confusion, he considered using a pseudonym and almost didn't publish

²Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, trans. Howard H. Hong & Edna. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1859/1998), 6.

³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 6-7.

⁴ Journals: Pap. X A 117 n.d. 1849.

anything.⁵ Eventually, one part was published as “On My Work as an Author.” The rest was published posthumously.

III. Kierkegaard’s Claim to be a Religious and Christian Author

In *Point of View*, Kierkegaard claims to be a religious and Christian author. This is fundamental to my thesis about faith in *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity*. A religious author is one “whose total thought is what it means to become a Christian.”⁶ This means that Kierkegaard understood a religious author to be someone whose overall focus in his work is to consider how one goes about becoming a Christian. “Thus the authorship, regarded as a *totality*, is religious from first to last, something anyone who can see.”⁷ Alastair Hannay says, “He had been religious all along, ‘The nerve in all my activity as a writer,’ he says, ‘is really to be found in the fact that I was essentially religious when I wrote *Either/Or*.’”⁸

George Pattison makes a distinction between two types of “religiousness” in Kierkegaard’s writings, the first type leading into the second. First is the “immanent” form of religiousness. An individual is religious in this sense if s/he holds to “ethical” principles that provide ways of understanding the world. These principles depend on “the universal conditionals of human consciousness.” The second type of religiousness begins when the first reaches a “climax” in someone. Pattison describes this transition: when the individual “realizes their own nothingness and in that recognition becomes altogether open to God,

⁵ Journals: JP VI 6361 (Pap. X A 147 n.d. 1849).

⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 47.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 6.

⁸ Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 383.

and a transcendent faith, a faith which takes as its starting point the paradox of the God-in-time, the incarnation of Jesus Christ.”⁹ In the second form of religiousness, one depends on “faith in an event outside the innate capacities of the human mind and is therefore said to be transcendent.”¹⁰ The Kierkegaard of *Point of View* is a religious author in this latter sense. Kierkegaard sees his work as being accomplished through something transcendental. “That I have needed and how I have continuously needed God’s assistance day after day, year after year – in order to turn my mind to that, in order to be able to state it accurately...”¹¹ He goes on to say, “Thus throughout all my work as an author I have incessantly needed God’s assistance in order to be able to do it as a simple work assignment for which specific hours are allocated each day.”¹² Kierkegaard believed that in order to do his work he needed divine help; it is in this sense that he is a religious author.

Kierkegaard is also a Christian author. He says, “my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian.”¹³ “Christian” in Kierkegaard’s writings does not refer to someone who is a member of a church or someone who follows ceremonial practices of a particular religion. Rather, Kierkegaard defines a Christian in “Armed Neutrality” as someone who has a “militant piety,”¹⁴ concentrated on the life of

⁹ George, Pattison, *Kierkegaard, the Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 155.

¹⁰ Pattison, *Kierkegaard*, 155.

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 72.

¹² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 74.

¹³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 23.

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 130. NB: *Armed Neutrality* was published after Kierkegaard’s death. It technically is not a part of the Kierkegaardian corpus. Yet, in it, Kierkegaard explains what a “Christian” is in the context of Kierkegaard’s Denmark:

Christ. In an early journal entry, he says, “Christian dogmatics, it seems to me, must grow out of Christ’s activity, and all the more so because Christ did not establish any doctrine; he acted. He *did not teach* there was redemption for men, but he *redeemed men*.”¹⁵ One with militant piety will be focused on living out how Christ lived or acted and not merely creating doctrine or following ceremonial practices.

Anti-Climacus develops this concept of militant piety in *Practice in Christianity* as being “rigorous.” A Christian is someone who is rigorous in following Christ. Anti-Climacus calls this “becoming a contemporary with Christ” who is the “proto-type”¹⁶ of the ideal picture of the Christian. Though this is not Kierkegaard speaking, it is important to recognize that Kierkegaard saw himself as one striving in the way Anti-Climacus describes. In a later chapter, I will discuss Kierkegaard’s reason for using Anti-Climacus as a pseudonym. But the basic idea is that Kierkegaard thought his life was not sufficiently good to be an example of a life of faith. David D. Possen explains, “Kierkegaard has Anti-Climacus say the things Kierkegaard believes must be said.”¹⁷ *Practice in Christianity* needed one who could give the high calling to return to faith to Denmark. Kierkegaard did not think he was in a position to give this call. Hannay says that Kierkegaard “felt unable to present himself in his own person as someone able to exemplify those standards and to

someone who is not a Christian by the church’s standards, but someone who works at being a “Christian.”

¹⁵ Journals: I A, 27 (JP I, 412). I think it is appropriate to note that at this time in Kierkegaard’s life, part of his major focus was on issues in systematic theology (Christian dogmatics).

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 131.

¹⁷ David D. Possen, “The Voice of Rigor,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 174-175.

judge others."¹⁸ Kierkegaard thought his own life was insufficient to be an example, so he used Anti-Climacus to give the world an example of what it is to be one of faith.

IV. Indirect Communication and the Pseudonyms

Although the authors of *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity* are Johannes de Silentio and Anti-Climacus, respectively, Kierkegaard was the editor of *Practice in Christianity* and wrote *Point of View* under his own name. Kierkegaard penned all the words, so why did he cloak his authorship in pseudonyms, and why these particular names? Part of the answer to this was gestured to in the final paragraph of the previous section; now I would like to give a more systematic explanation.

Kierkegaard tells us that “[i]f anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself.”¹⁹ To answer these questions, we must first untie the knot of indirect communication.

The pseudonymous works are given in a language of “reflection,” indirect communication. Kierkegaard defines indirect communication as “to deceive into the truth.”²⁰ All of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writings are “maieutic.”²¹ The term originates from the Greek word, *maieutikós*, which means “midwife.” George Pattison explains, “He [Kierkegaard] was repeatedly to allude to Socrates’ ‘maieutic’ approach to teaching, that is, being the midwife who brings others’ thoughts to birth.”²² These maieutic writings having a religious goal, which is “becoming a Christian.”²³ Kierkegaard says in

¹⁸ Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 374.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 133.

²⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 7.

²¹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 7.

²² Pattison, *Kierkegaard*, 78.

²³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 8.

Point of View that there is evidence for this goal from the beginning to the end of his pseudonymous writings. In *The Point of View* Kierkegaard goes through the corpus pointing out how the religious is there from the beginning and becomes more pronounced further in the corpus. Kierkegaard says a shift in the intended audience accompanies the shift to the religious. Early in the corpus, the intended audience is Danish society as a whole, “the crowd” or “the public.”²⁴ Gradually, it shifts to “the individual.”²⁵ What this means is that Kierkegaard is speaking to persons in society in order to induce them to think of their own individual responsibility rather than society’s overall responsibility.

Kierkegaard’s overall purpose is to deceive his readers into recognizing for themselves that Christendom is an illusion. Christendom is what Kierkegaard calls the Danish church, the national church of Denmark. The Danish people were by default “Christians” because of their nationality. Louis Mackey describes the state of Denmark in Kierkegaard’s day as being in “the illusion by which people who are in fact pagans persuade themselves that they are Christian.”²⁶ In his journals, Kierkegaard refers to Christendom as “a monstrous illusion.”²⁷ The people of Denmark were asleep to the fact that Christendom was an illusion.

Kierkegaard uses pseudonyms to awaken the Danish people to the illusion of Christendom. Kierkegaard used this literary tool to do more than just conceal his identity. His pseudonyms present points of view or positions about a variety of topics such as God, society, reason, authority and faith. Kierkegaard had different purposes for different

²⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 11.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 11.

²⁶ Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986), 180.

²⁷ Pattison, *Kierkegaard*, 70.

pseudonyms. In general, however, Kierkegaard uses them to communicate indirectly to his readers.

The purpose of indirect communication is to deceive the reader into thinking what the writer intended without allowing the reader to know his/her conclusions are intended by the writer. This is opposed to direct communication where one speaks to the audience openly and clearly about what one wants to say.

Kierkegaard believed that one who is caught up in the illusion of Christendom cannot be brought out of this dilemma through direct communication: only indirect communication will be able to accomplish this task. Those who are caught up in this illusion have to be deceived into realizing they are living in an illusion. Kierkegaard explains this method of deception:

One does not begin... in this way: I am Christian, you are not a Christian – but this way: You are a Christian, I am not Christian. Or one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely esthetic categories. No, one begins this way: let us talk about the esthetic.²⁸

Kierkegaard borrows heavily from Socrates' concept of "midwifery" to explain his method of indirect communication.²⁹ The pseudonyms are a type of midwife, replacing Kierkegaard as the author.³⁰ They help the reader give birth to his or her own ideas because the author provides authority, context and purpose for the reader in a piece. Rather than looking to Kierkegaard as the author, the reader looks to the pseudonym and

²⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 54.

²⁹ Kierkegaard goes as far as to say in *Point of View*, "I can very well call Socrates my teacher" (*Point of View*, 54).

³⁰ Midwives are by definition persons who assist in the birth of a child. They are the ones who replace Kierkegaard as the one assisting in the birthing of the reader's ideas.

comes to conclusions that Kierkegaard intended though the reader is not supposed to realize that Kierkegaard's intent was for him/her to come to these conclusions.

Malantschuk documents the origin of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. He compares Kierkegaard's method of pseudonyms to being an actor. "It is of essential importance for an actor to be able to identify himself with the person he is to present if a rendering of the person's psychological life is to be achieved."³¹ If Daniel Day Lewis is to play a persuasive performance of Lincoln, then he must, on some level psychologically identify with Lincoln.³² Malantschuk explains that Kierkegaard used a method of "identification of the observer [Kierkegaard] with the object of the observations [his pseudonyms]."³³ As a result of identifying with his pseudonym, Kierkegaard splits himself between his pseudonym and his own self. It allows Kierkegaard to be able to develop different attitudes and positions about life that become pseudonyms. This process is personal, as all acting is, but there is a separation between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. Kierkegaard in his journal calls himself a "double-thinker" who splits "I" into two. Malantschuk explains this concept:

There is a first origin 'I' and 'another' which comes out in his empathetic experiments. Every time the 'other I' thinks something through, the 'first I' discovers that it also bears upon itself, because the relived character situation is one of his own possibilities, which thus becomes a present possibility for him.³⁴

³¹ Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1971), 30.

³² In one sense Kierkegaard is applying method acting, before it was practiced on the screen and on the stage, to writing.

³³ Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's*, 29.

³⁴ Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's*, 31.

Kierkegaard's view is not the same as his pseudonym's point of view. The pseudonyms develop their own point of view though they have an effect on Kierkegaard's point of view since they stem from him.

V. Objections

The secondary scholarship on Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication is rather large. Henning Fenger says, "It is an accepted tenet of Kierkegaard scholarship that scholars must be required to make up their minds about the pseudonyms, the pseudonyms' relations to one another and their connection to Kierkegaard himself."³⁵ Before moving into my own view on *Point of View*, I wish to provide a short overview of the Kierkegaard scholarship.

There are two main perspectives on Kierkegaard's pseudonyms.³⁶ First are those who take Kierkegaard at his word in *Point of View*. This perspective can be traced in English-speaking scholarship back to Walter Lowrie who claimed that we can take Kierkegaard at his word and interpret *Point of View* as Kierkegaard's own voice.³⁷ Gregor

³⁵ Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and their Origins: Studies in the Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 21.

³⁶ This overview is an adaption of a footnote in Jolita Pon's work *Stealing the Gift: Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Bible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 160-161, footnote 86.

³⁷ Walter Lowrie says, "The Point of view for my Life as an Author is an intimate and sincere revelation of Søren Kierkegaard." Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), 437.

Malantschuk,³⁸ Stephen C. Evans,³⁹ George Pattison,⁴⁰ M. Holmes Hartshorne⁴¹ and others espouse similar views. Though each accepts Kierkegaard's words in *Point of View* in different degrees, each accepts Kierkegaard's fundamental claims in *Point of View*.

On the opposite end is the view that we should take nothing at Kierkegaard's word in *Point of View*. Everything "Kierkegaard" says is fabricated and deceptive. All claims in *Point of View* warrant suspicion and doubt. Henning Fenger would be the most extreme on this end.⁴² Others, like Joakim Garff⁴³ and Louis Mackey,⁴⁴ take a more moderate thesis

³⁸ Malantschuk says, "Kierkegaard's method of making his writings difficult succeeded so well that he eventually feared that in studying his authorship people would stop with this multiplicity of individual works without discovering that the whole should be understood within a 'comprehensive plan' [*total-anlaeg*] which puts the individual works in place in relation to each other. To prevent anyone in the future from explaining the dissimilarity of the works simply by the 'poor comment that the author changed' and 'to insure a comprehensive view of work,' Kierkegaard drafted in 1848 *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*" (*Kierkegaard's*, 5).

³⁹ Evans says, "I begin by affirming that I agree with Kierkegaard himself that his literature has an overall religious purpose and that Kierkegaard was, as he put it in *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, 'from beginning to end a religious author.'" C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 4.

⁴⁰ Pattison says "*The Point of View* which... has an attractive simplicity, corresponding to its intention to explain Kierkegaard's work as an author to his contemporaries at large" (*Kierkegaard*, 70).

⁴¹ Hartshorne says, "These books are not by Kierkegaard at all... There is no doubt that Kierkegaard set pen to paper and that these books were among the resulting production." M. Holmes Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard: Godly Deceiver* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 1.

⁴² Jolita Pons in regards to Fenger's position says, "Fenger seeks to prove that nothing in *The Point of View* should be taken at face value, that everything in it is consciously counterfeited and fabricated" (*Stealing a Gift*, 159).

⁴³ Garff says "when one begins summarizing Kierkegaard's writing one quickly learns that its essence disappears because it is intimately connected with the fine ether of the the rhetoric, and in a summary it therefore evaporates." Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 336.

⁴⁴ Mackey says, "This book is not *the* point of view for his work as an author. It is only a point of view... a plurality of wholes and no totality." (*Points of view*, 190)

than Fenger, but they all doubt that what Kierkegaard says in *Point of View* can be taken at face value.

My approach will be similar to that of the first group. I take it that Kierkegaard was being honest and in general accurate in *Point of View*. My goal is to explore the implications of this view. This approach is similar to Malantschuk's in *Kierkegaard's Thought*. Malantschuk assumes that there is an underlying principle to the Kierkegaardian corpus and that one can make legitimate claims about what Kierkegaard thought.⁴⁵ This assumption requires an acceptance of Kierkegaard's main claims in *Point of View*.

This approach is subject to major criticism. I wish to deal with three such criticisms here. The first objection is the general claim that given specific events in his life, Kierkegaard's (not the pseudonym "Kierkegaard") *real* thought is found in his pseudonyms. This is what I will call the "biographical objection." The second objection is that the supposed unified whole to the Kierkegaard "canon" is an invention. Kierkegaard had no idea what he was doing and made it up afterwards. This is what I will call the "invention objection." The third and final objection I shall confront here is that we cannot know what the unified system underlying Kierkegaard's works is. The "Kierkegaard" of *Point of View* is just another pseudonym and we can have no knowledge of what the "real Kierkegaard" intended. This is what I will call the "pseudonym objection."

A. The Biographical Objection

M. Holmes Hartshorne works through the biographical objection in his work. He defends the claim that we can use *Point of View* as a way of interpreting Kierkegaard's writings in his work *Kierkegaard: Godly Deceiver*. Hartshorne explains that the

⁴⁵ See footnote 38.

biographical objection says that we can read the corpus biographically. Explaining the corpus from points of view other than Kierkegaard's is misleading. *Point of View* is inaccurate because it leaves out important events in his life, and Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication warps how personal Kierkegaard's writings are.⁴⁶

For instance, reading Kierkegaard's personal life into *Fear and Trembling* enhances one's understanding of the work. Kierkegaard began his torrent of writing just after his heart-breaking decision to end his engagement with Regine Olsen.⁴⁷ The two met before Regine was of age. Their first meeting made a strong impression on Kierkegaard, and he proposed a few years later when Regine was 18. Both seemed happy at the prospect of living life together. Kierkegaard's sudden decision was unexpected and heartbreaking to Regine and her family. Regine's father pleaded with Kierkegaard to reconsider, warning the young man that Regine was contemplating suicide. Kierkegaard in turn wrote harsh letters to Regine which he backed up with public displays of coldness toward her. All of this was to prove to her that their relationship was over. Yet, in his journals, Kierkegaard displays a deep love for her and sorrow over the ending of their engagement. He says he broke up with her primarily for her own sake. He believed that his constant brooding, melancholia and difficult relationship with her father might "crush her."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 74-80.

⁴⁷ The relationship between Regine Olsen and Søren Kierkegaard is one of the famous break-ups in western history. It has been scrutinized and discussed ever since it happened. Since it is not directly related to my research, I have not included the key works produced in this area of Kierkegaardian scholarship.

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; Repetition* trans. Howard H. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1843/1983), xiii.

Using this significant event in Kierkegaard's life, the biographical objection says the break-up with Regine informed Kierkegaard's early writings and was part of the impetus for writing *Fear and Trembling*. Hong & Hong in their introduction to *Fear and Trembling* say, "Kierkegaard was well aware...that one reader would inevitably use a biographical approach to whatever he wrote, for she was a part of that personal history."⁴⁹ In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio struggles with the question of whether a person may break an ethical duty for a higher duty that transcends "the universal." Biographically, Hartshorne says Kierkegaard was ethically "bound by his commitment to Regine; he had confessed his love to her, asked for her hand and pledged his word."⁵⁰ But then he went and broke his word. His actions were justified only if he was living for a principle that is higher than ethics.

Hartshorne also points out other works, specifically, *Either/Or* and *Repetition* where, similar to *Fear and Trembling*, the reading of the work is enhanced with knowledge of the couple's break-up.⁵¹ In regard to *Either/Or*, Hartshorne goes as far as to say, "Kierkegaard clearly had in mind his experience with Regine."⁵² He admits, "Like any author, he [Kierkegaard] necessarily wrote out of his own experience."⁵³

⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, xi.

⁵⁰ Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 75.

⁵¹ Providing examples of how the readings of *Either/Or* and *Repetition* are enhanced through knowledge of Kierkegaard's breakup with Regine is beyond the scope of this paper. But Hartshorne says "In the period when he wrote and published *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, the suffering occasioned by his unhappy love was certainly uppermost in his mind...Regine was indeed central to these early writings" (*Kierkegaard*, 77-78).

⁵² Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 77.

⁵³ Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 77.

Hartshorne agrees with the biographical objection by saying that it is clear that the historical figure of Kierkegaard intentionally included his personal life in his writings. Kierkegaard did not try to hide the fact that his life was personally involved. This is evident from various journal entries.⁵⁴ For example:

It is true that when I began as an author I was “religiously resolved,” but this must be understood in another way. *Either/Or*, especially “The Seducer’s Diary,”⁵⁵ I wrote for her sake, in order to clear her out of the relationship. On the whole the very mark of my genius is that Governance broadens and radicalizes whatever concerns me personally.⁵⁶

The Kierkegaard of *Point of View* did not say that his writings are non-biographical or void of his personal life. So admitting that biographical details will enhance one's reading of Kierkegaard’s works is not in tension with taking *Point of View* as a guide. Also, the pseudonyms are crucial because they help the reader see that what is being said is coming from a specific point of view not being held consistently by Kierkegaard or other pseudonyms. For instance, Johannes comes from the point of view of one who lacks faith in *Fear and Trembling* and who is criticizing Danish society for their belief they have faith because they really do not.

⁵⁴ In an entry from 1843, Kierkegaard wrote a rough outline of *Fear and Trembling*. At the end he notes “He who has explained this riddle has explained my life. But who of my contemporaries has understood this” (Journal: V 5640 Pap. IV A 76)?

⁵⁵ For those less familiar with Kierkegaard’s writings, “The Seducer’s Diary” is a chapter in *Either/Or*. *Either/Or* is the first pseudonymous work in the Kierkegaardian Corpus and is a 2 vol. book that provides a perspective of the life of a hedonist (the aesthetic point of view) that eventually gives way to one who lives a moral life (the ethical point of view). In “The Seducer’s Diary” Johannes the Seducer writes about his attempt to seduce a young woman by deceiving her into becoming engaged. When he gets what he wants from her, he breaks off the engagement in order to fight off “the boredom” that arises once he has met his goal.

⁵⁶ Journal: X.1 A 266.

B. The Invention Objection

As noted above, the invention objection says that the supposed unified whole to the Kierkegaard “canon” is an invention. Kierkegaard had no idea what he was doing and made it up afterwards.

This idea is advocated by Henning Fenger in *Kierkegaard, the Myths and their Origins*. In it he says there is a “darker” Kierkegaard than the one the majority of Kierkegaardian scholarship has focused on. Using source criticism, Fenger says that Kierkegaard made up the idea of a Kierkegaardian canon.⁵⁷ Kierkegaard was really a psychologically sick man who spent his life working to fulfill his masochistic desires.⁵⁸

Point of View is a “blend of a desire for honesty and its naïve self-persuasion.”⁵⁹ On the one hand, Fenger recognizes that the writer of *Point of View* is the historical figure of Kierkegaard making an honest attempt at explaining the whole of his work. Hence, Fenger recognizes Kierkegaard’s role as a poet, who “has every right to... let himself be made into literature by Providence or God.”⁶⁰

On the other hand, Fenger says that Kierkegaard’s honest attempt to make sense of his own life is wrong. He says that we know it is wrong because there are factual

⁵⁷ Fenger says “If this little book has a thesis, it is simply that Kierkegaard research went down the wrong track at the outset and that ‘the mistake’ to a certain extent – to a great extent – goes back to Kierkegaard himself. But, like anyone else, of course, Kierkegaard had the right to suppress, rewrite, misrepresent, distort, erase, destroy and lead astray and to arrange the interpretation of his life and his works” (*Kierkegaard, the Myths*, xiii).

⁵⁸ Fenger says “During his final years of his life an enormously strong masochism recurs: his aggression is now not only directed outward but is self-destructive” (*Kierkegaard, the Myths*, 70).

⁵⁹ Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths*, 29.

⁶⁰ Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths*, 31.

inaccuracies in Kierkegaard's journals.⁶¹ Furthermore, Kierkegaard manipulated information by portraying facts in a misleading way.⁶² Ever since then, scholars of Kierkegaard have been led down a false trail of interpreting Kierkegaard's work, and my efforts would be no better off.

However, Hartshorne offers a helpful response to Fenger. At the beginning of his writing, Kierkegaard did not have a clear plan for his writings, but as he wrote, the plan began to evolve. "Kierkegaard knew what he was doing when he wrote them, but he did not see clearly the overall plan of his literary activity until he had written much more."⁶³ Kierkegaard says this in *Point of View*: "This is how I *now* understand the whole. From the beginning I could not quite see what has indeed also been my own development." Kierkegaard did not begin with a clear picture in mind. Certain inaccuracies and manipulations were caused by Kierkegaard's developing plan.

A second point to note is that Fenger's analysis has major gaps. Multiple reviews of Fenger's thesis have repeatedly pointed out that most of Fenger's claims lack substantial evidence.⁶⁴ Fenger admits a leaning toward Kierkegaard's "aesthetic works"

⁶¹For instance, Fenger explains that Kierkegaard mentions the "long passage of time" between the publishing of two articles though in actuality it had been only a month (*Kierkegaard, the Myths* 1). Fenger then goes through and shows that Kierkegaard's "legendary memory is not precise about details" (*Kierkegaard, the Myths*, 1).

⁶²For instance, Kierkegaard claims to have put the aesthetic authorship behind him after *Postscript* in 1845 but fails to mention *A Literary Review: Two Ages*, which was published in 1846, a work Fenger thinks is an aesthetic work (*Kierkegaard, the Myths*, 28-29).

⁶³Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 80.

⁶⁴See George Stengren, Review of *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*, by Henning Fenger, *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter No. 9*, 1982, 8-11; Kerry J. Koller, Review of *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*. By Henning Fenger, *Notre Dame English Journal*, 14 (2), 1982, 161-163; or Northrup Dunning, Review of *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins* by Henning Fenger, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 50(1), 1982, 141-142.

and consciously leaves out parts of Kierkegaard's corpus. In the preface, Fenger says "[I]et others map the whole of the Kierkegaard continent. My own ambitions will be richly fulfilled if I can delineate certain contours of the province which bears the name *Aesthetica kierkegaardiana*."⁶⁵ So Fenger's criticism is dampened by the fact that he is focusing on only the aesthetic portions of Kierkegaard's work.⁶⁶ On the other hand, my paper is categorically different the Fenger's project. My paper focuses on comparing a religious work with an aesthetic work. Fenger's scope is focused only on aesthetic works and does not take into account the religious point of view found in the Kierkegaardian corpus.

C. The Pseudonym Objection

Lastly, the "pseudonym objection" is put forward by Louis Mackey. He argues that there is no unified whole and that the "Kierkegaard" of *Point of View* is just another pseudonym. Consequentially, we cannot have knowledge of what Kierkegaard actually thought.

Before moving into Mackey's objection in more depth, it's important to be aware of how the Kierkegaardian corpus is divided. The Kierkegaard corpus can be broken up into three "stages." Each stage represents a view of the world and does not necessarily follow Kierkegaard's personal life. The first stage is the aesthetic stage which focuses on self-gratification and living a hedonistic lifestyle. The aesthete follows the latest fashion and is constantly warding off boredom. The second stage is the ethical stage which

⁶⁵ Fenger *Kierkegaard, the Myths*, xi.

⁶⁶ Aesthetic works include *Either/Or*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Stages on Life's Way* while religious works would include *The Sickness unto Death*, *Works of Love* and *Practice in Christianity*. Aesthetic works come from the aesthetic stage whereas religious works come from the religious stage.

focuses on duty and living a moral life. The ethical life follows the laws and rules of “God, country or mankind in general.” The last stage is the religious stage which is broken up into Religiousness A and Religiousness B. Religiousness A is when the individual senses great guilt in the presence of God and has a strong sense of God’s immanence. Religiousness B is the conversion to being a follower of Christ through faith.⁶⁷ One becomes “in Christ.” These three categories stem from Kierkegaard’s work *Stages of Life’s Way* and should not be taken as authoritative over all of Kierkegaard’s works. They provide helpful structure but break down in various works like *Point of View*.⁶⁸

According to Mackey, *Point of View* does not provide readers with the correct interpretation of Kierkegaard’s “canon,” but is only another “religious work.” Kierkegaard didn’t intend this: “he had outsmarted himself.”⁶⁹ Consequently, there is “no totality”⁷⁰ of works to understand in the Kierkegaardian corpus. The reason for Mackey’s claim is that *Point of View* has a high level of duplicity and leaves the reader with reasonable doubt about whether this is really Kierkegaard’s thinking. It is better to understand the work as another ironic piece written by another of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms.

⁶⁷ Merold Westphal in “Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence” distinguishes between two types of Religiousness B. The first is when one is “believing in the paradox” (37) of the God-man and the second is “the willingness to become his follower” (37). I have not followed Westphal in this distinction because it has to do more with comparing Anti-Climacus with a previous pseudonym, Johannes Climacus from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Making this distinction is unnecessary when comparing Johannes de Silentio and Anti-Climacus’ view of faith since Johannes de Silentio is not even at the first kind of religiousness.

⁶⁸ This information was taken from: Storm, D. Anthony. *D. Anthony Storm's Commentary on Kierkegaard*. Available at <http://www.sorenkierkegaard.org/>. Retrieved January 19, 2016.

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 186.

⁷⁰ Mackey, *Points of View*, 190.

Mackey argues that there are two areas where *Point of View* shows its duplicity. The first area has to do with externalities to the text and the second area with the text itself.

One external issue that shows that Kierkegaard was not being as direct as he claims in *Point of View* has to do with whether the work was to be published. Kierkegaard struggled to decide when to publish the work. It was written in 1849 and eventually one part of it was published in 1851. Not until after Kierkegaard's death was the rest published. Instead of directly writing and then publishing the work, Kierkegaard held it back and then only published part of it. His indecision shows a lack of directness contrary to what he says in *Point of View*. A second external issue has to do with the place of *Point of View* in the Kierkegaardian corpus. It was intended to be the last work in the Kierkegaardian corpus, but it was not. Kierkegaard continued to publish until within a couple months of his death. So although Kierkegaard said it was the last of his works, he continued to write and publish. Based on these two points it might be argued that Kierkegaard was not being as direct as he claims in *Point of View*.

Mackey also takes issue with Kierkegaard's arguments. First, he doubts that Kierkegaard is communicating directly in *Point of View*. This is because it is possible to go through each of Kierkegaard's aesthetic works and see a parallel religious work written under Kierkegaard's own name:

The directly religious was present from the very beginning; *Two Upbuilding Discourses* is in fact concurrent with *Either/Or*. And in order to safeguard this concurrence of the directly religious, every pseudonymous work was accompanied concurrently by a little collection of "upbuilding discourses" – until *Concluding Postscript* appeared, which poses the issue, which is *the issue...* of the whole authorship: *becoming a Christian*.⁷¹

⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 8.

This, says Kierkegaard, is evidence that he was a religious author from the beginning of his authorship. But Mackey offers three objections to Kierkegaard's claim. First, this argument supports the conclusion that Kierkegaard was wholly an aesthetic writer with no religious intent works just as well: for every religious work published, there is an aesthetic work. Mackey summarizes this objection saying:

Why isn't the assumption that he is an aesthetic writer the one that succeeds, the presupposition that explains the authorship as a whole? The privilege here awarded the religious reading does not appear to emerge inevitably from the mere perusal of the texts.⁷²

Second, Mackey argues that *Two Upbuilding Discourses* is not a religious work. Rather, it was Kierkegaard making reparations for his father's sin and justifying his broken engagement with Regine. Thus, Mackey says, "It was necessary to make reparation for the father's crimes: because the mother had been violated, woman (read: Regine) must be left intact, and because his father had defied God, the most practice perfect submission."⁷³ Kierkegaard's father (Michael) expected his whole family would die before him because God's wrath was upon him. He believed God's wrath was upon him because he had slept with Kierkegaard's mother before they were married and cursed God while working as a shepherd in the countryside of Denmark. His prophecy was almost true because his second wife and almost all his children died before his own passing. Since Michael died before either Søren or Søren's older brother Peter, Søren took it upon himself to pay penitence to God for what he took to be his father's sin.

⁷² Mackey, *Points of View*, 166.

⁷³ Mackey, *Points of View*, 169.

Mackey also gives reason to doubt that Kierkegaard was writing out of his devotion to God in *Point of View*, thus giving reason to think that Kierkegaard was being deceptive in this work. Kierkegaard claims in *Point of View* that he has a relationship with God that is a “happy love.”⁷⁴ He finds more joy in his relationship with God than he found even in the work that consumed most of his life.⁷⁵ Yet without God, he would not have been able to accomplish this work, for he would have been overwhelmed by the quantity of thoughts running through his mind. He describes it as one starving in the midst of plenty, as being “overwhelmed by wealth.”⁷⁶ Only by being obedient to God was he able to accomplish his work. As a result, Kierkegaard claims it is through God that his work is unified.

Mackey claims that God filled the void of the loss of his fiancé and the loss of his father. “God is Søren’s lover. Having renounced Regine and lost his father, he regains them both in God, who is both ‘he’ (the dead father) and lover/beloved (the rejected bride).” But he goes on, “But God is Søren’s lover?”⁷⁷

To answer this question, Mackey explains that Kierkegaard projects his relationship with Regine and his father into his relationship with God. Kierkegaard’s father loved him and as a result diligently taught him the faith of Christianity. Yet, he also passed on his melancholy, leaving Kierkegaard with no childhood. Likewise, God blessed Kierkegaard with his gift of thinking and ability to write. This leaves Kierkegaard with a deep desire to write, even to the extent that in order to fulfill this desire he is willing to

⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 71.

⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 74.

⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 75.

⁷⁷ Mackey, *Points of View*, 173.

forgo the necessities of life. The break-up with Regine provided Kierkegaard the experiences that enabled him to become a poet. God gave Kierkegaard his purpose: to be a religious writer. Hence “a system of dualities recapitulated eternally [Regine and Kierkegaard’s father] in his reflective relationship with the living Father who writes/accepts his works.”⁷⁸ Though Kierkegaard says that God is his lover, he is being deceptive because he is projecting his relationship with his father and former fiancé on God. It’s not that Kierkegaard really loves God; rather it’s his love for his father and fiancé that drive his project.

Since *Point of View* is a deceptive work, like Kierkegaard’s other works, it brings into doubt Kierkegaard’s claim to be speaking directly. Rather, it is another work of indirect communication. Thus, when Kierkegaard explains the whole of his work as being religious, it’s not intended to be understood directly. It’s an ironic claim. There is no “Kierkegaard,” it is another pseudonym.⁷⁹ As a result, “the canon contravenes itself.” There is no overarching plan for Kierkegaard’s work. So the irony is that there is no “Kierkegaard” as the Kierkegaard of *Point of View* claims and no overarching plan though the Kierkegaard of *Point of View* claims there to be.

As noted above, Mackey contends that one could say that the whole purpose of the Kierkegaardian corpus could be aesthetic, not religious. However, there are two problems with this claim. First, all the aesthetic works are in pseudonyms while most of the religious works are not. Hence Kierkegaard says, “The author was a religious author who for that reason never wrote anything aesthetic himself but used pseudonyms for all the

⁷⁸ Mackey, *Points of View*, 178.

⁷⁹ Mackey, *Points of View*, 187, 188.

esthetic works.”⁸⁰ If the purpose of all the writings was aesthetic, it seems some aesthetic works ought to be written with Kierkegaard’s own name as the author. If Kierkegaard’s purpose was primarily aesthetic, then we should expect his works with his own name to have this purpose. Moreover, there is no reason for an aesthetic author to write religiously. Thus, we have reason to believe that Kierkegaard is a religious author who writes aesthetically.

Moreover, Mackey’s analysis of how Kierkegaard’s relationship with his father and fiancé influence his writing is pure conjecture. Certainly Kierkegaard’s break-up with Regine and Kierkegaard’s relationship with his father are important influences on his life.⁸¹ Furthermore they are helpful in interpreting the Kierkegaardian corpus. Yet, there is no direct textual evidence for these biographical claims. *Point of View* is not even cited in this section of Mackey’s paper even though it is *Point of View* that he is discussing. Rather, he takes snippets from *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard’s journals and *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* to force through an implied meaning that doesn’t exist in the text of *Point of View*.

It’s possible, though highly doubtful, that the Kierkegaard of *Point of View* is a pseudonym and thus that we can’t know what Kierkegaard *really* thought. Yet, the pseudonym, Kierkegaard, makes major claims about how to read the pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard, the person. Why not suppose these claims are true—direct communication—and see where this reading takes us?

⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 31.

⁸¹ Malantschuk mentions “even with a cautious estimate of Kierkegaard’s or his pseudonymous authors’ statements about his childhood, it must be taken for granted that his father’s powerful influence was of decisive significance in develop the very aptitudes he needed as a thinker” (*Kierkegaard’s*, 13).

Chapter two leads us into Johannes' point of view of faith and chapter three into Anti-Climacus' point of view of faith. Then we shall discuss how the two are Kierkegaard's conclusion.

Chapter 2

I. Introduction

With the contents of chapter one in mind, I will now explain Johannes' view of faith in *Fear and Trembling*. The next chapter will explain Anti-Climacus' view of faith in *Practice in Christianity*. This chapter and the next lay the foundation for the final chapter, explaining Kierkegaard's view of faith. First I will describe who Johannes is and his position in the Kierkegaardian corpus. Then I will walk through *Fear and Trembling*, explaining Johannes' view of faith.

II. Johannes de Silentio

In what follows I will discuss three key aspects to the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio. First, Johannes speaks of himself as having two identities: he is a poet and a dialectician. Yet he is a specific sort of poet and claims to not be a philosopher. Second, in the Kierkegaardian corpus Johannes is a transitional pseudonym. He is between the stage of the ethical and the religious; he has a bit of both the religious and ethical in him. Third, because Johannes is a transitional pseudonym, Johannes lacks faith and cannot understand the subject of *Fear and Trembling*, which is Abraham's obeying God's command to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, out of faith.

A. Johannes' Dual Identities

In the original draft of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard subtitled the work, "A poetic person who exists only among poets."⁸² He changed the subtitle in the final draft to, "A Dialectical Lyric." The original and revised subtitles reveal Johannes' dual identities as a poet and a dialectician.

⁸² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 123.

Early in *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes claims to be “*poetice et eleganter*,”⁸³ which means “in a poetic and refined way.” Johannes is a poet in the sense that he is committed to the idea of Abraham’s faith as being true for himself but does not live it out.

Johannes describes a poet:

He [the poet] follows his heart’s desire, but when he has found the object of his search, [the hero,] he roams about to every man’s door with his song and speech so that all may admire the hero as he does, may be proud of the hero as he is.⁸⁴

The poet praises the hero by collecting facts about the hero and retelling the hero’s story. According to Johannes, the poet is unable to do what the hero does and can only admire the hero. Hence, Johannes says, “Just as God created man and woman, so he created the hero and the poet or orator. The poet or orator can do nothing that the hero does; he can only admire, love, and delight in him.”⁸⁵

As a poet, Johannes admires and delights in Abraham and his faith in *Fear and Trembling*. He calls Abraham “venerable Father Abraham”⁸⁶ for his act of faith.

Repeatedly, Johannes says he “admires”⁸⁷ Abraham.

But Johannes is a poet who stops short of faith. Edward F. Mooney explains that Johannes “wants a truth by which he can live, that speaks directly, individually to him.”⁸⁸ He wants a truth that impacts him personally; he is committed to the idea that Abraham’s

⁸³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 243.

⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 15.

⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 15.

⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 22.

⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 112, 114.

⁸⁸ Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 24.

faith is personally true for himself, but Johannes says “I cannot make the movement of faith.”⁸⁹ Johannes does not go as far as to act it out in his own life.

The first half of *Fear and Trembling* is in the poetic genre. There is an Exordium, a Eulogy and a Preliminary Expectoration. An exordium is a part of a rhetorical exercise intended to introduce an issue and urge the reader forward,⁹⁰ the eulogy is a praise of someone⁹¹ and an expectoration is “an outpouring of the heart.”⁹² But Johannes says he is not a poet. “I am not a poet.”⁹³ This apparent contradiction is resolved by understanding that Johannes is not a poet in a different sense. He does not process information and ideas as a poet. After saying he is not a poet, Johannes goes on to say, “and I go at things only dialectically.”⁹⁴ He thinks dialectically. Clare Carlisle explains that dialectics “is a form of philosophical thinking: it involves reasoning – elucidation of the distinctions and connections between concepts, points of view or positions – and it appeals to the intellect rather than the imagination.”⁹⁵ The second half of *Fear and Trembling* is dialectical with three “problemas,” or what Alastair Hannay calls “puzzles.”⁹⁶ Johannes processes the

⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 34.

⁹⁰ Sharon Crowley, *Ancient Rhetoric for Contemporary Students* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 295.

⁹¹ Mooney translates “Eulogy on Abraham” specifically as “Speech in Praise of Abraham” (*Knights of Faith*, 14).

⁹² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 343, footnote 2.

⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 90; see also 7, 9.

⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 90; see also 7, 9.

⁹⁵ Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 137.

⁹⁶ Alastair Hannay, “Homing in on Fear and Trembling,” In *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: a Critical Guide*. Ed. Daniel Conway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.

Akedah intellectually, specifically three dilemmas that it poses which will be introduced later in this chapter.

Though Johannes is a dialectical thinker, he is not a philosopher. Johannes says, “The present author is by no means a philosopher.”⁹⁷ What Johannes means by “philosopher” is someone who works at creating a complete and comprehensive system of ideas with an organized and clear method.⁹⁸

The reason Johannes distances himself from being a philosopher is that he wants to avoid understanding Abraham’s faith as his Danish contemporaries do. Johannes thinks Danish society is following the current trend of philosophical thinking. Danish society has “gone beyond”⁹⁹ faith by “transposing”¹⁰⁰ it into conceptual form and grasping it in light of a system of thought. Mooney describes the system of thought in vogue as “a grandiose attempt to capture all matter, all life, all spirit, in an overarching conceptual structure. This structure would embody universal knowledge and truth.”¹⁰¹ Uncomfortable tensions such as paradoxes, absurdities and doubts are moderated within this system of thought. Mooney goes on to say that these uncomfortable tensions are “smoothed over or erased through clever intellectual ‘solutions.’”¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

⁹⁸ In the Preface, Johannes describes the expectations of Danish society for writers: “in an age when an author who desires readers must be careful to write in such a way that his book can be conveniently skimmed during the evening-dinner nap, must be careful to look and act like that polite gardener’s handyman in *Adresseavisen*. [The Advertiser] who with hat in hand and good references from his most recent employer recommends himself to the esteemed public” (*Fear and Trembling*, 7-8).

⁹⁹ Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 32.

¹⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Mooney, *Knights of Faith*, 21.

¹⁰² Mooney, *Knights of Faith*, 22.

Johannes is a poet in the sense that he is praising and admiring Abraham's faith, but he does not process the Akedah as a poet but as a dialectician. He processes the Akedah intellectually as a puzzle. On the other hand, Johannes is not a philosopher. He is not building a system of thought in an attempt to fit Abraham's faith within a system.

B. A Transitional Pseudonym

Ryan Kemp correctly argues in "Johannes de Silentio: Poet or Faithless Aesthete"¹⁰³ that Johannes is best understood as being in-between the ethical and religious stage in the Kierkegaard corpus; Johannes has both the religious and ethical in him.

In chapter one, I explained how the Kierkegaard corpus is often broken up into three "stages."¹⁰⁴ The first stage is the aesthetic stage, when one lives a hedonistic life style and is focused on self-gratification. The second stage is the ethical stage when one lives a moral life and is focused on following one's duty. The last stage is the religious stage which is broken up into Religiousness A and Religiousness B. Religiousness A is when the individual senses great guilt in the presence of God and has a strong sense of God's immanence. Religiousness B is the conversion to being a follower of Christ through faith. One becomes a contemporary with the God-man.

Johannes is religious in that he "understands"¹⁰⁵ the requirements of faith. Johannes as a poet admires Abraham's faith and as a dialectician thinks about the Akedah. Yet Johannes does not "have"¹⁰⁶ faith. Johannes says, "Even if one were to render the

¹⁰³ Ryan Kemp "Johannes de Silentio: Religious Poet or Faithless Aesthete?," *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*, Eds. K. Nun & J. Stewart (Burlington, NC: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 143-159.

¹⁰⁴ See chapter one, page 22-23

¹⁰⁵ Kemp, "Johannes de Silentio," 144.

¹⁰⁶ Kemp, "Johannes de Silentio," 144.

whole of the content of faith into conceptual form, it would not follow that one had grasped faith, grasped how it came to it or how it came to one."¹⁰⁷ Johannes sets out in *Fear and Trembling* to conceptualize faith as a dialectician. He does not set out personally to acquire faith; he only admires it as a dialectician. Kemp correctly believes the reason Johannes does not acquire faith is that he lacks courage. Kemp explains:

In the end, what prevents de Silentio from possessing faith is a failure to muster a certain kind of 'courage.' Thus, having faith, as opposed to merely knowing about it, requires certain motivational conditions to be met.¹⁰⁸

Because Johannes lacks courage, he has what Kemp calls a level of "Socratic faith."¹⁰⁹ Mooney holds a similar position to Kemp and says, "Johannes tries to write about faith from only a poetic standpoint of beholding. And he, failing, tries to live, to be, from that merely poetic standpoint."¹¹⁰ Mooney is saying that Johannes is looking at Abraham and praising him, admiring him, but Johannes fails to act out this admiration in his own life.

C. Johannes does not understand Abraham's Faith

Johannes greatly admires Abraham but does not have faith because he fails to have the courage to act it out in his own life. Consequently, Johannes fails to understand Abraham's faith. He says:

The tragic hero, who is the favorite of ethics, is the purely human; him I can understand, and all his undertakings are out in the open. If I go further, I always run up against the paradox, the divine and the demonic, for silence is both. Silence is 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.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Kemp, "Johannes de Silentio," 145.

¹⁰⁹ Kemp, "Johannes de Silentio," 150.

¹¹⁰ Mooney, *Knights of Faith*, 36.

¹¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 88.

When considering faith dialectically, Johannes finds that faith is paradoxical because he cannot rationalize faith. Consequently, his lack of courage to live out faith leads him to have an incomplete view of faith.

III. Johannes' view of Faith in *Fear and Trembling*

Fear and Trembling can be broken up into two parts. The first section, which is Part One in this section, consists of the Exordium, Eulogy and the Preliminary Expectoration. These sections are poetic. The second section, which is discussed in Part Two of this section, consists of three “problemata” or “puzzles” that focus on the dilemma one faces when considering Abraham’s act.

A. Part One

1. Exordium

Johannes begins *Fear and Trembling* by describing the current philosophical trend of Danish society toward system building. Danish society has “gone beyond”¹¹² faith by “transposing it”¹¹³ into conceptual form and grasping it in light of a system of thought. All thought is captured within this system. Tensions are moderated within this system of thought.

Johannes sets out in *Fear and Trembling* to show that “going further than faith”¹¹⁴ or having a theoretical view of faith comes at the cost of losing faith. To the Danish people, faith is an intellectual activity restricted to conversations and intellectual exercises

¹¹² Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, 32.

¹¹³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

that have no bearing on how one lives. He compares his Danish contemporaries with “those of ancient days.”¹¹⁵ Back then faith was:

A task for a whole lifetime, because it was assumed that proficiency in believing is not acquired either in days or in weeks. When the tried and tested oldster approached his end, had fought the good fight and kept the faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten the anxiety and trembling that disciplined the youth.... The point attained by those venerable personages is in our age the point where everyone begins in order to go further.¹¹⁶

Faith has become an intellectual activity that, paradoxically, eschews living faith out in one’s life. For instance, Johannes mentions sarcastically in the preface that many people want books written so that they can “be conveniently skimmed during the after-dinner nap.”¹¹⁷ Faith is a matter limited to conversation and arm-chair thinking in Danish society—people no longer lived faith out in their lives.

Johannes wants to challenge the Danish people’s merely theoretical view of faith. To do so, he uses the same methods of rationality used by the Danish people, but he uses them to analyze the Akedah. As we will see, this method of rationality results in faith being a paradox. In four *Exordiums* or introductions, he presents the Akedah. The story is that the Lord tells Abraham that he and Sarah, his wife, will have a son in spite of their old age. Abraham believes God, and they have a son who is named Isaac. God then tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering to God on Mt. Moriah. Abraham works to carry out God’s command, but at the last moment, an angel of the Lord stops Abraham from killing his son and provides a ram as a substitute sacrifice.

¹¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 8.

In each *Exordium* Johannes uses creative license to interpret what might have happened if Abraham had lacked faith.¹¹⁸ In each *Exordium* he concludes that Abraham is so great that no one, not even he, Johannes, can understand him: “No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?”¹¹⁹ asks Johannes. Johannes explains what it means to say that Abraham is the greatest in “Eulogy on Abraham.”

2. Eulogy¹²⁰

“Greatness” to Johannes is defined by how one relates to God. Johannes sees Abraham to be “the greatest of all”¹²¹ people. Abraham’s relationship with God makes him the greatest because he “struggled with God”¹²² and “conquered God by his powerlessness.”¹²³ What Johannes means when he says that Abraham “conquered God” is that Abraham won God’s favor and blessing. Abraham won God’s favor and blessing by his, Abraham’s, “powerlessness.”¹²⁴ This means that Abraham gave up Isaac to God but had faith that God would return Isaac to him.

Johannes describes Abraham’s faith in these terms: “It is great to lay hold of the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after giving it up.”¹²⁵ The temporal is the realm of this world. This includes personal wealth and relationships with other people.

¹¹⁸ Mooney says that each prelude “presents a striking quartet of variations on the Abraham story. Each variation highlights, by what it omits, an essential feature [faith] of the faithful version of the story” (*Knights of Faith*, 14). Mooney says later that in each of these descriptions that essential feature is faith (*Knights of Faith*, 28).

¹¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 14.

¹²⁰ Johannes is using this term not to refer specifically to praise of someone who has died but rather more narrowly, simply as praise of a person.

¹²¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 16.

¹²² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 16.

¹²³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 16.

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 16.

¹²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 18.

Johannes gives an example of the rich young man in the gospel of Luke as one who is not willing to give up the temporal. Jesus asks the rich young man to give away all his personal wealth to the poor and come follow him. The rich young man would not.¹²⁶ Johannes contrasts the rich young man with Abraham who has faith and gives up the temporal. Isaac is “the temporal” in the Akedah. To lay “hold of the eternal” means to give up the temporal which is what Abraham did when he attempted to sacrifice Isaac. Yet Abraham is great because he still held “fast to the temporal.” Johannes means that Abraham believed God would return Isaac to him though he gave up Isaac to God (the eternal).

Speaking in his poetic stance, Johannes says he is “amazed”¹²⁷ by Abraham, calling him “venerable father.”¹²⁸ But Johannes says no one can understand Abraham and that his faith is “preposterous.” Faith to Johannes is a paradox. This becomes clearer in the “Preliminary Expectoration.”

3. Preliminary Expectoration

The title “Preliminary Expectoration” fits with Johannes’ identity as a poet. Hong and Hong note that the word “expectoration” means “an outpouring of the heart.”¹²⁹ Walter Lowrie translates the title as “Preamble from the Heart.”¹³⁰ These different translations show how this is a section where Johannes is writing as a poet, expressing an issue of the heart.

¹²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 49; Luke 18:18-23.

¹²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 37.

¹²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 22.

¹²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, footnote 2, 343.

¹³⁰ Mooney, *Knights of Faith*, 14.

In this expressive preamble, Johannes begins to explain the inherent paradox of the Akedah. Abraham is a man of faith, but he is also murdering his only son by God's command. To make the paradox clear to his contemporaries, Johannes theorizes that if a Danish contemporary tried to carry out what Abraham did, he would be condemned as a murderer. "He probably would be executed or sent to the madhouse,"¹³¹ says Johannes, but "we glorify Abraham..."¹³² Johannes maintains that to the Danish people, the only morally relevant difference between Abraham and the mad Dane is that Abraham had faith. Obviously the mad Dane is mad, but why not Abraham asks Johannes?¹³³ Using the methods of his contemporaries, Johannes wants to understand how faith can make an unethical act, murder, become an ethical act, even "holy."¹³⁴ Johannes struggles to reconcile the paradox that he sees in Abraham's faith:

I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hair's breadth. I stretch every muscle to get a perspective, and at the very same instant I become paralyzed.¹³⁵

Johannes desires to understand faith but cannot become sufficiently courageous to "plunge confidently"¹³⁶ into it. Consequently, he is thinking about faith from the point of view of

¹³¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 29.

¹³² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 28.

¹³³ This ethical question Johannes raises is interesting but not relevant to my overall thesis since my thesis is focused on comparing Johannes' and Anti-Climacus' view of faith to develop Kierkegaard's view of faith.

¹³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 30.

¹³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 33.

¹³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 34.

one without faith. Mooney correctly says that Johannes is at a stage Johannes calls “a knight of infinite resignation.”¹³⁷

Johannes explains what a knight of infinite resignation is by using an example of a young man who falls in love with a princess whom he cannot marry. The young man’s love is deep, so when he discovers he cannot have her, the young man must resign himself to giving her up:

Having totally absorbed this love and immersed himself in it, he does not lack the courage to attempt and to risk everything. He examines the conditions of his life, he convenes the swift thoughts that obey his every hint, like well-trained doves, he flourishes his staff, and they scatter in all directions. But now when they all come back, all of them like messengers of grief, and explain that is an impossibility, he becomes very quiet, he dismisses them, he becomes solitary, and then he undertakes the movement.¹³⁸

The young man renounces the possibility of marrying the princess but he “undertakes the movement” by continuing to love her eternally. He does not need to see her to maintain his love for her. Rather, by renouncing his love “in the finite world,” he is able to continue his love for her eternally. Johannes says that “he keeps his love just as young as it was in the first moment; he never loses it simply because he has made the movement infinitely.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Mooney explicitly notes that Johannes is a knight of resignation (*Knight of Faith*, 54). Also, though Johannes and Danish society are working from the same point of view, this does not mean that Johannes thinks that the rest of Danish society is at the point of being knights of infinite resignation. He is clear in his description of Danish society as being cheap in how it treats ideas. “Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas our age stages a real sale. Everything can be had at such a bargain price that it becomes a question whether there is finally anyone who will make a bid” (Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 5).

¹³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 42.

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 44.

One becomes a knight of infinite resignation through the following process. One begins to desire something so much that it becomes the sole focus of his life. One then becomes a knight of infinite resignation when one realizes that one will not get what one desires and one accepts the fact one will not get it. This acceptance is comforting and brings peace. One will have reconciled oneself to the reality that this is how things are. The virtue of peace or “eternal comfort” that is thereafter reflected in one stems from one's acceptance of this unfulfilled desire.

Mooney gives good reasons for believing Johannes is a knight of infinite resignation. Mooney says that Johannes is a knight of infinite resignation because Johannes admits he could do part of what Abraham did on Mt. Moriah: he could sacrifice Isaac just like Abraham. But Johannes thinks that he would not be able to bring himself to expect, like Abraham did, to get Isaac back. “The moment I mounted the horse, I would have said to myself: Now all is lost, God demands Isaac, I sacrifice him and along with him all my joy...”¹⁴⁰ Johannes’ surrender of Isaac to God would be an act of “immense resignation,” a “substitute for faith.”¹⁴¹ But Johannes would be at peace with losing his son Isaac.

Johannes says that Abraham is at the stage of a knight of faith. A knight of faith is in contrast to the knight of infinite resignation because the former makes an extra movement that the knight of infinite resignation does not make. The knight of faith continues to hold on to the belief that he will marry the princess:

He does exactly the same as the other knight did: he infinitely renounces the love that is the substance of his life, he is reconciled in pain. But then

¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 35.

¹⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 35.

the marvel happens; he makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her – that is, by virtue of the absurd.¹⁴²

While recognizing the impossibility of the act, the knight of faith believes that the act will happen. According to Johannes, this kind of belief is faith and it is held by “virtue of the absurd.”¹⁴³ It is absurd that the young man believes that he will get the princess though he is giving up the princess. Likewise, it is absurd that Abraham decides to accept losing Isaac and decides to believe that God will return Isaac to him in this lifetime. Johannes calls this “the double movement,”¹⁴⁴ and he says that this extra step of faith that Abraham, a knight of faith, takes is “beyond human calculation.”¹⁴⁵ This is the step that Johannes thinks that he cannot make: he can only observe Abraham and “describe the movements of faith.” In the second part of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes works through three puzzles analyzing the Akedah and the paradox that it presents to him and his Danish contemporaries.

B. Part Two

Johannes leaves his poetic expression of faith and begins his dialectical thought in the second half of *Fear and Trembling*. He focuses on three questions: First, “Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?” Second, “Is there an absolute duty toward God?” Third, “Is it ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer and from Isaac?” I shall discuss each of these three questions in the next three subsections of this chapter.

¹⁴² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 46.

¹⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 40.

¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 35, 36.

1. Problema I: Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?

In this section I will explain the first question and Johannes' answer. First I define the ethical and explain what Johannes means by a "teleological suspension." Then I show how Johannes looks at Abraham's faith, resulting in an example of a "teleological suspension of the ethical."

Johannes asks whether the "ethical" or "universal"¹⁴⁶ applies at all times in light of the paradoxical knight of faith. Westphal defines the ethical as "the domain in which the laws and customs of one's people are the highest norms for action. The ethical is the concrete universal, the community whose values sustain, guide, judge and reward the individual."¹⁴⁷ Westphal goes on to explain that Johannes is defining the ethical through a particular view of reason. It is a type of reason that has "hegemony over interpretation" and leaves "no mysteries unresolved."¹⁴⁸ Westphal says that this view is a priori "in the Kantian sense except one finds great difficulty in justifying it."¹⁴⁹ Consequentially, anything that claims to go beyond reason is perceived as "absurd" or "madness" precisely by virtue of the fact that it goes beyond reason: if reason cannot comprehend it and if reason has ultimate authority over interpretation, then it is incomprehensible.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Johannes says later "The ethical is the universal..." (Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 68).

¹⁴⁷ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, 94.

¹⁴⁸ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, 86.

¹⁴⁹ Westphal explains that customs and cultural practices are "hard to construe as a condition of the possibility of experience. It is to adopt a prejudice in the Gadamerian sense, along with the realization that this places one in a hermeneutical circle that is but one option among others" (*Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, 86). I think what Westphal is trying to say is that customs of a people cannot be a priori.

¹⁵⁰ It's worth mentioning that Clare Carlisle disagrees with Mooney and Westphal. In her commentary on *Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: a Reader's Guide* she argues that the ethical refers to Kant's view (16-21). Also, in her paper,

A “teleological suspension” is holding back an explanation for an action. All actions according to the universal must be explained in light of the “teleology of the moral [ethical].”¹⁵¹ If there is no explanation for an act within the ethical, then according to reason, it is absurd or a paradox.

The question that Johannes is asking is whether the ethical can explain faith, and the answer is that it cannot:

The story of Abraham contains, then, the teleological suspension of the ethical. As the single individual he became higher than the universal. This is the paradox, which cannot be mediated. How he entered into it is just as *inexplicable* as how he remains in it.¹⁵²

Abraham’s act is madness or absurd because it suspends the ethical despite the fact that the ethical, according to the ethical, “applies at all times.”¹⁵³ Because of faith, one can suspend the ethical by not giving a reason for its action. Someone like Abraham is “mad” because his purpose is found in God rather than reason. This is what Johannes means when he says, “For he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith reflects upon God.”¹⁵⁴ C. Stephen Evans correctly notes that Johannes sees that a “person of faith is a person who has a direct and personal relationship with God, a

“Johannes de Silentio’s Dilemma,” (2015) she argues that Kierkegaard would have been familiar with Kant’s critique of Abraham through lectures given by Hans Lassen Martensen who tutored Kierkegaard and later became bishop (48-51). Lastly, she says that Kant and Hegel shared similar views that the good life is best fulfilled in meeting ethical requirements. This may be true; the reason I differ with Carlisle is that the way Johannes goes about explaining the ethical is by saying that it resides in society or Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit*. The ethical is not really “universal” but only appears universal from the point of view of the ethical.

¹⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 54.

¹⁵² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 66. Italics are my own.

¹⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 54.

¹⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 37.

relation that cannot be reduced to the individual absorbance of socially accepted ideals.”¹⁵⁵

Abraham has a direct relationship with God that is outside of society’s expectations, and society’s rules have no claim on him.

Abraham suspends the ethical by a movement of faith, moving “higher than the universal.”¹⁵⁶ This is a paradoxical “movement,” in which the individual (knight of faith) is not justified by the universal. To be justified in this sense is to have a sufficient explanation for an action. To flesh out the teleological suspension of the ethical, Johannes contrasts Abraham’s actions with the actions of a tragic hero.

A tragic hero ends the life of a loved one, and his actions are justified by the universal. Johannes recounts the stories of Jephthah sacrificing his daughter, Brutus (Junius) executing his sons and Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter. The actions of these tragic heroes are within the universal and do not require faith because the universal gives justification for them. Jephthah vowed to God to sacrifice the first thing he saw come out of the doors of his home, which turned out to be his daughter and only child, in exchange for a military victory.¹⁵⁷ Brutus had his two sons executed for their attempted overthrow of the Roman Republic.¹⁵⁸ Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia to the gods so his ships could sail to Troy.¹⁵⁹ Jephthah’s action was justified by the universal of Ancient Israel because he fulfilled his vow to the Lord. Brutus’ action was justified by the universal of Ancient Rome because he preserved the Republic. Agamemnon was justified by the universal of

¹⁵⁵ C. Stephen Evans, “Faith as the telos of Morality” In *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 23.

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 58, 87.

¹⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 58.

¹⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 87.

ancient Greece because he was able to sail to Troy. In these three cases, one working within the universal of that culture will see the justification for their actions.

Johannes says, “It is not to save a nation, not to uphold the idea of the state that Abraham does it; it is not to appease the angry gods.”¹⁶⁰ Unlike the tragic hero, Abraham’s actions are not justified within the universal. Hence, no one coming from the point of view of the universal can understand why Abraham is murdering his son. Mooney says:

The tragic hero can count on being understood, even in the midst of his dilemma, because he can count on a large background, even in the midst of his dilemma, of socialized agreement about the relevant universal rules. However, a command from God, in Kierkegaard’s or Johannes’s view, is not a public, objective matter. It is utterly private.¹⁶¹

Because Abraham’s act has no relation to the universal, the act is a “private endeavor,”¹⁶² and Abraham cannot communicate the reason for his act within the universal. Johannes, who is within the universal, cannot explain the justification for this act either. If he tried to explain it, he would express the universal. “As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me.”¹⁶³

The reason is that Johannes believes that in order for communication to work, it requires a set of rules to govern it. Because he is of the point of view of the ethical, the rules for his communication stem from the ethical. Abraham cannot use these rules to communicate his act since his act is separate from the ethical and to communicate would be using the rules of the ethical. Hence, Johannes thinks that Abraham’s act is purely “a private endeavor” between him and God.

¹⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 59.

¹⁶¹ Mooney, *Knights of Faith*, 72.

¹⁶² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 59.

¹⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 60.

Because of the teleological suspension of the ethical, Abraham is “the single individual or the self as the single individual [who] stands in an absolute relation to the absolute.”¹⁶⁴ What this means is that Abraham as a single individual is not acting out of habit or as a member of a group or culture. He is self-consciously choosing to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham’s “absolute relationship” is one in which the relationship transcends the ethical norms of his society. The relationship is absolute in that regardless of anything else, Abraham’s relationship still stands with “the absolute.” The absolute is God who issued Abraham a command to sacrifice his son.

From the point of view of the ethical, Abraham’s act is a paradox or absurd because the ethical cannot explain why Abraham sacrifices Isaac. Since the ethical cannot explain why Abraham sacrifices Isaac, this means that either there is a teleological suspension of the ethical or Abraham’s act warrants calling him a murderer and ought to be condemned.

2. Problema II: Is there an Absolute Duty Toward God?

Another question Johannes answers is whether there is an absolute duty toward God. Johannes concludes that “either there is an absolute duty to God... or else Abraham is lost.”¹⁶⁵ We will first look at Johannes’ question and then his answer.

In asking this question, Johannes is not saying that “God” refers to the universal or duty. Otherwise, says Johannes, this would be a tautology. Contradicting Johannes’ point of view is the ethical point of view which says that God is the universal or duty. From the ethical point of view God is impersonal and abstract. Doing one’s duty is not entering into

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 123.

¹⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 81.

a relationship with God but simply complying with an abstract code. However, in Johannes' view, "God" is a personal being who issues commands and promises. Abraham, by obeying God, enters into this personal relationship since he is obeying a personal God.

Clare Carlisle explains:

In problem II, then, Johannes de Silentio is concerned to accentuate the contrast between an abstract conception of God as nothing more than the ethical-as-universal, and the personal God with whom the 'knight of faith' has an intimate and particular relationship. He states that the knight of faith attains a 'wondrous glory... in becoming God's confidant, the Lord's friend, and to speak very humanly, in saying 'you' to God in heaven.' [68] The second-person form of address – saying 'you' rather than saying 'he' or 'she' – represents the individual's direct, personal relationship to God which is the content of religious faith, whereas 'even the tragic hero addresses [God] in the third person.' [68]¹⁶⁶

Abraham enters into this relationship through an internal disposition of faith. Faith is not in "the company of feelings, moods, idiosyncrasies, *vapeurs* [vagaries], etc."¹⁶⁷ It is different from other internal dispositions in that "faith is preceded by a movement of infinity."¹⁶⁸

One can see this movement in the tragic hero and knight of infinite resignation who resigns himself to a situation being guided by the universal, who is reconciled with his situation and does not expect anything back.

Faith comes when one has the internal disposition of expecting to receive what was relinquished. A knight of faith goes further than the knight of infinite resignation.

¹⁶⁶ Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, 122. Earlier I voiced my disagreement with how Carlisle characterizes the ethical in its connection with Kant. (See footnote 69.) Here, Carlisle and I agree that the ethical's conception of God is one of an abstract being who is impersonal.

¹⁶⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 69.

Johannes repeats himself from earlier by explaining that to expect what one gives up, the knight of faith “relates himself as the single individual absolutely to the absolute.”¹⁶⁹ In light of what we said earlier about this statement, Johannes also adds that the knight of faith (Abraham) has a duty to God prior to his duty to the universal because he has faith, something which Johannes does not understand. Abraham consciously decides to sacrifice Isaac because God commanded him to do so. Johannes says that if one’s duty to God is prior to one’s duty to the universal, then one’s duty to the universal is relative. But a universal, by Johannes’ definition, is not relative, which is a contradiction. Johannes thinks that this contradiction cannot be resolved.

From the point of view of the universal, Abraham has an absolute duty per the universal to love and protect his son. On the other hand, the universal recognizes that Abraham believes that he has an absolute duty to sacrifice his son. This is a paradox according to Johannes since sacrificing one’s son is not protecting or loving one’s son. Johannes hypothesizes that if someone were to discuss with Abraham his dilemma then he would see this paradox:

If he [Abraham] had said to someone: I love Isaac more than anything in the world and that is why it is so hard for me to sacrifice him – the other person very likely would have shaken his head and said: why sacrifice him, then? Or, if the other had been smart, he probably would have seen through Abraham and perceived that he was manifesting feelings that glaringly contradicted his actions.¹⁷⁰

Johannes thinks that this paradox cannot be resolved from the point of view of the universal. Furthermore, to try to do so is to cancel faith. “Faith itself cannot be mediated

¹⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 70.

¹⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 70.

into the universal, for thereby it is canceled...”¹⁷¹ When the universal attempts to understand faith, it can understand it only as a paradox. The universal takes uncomfortable tensions like paradoxes and tries to smooth them over but to do so is to get rid of faith since, according to Johannes, faith is inherently contradictory.

It is difficult to accept the paradox that exists between Abraham obeying God’s command and Abraham’s societal duty to love and protect his son. The reason it is difficult is that one within the universal cannot understand the knight of faith. Tragic heroes have the comfort of being understood by those around them. Tragic heroes are pitiable but relatable. To Johannes, the knight of faith is not relatable and is isolated:

He [the knight of faith] also knows that up higher there winds a lonesome trail, steep and narrow; he knows it is dreadful to be born solitary outside of the universal, to walk without meeting one single traveler. He knows very well where he is and how he relates to men. Humanly speaking, he is mad and cannot make himself understandable to anyone.¹⁷²

Johannes claims that the reason for the knight of faith’s isolation from others is that he cannot receive outside help in his “task”¹⁷³ of faith. This is because he is in an “absolute relationship with the absolute.”¹⁷⁴ For the knight of faith to receive help outside this “absolute relationship” is to act not in reference to this absolute relationship because this “absolute relationship” would then no longer be absolute.

¹⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 71.

¹⁷² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 76.

¹⁷³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 123.

Johannes says that the knight of faith, in this case Abraham, is “mad.” Abraham had waited 130 years¹⁷⁵ to have Isaac. Now, he was going to relinquish what God had given him. Johannes says, “Let me speak humanly about it, purely humanly!... Is it not madness!”¹⁷⁶ From Johannes’ point of view, Abraham’s actions are mad because, after waiting for 130 years, Abraham is now giving up the promise of God by sacrificing Isaac.

The origin for Johannes’ claim that Abraham is mad is his point of view as one from the universal or ethical. Similar to the first puzzle, Johannes cannot make sense of the reason for Abraham’s act because Johannes’ point of view is one from the universal or ethical. Consequently, he admires Abraham, as we said before, but finds his act to be mad.

3. Problema III: Was it Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal his Undertaking from Sarah, Eliezer and from Isaac?

Johannes’ final question is, “Was it ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer and from Isaac?” To reiterate, Westphal defines the ethical as, “The domain in which the laws and customs of one’s people are the highest norms for action. The ethical is the concrete universal, the community whose values sustain, guide, judge and reward the individual.”¹⁷⁷ The laws and customs in Abraham’s life are the relationships in his family: the husband-wife relationship (with Sarah), the master-servant relationship (Eliezer)¹⁷⁸ and the father-son relationship (Isaac).

¹⁷⁵ Abraham was 100 years old (Genesis 21:5) when Isaac was born. Kierkegaard was 30 years old when he wrote *Fear and Trembling*; perhaps a numerological point Kierkegaard was trying to make?

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 77.

¹⁷⁷ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, 94.

¹⁷⁸ Genesis 15:2.

Abraham conceals his undertaking from these people by remaining silent. At one point in the story, Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham responds, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.”¹⁷⁹ Johannes says that Abraham’s response is “in the form of irony, for it is always irony when I say something and still do not say anything.”¹⁸⁰ What Johannes means is that while it is true that God was going to provide a lamb, Abraham did not specify who this lamb would be despite knowing that it would be Isaac.

Johannes works through various examples, both historical and fictional, to show “the incomprehensibility”¹⁸¹ of Abraham’s act. In the end, Abraham is cloaked by silence, and onlookers are unable to understand. Abraham cannot explain his action because he would be explaining it in reference to the universal, which he cannot do since he is acting in faith. Abraham’s action, according to Johannes, cannot be explained because Johannes is coming from the point of view of the ethical.

Abraham’s acting in faith shows that he had relinquished Isaac to God. Yet, he took the extra step of faith, and he believed that he would receive Isaac back because “it is indeed possible that God could do something entirely different.”¹⁸²

Johannes cannot understand Abraham and thinks of his action as a paradox. Johannes thinks that he himself has stopped short of faith because he does not have the courage to acquire faith. Nonetheless, he has not followed his own generation in failing to pursue faith.

¹⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 115-116; Genesis 22:8.

¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 118.

¹⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 112.

¹⁸² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 119.

VI. Summary

Johannes' presentation of faith is incomplete. He says that faith is formed through a private relationship with God. One with faith is silent about this relationship from the point of view of one who is in the ethical. Also, Johannes understands faith dialectically. Because of his point of view, he does not understand the justification for Abraham's action, and faith appears to be a paradox to him. In the next chapter we will look at Anti-Climacus' account of faith in *Practice in Christianity*: being a contemporary of the God-man and meeting the requirements of believing the God-man's words and not being offended by him. After this second analysis I argue that from Johannes' point of view and Anti-Climacus' point of view it may be inferred that Kierkegaard's view of faith is the aligning of the self in a trusting relationship with the God-man. Moreover, one outside of faith will perceive faith to be paradoxical or find faith offensive, for one must have faith to avoid offense and overcome this paradox.

Chapter 3

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on Anti-Climacus' point of view of faith in *Practice in Christianity*. I note some differences between *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity* before discussing two reasons why Kierkegaard chose Anti-Climacus as the pseudonym for *Practice in Christianity*. Then I discuss Anti-Climacus' point of view of faith as being a contemporary with the God-man and meeting the requirements of believing the God-man's words and not being offended by the God-man.

II. Major Differences between *Practice in Christianity* and *Fear and Trembling*

Fear and Trembling is often said to be Kierkegaard's most popular work, but Kierkegaard saw *Practice in Christianity* as his greatest work.¹⁸³ There are major differences between *Practice in Christianity* and *Fear and Trembling*. *Practice in Christianity* is almost double the length of *Fear and Trembling*. *Practice in Christianity* begins with an invocation and ends with a series of homilies. *Fear and Trembling* is subtitled as "A Dialectical Lyric." The first half is poetic, and the second half is dialectical.

Another major difference between the two works is the shift in audience. Johannes' audience is Danish society. The focus is on society as a whole group. By way of contrast, Anti-Climacus' audience is "individuals."¹⁸⁴ An individual to Anti-Climacus is a

¹⁸³ In reflecting on *Practice in Christianity* Kierkegaard says in his journal, "Without a doubt it [*Practice in Christianity*] is the most perfect and truest thing I have written." (Pap. X A 66) In regards to *Fear and Trembling*, he has this to say, "Once I am dead, *Fear and Trembling* alone will be enough for an imperishable name as an author. Then it will be read, translated into foreign languages as well" (Pap. X A 15).

¹⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 14.

person who self-consciously chooses for himself.¹⁸⁵ This is related to (and borne out by) another major difference between the two works: Kierkegaard chose himself to be the editor of *Practice in Christianity*. In the “Editor’s Preface,” Kierkegaard says, “...I understand what is said as spoken to me alone – so that I might learn not only to resort to *grace* but to resort to it in relation to the use of *grace*.”¹⁸⁶ Kierkegaard understood *Practice in Christianity* to be written to individuals, he himself being an individual.¹⁸⁷ Niels Jørgen Cappelørn notes that in order to understand the concept of offense in *Practice in Christianity*, one needs to recognize that it is always related to an individual.¹⁸⁸

III. Anti-Climacus

Anti-Climacus is the author of *Practice in Christianity*. Anti-Climacus is also Kierkegaard’s last pseudonym. There are two reasons Kierkegaard uses Anti-Climacus as a pseudonym. First, Anti-Climacus is the ideal Christian. Second, Kierkegaard uses Anti-

¹⁸⁵ Anti-Climacus says, “How the single individual will understand the invitation he [Christ] leaves up to the individual” (Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 14). What Anti-Climacus means is that Christ offers rest and leaves the decision to the individual to decide whether he will come or not come.

¹⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 7.

¹⁸⁷ For instance, in discussing the invitation of the God-man, Anti-Climacus says “the inviter must invite all, although each one separately or as an individual” (Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 16).

¹⁸⁸ Cappelørn says, “Before we go further, it is important to keep in mind that offense always pertains to subjectivity, that is, that it is always related to the individual. Imagining “offense” without an “offended” person is perhaps not as difficult as imagining the son of a flute without a flutist, but in and of itself, offense is nevertheless an abstract concept... Just as love is actualized only when there is an individual who falls in love, so too is offense actualized only when there is an individual who becomes offended” (Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, “The Movements of Offense Toward, Away from, and Within Faith: Blessed is he who is not offended at me,” In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 104.)

Climacus to speak with force and to speak indirectly. In the next two subsections, I shall explain both of these reasons in more detail.

A. The Ideal Christian

Marek says that "Anti-Climacus... portrays the ideality of a Christian existence as such; he is 'a Christian on an extraordinarily high level.'"¹⁸⁹ Anti-Climacus has lived out the claims he makes in *Practice in Christianity*. Kierkegaard struggled over whether to publish *Practice in Christianity* under his own name or a pseudonym. Kierkegaard decided to use Anti-Climacus as a pseudonym because he felt his own life to be insufficient. Hannay explains why:

He [Kierkegaard] now was to depict for people the high spiritual standards which religious faith and observance required, he nevertheless felt unable to present himself in his own person as someone able to exemplify those standards and to judge others.¹⁹⁰

Kierkegaard felt that his own life was an insufficient example. He had not lived out the ideal requirements of being a Christian in his own life. So he decided to use a pseudonym instead.

Anti-Climacus is also an ideal Christian in comparison to other pseudonyms. He is "higher" than the other pseudonyms. Previous pseudonyms have been coming from a point of view that lacks faith. Anti-Climacus, on the other hand, comes from a "decisively Christian standpoint,"¹⁹¹ as one with faith.

The term Anti-Climacus comes out of an earlier pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. Johannes Climacus wrote *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific*

¹⁸⁹ Jakub Marek, "Kierkegaard's 'Servant of the Word,'" In *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*, Eds. K. Nun & J. Stewart (Burlington, NC: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 40.

¹⁹⁰ Hannay, "Homing in on Fear and Trembling," 374.

¹⁹¹ Marek, "Servant of the Word," 40.

Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments as well as the posthumously published work *Johannes Climacus*. Hong & Hong, in their introduction to *Practice in Christianity*, say that the Latin root “anti” does not mean “against” as it usually means in the English language. They argue that Kierkegaard is using it to mean “‘before,’ a relation of rank, the higher as in ‘before’ in the First commandment.”¹⁹² As evidence for this interpretation of “anti,” Hong & Hong cite Kierkegaard’s journal which says, “There is something (the esthetic) that is lower and also pseudonymous, and something that is higher and also pseudonymous, because as a person I do not correspond to it [the higher].”¹⁹³ What Kierkegaard means is that he, Kierkegaard, does not fit in with the higher pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, which Kierkegaard had not yet named at the time of writing of this journal entry. Also in Kierkegaard’s journal, Kierkegaard says, “Anti-Climacus will be the higher pseudonym, and thus the piece, ‘Climacus and Anti-Climacus’ cannot be used unless it should be by a new pseudonym.”¹⁹⁴ Westphal agrees with Hong & Hong and adds that the reason Kierkegaard says Anti-Climacus is “higher” than Climacus is that he speaks directly rather than “dialectically humorous/serious and indirect.”¹⁹⁵

Jakub Marek also interprets the term “anti” to mean that Anti-Climacus “assumes a higher standpoint”¹⁹⁶ than other pseudonyms. In disagreeing with Hong & Hong, Marek adds that Anti-Climacus is also in “opposition”¹⁹⁷ to earlier pseudonyms. Marek says, “Anti-Climacus is anti- or contra that which is non-Christian, opposing the non-Christian

¹⁹² Kierkegaard, *Practice*, xiii.

¹⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, xiii.

¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, xiii.

¹⁹⁵ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 232.

¹⁹⁶ Marek, “Servant of the Word,” 40.

¹⁹⁷ Marek, “Servant of the Word,” 40.

existence, the standpoint of the ‘natural man.’”¹⁹⁸ Marek qualifies his statement by saying that Anti-Climacus is not merely a “negation,”¹⁹⁹ for Anti-Climacus repeats themes found in earlier works.

I do not follow Marek’s interpretation in saying that Anti-Climacus is in opposition to other pseudonyms. Marek goes against what Kierkegaard says in his journal. Marek cites Kierkegaard’s journal, saying that Anti-Climacus is “a Christian on an extraordinarily high level.”²⁰⁰ Marek then goes on to say that “Johannes Climacus is the opposite of Anti-Climacus.”²⁰¹ Yet, clearly, Kierkegaard does not say that they are “opposite,” but that one is higher than the other. So Marek does not have evidence for why it is appropriate to interpret the term “anti” as “in opposition” rather than “higher or prior to.” In light of Kierkegaard’s journal entries, it fits better to interpret Anti-Climacus as a pseudonym that is higher than other pseudonyms.

B. Anti-Climacus presents a Rigorous Requirement

David D. Possen argues that Kierkegaard uses Anti-Climacus to speak “more rigorously than he himself dared” as a “necessary corrective for *all* lenient presentations of Christianity, including Kierkegaard’s own.”²⁰² Anti-Climacus was able to be rigorous as a writer in that he set forward a strict and high standard for living. Possen explains that the standard for living is “*imitatio Christi*,”²⁰³ living according to the strict and high standard

¹⁹⁸ Marek, “Servant of the Word,” 40.

¹⁹⁹ Marek, “Servant of the Word,” 40.

²⁰⁰ Marek, “Servant of the Word,” 40.

²⁰¹ Marek, “Servant of the Word,” 40.

²⁰² Possen, “The Voice of Rigor,” 163.

²⁰³ Possen, “The Voice of Rigor,” 169.

put forward by Christ. This is intended to correct those who have presented the standards of Christ in a way that tones down the severity of *imitatio Christi*.

According to Possen, Anti-Climacus presents a rigorous picture of Christianity so that one will recognize that all fail to meet this standard. Possen says, “*imitatio Christi* is the rigorous standard we all fail to meet; grace is the leniency we all therefore depend upon.”²⁰⁴ Consequently, one who lives by this high standard and fails can fall back onto “grace.” To Anti-Climacus, grace is the unmerited favor to one who “strives”²⁰⁵ toward *imitatio Christi* and fails. Possen says this is what Kierkegaard means in the preface to *Practice in Christianity* when he says, “So that I might learn not only to resort to grace but to resort to it in relation to the use of *grace*.”²⁰⁶ Lenient presentations of the requirements of what it takes to be a Christian give room for people to claim grace while unaware that it is necessary to continue to work at meeting the requirements of being a Christian. Consequently, one does not have “an honest encounter with the requirement of *imitatio Christi*.”²⁰⁷ So Anti-Climacus presents this rigorous account of Christianity as a corrective to previous lenient accounts.

The main theme of *Practice in Christianity* is Anti-Climacus giving the requirements for acquiring faith to individuals. Anti-Climacus says that faith is a person [an individual] being a contemporary with the God-man,²⁰⁸ and who meets the requirements of believing his words and not being offended by the God-man.

²⁰⁴ Possen, “The Voice of Rigor,” 172.

²⁰⁵ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept*, 252.

²⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 7.

²⁰⁷ Possen, “The Voice of Rigor,” 174.

²⁰⁸ I will use the following terms to refer to the same person: the God-man, Jesus Christ and Christ.

IV. Being a Contemporary

In the “Invocation” of No. 1 Anti-Climacus says:

But as long as there is a believer, this person, in order to have become that [a believer], must have been and as a believer must be just as contemporary with Christ’s presence as his contemporaries were. This contemporaneity is the condition of faith, and, more sharply defined, it is faith.²⁰⁹

What Anti-Climacus means when he says that having faith is being a contemporary with the God-man is that one will think about the God-man just as he actually was physically on earth. He will think of himself as one who physically was with the God-man. Anti-Climacus describes this state as residing “together in a house and liv[ing] together in a common life and in daily association with the poor and wretched.”²¹⁰

We discussed in chapter one the distinction between Religiousness A and Religiousness B.²¹¹ Religiousness A is when the individual senses great guilt in the presence of God and has a strong sense of God’s immanence. Religiousness B is the conversion to being a follower of the God-man through faith. Faith in Religiousness B is transcendent, taking its start from the paradox of Jesus Christ (the God-man) being both God and man, both infinite and finite. One who comes to faith goes through a “paradigm shift,”²¹² shifting out of a “human understanding.”²¹³

²⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 9.

²¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 13.

²¹¹ See chapter one, page 21

²¹² Murray A. Rae, “The forgetfulness of historical-talkative Remembrance in Kierkegaard’s *Practice in Christianity*,” In *International Commentary on Kierkegaard: Practice in Christianity*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 92.

²¹³ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 59.

Westphal calls this concept of faith “trans-cognitive.”²¹⁴ This means that faith presupposes certain facts about the world such as: God exists, has issued specific commands, is a personal being and desires to enter into a relationship with people. Also, it means that faith is personal in the sense that one takes on an “attitude or stance”²¹⁵ like Christ’s contemporaries. To come to this stance one must believe that God has entered time as a human as the God-man.

V. The God-Man

The God-man is an important focus in *Practice in Christianity*. Westphal discusses Anti-Climacus’ focus on the God-man in “Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence.” Specifically, the God-man is “in the situation of abasement.”²¹⁶ Discussing the God-man in his abasement is sometimes called kenosis. Kenosis refers to Christ’s emptying his divinity and appearing as a servant. Westphal says that in *Practice in Christianity* we find “a kenotic Christology.”²¹⁷ Anti-Climacus describes the God-man as kenosis:

The inviter... is the abased Jesus Christ, the lowly man born of a despised virgin, his father a carpenter, in kinship with a few other common folk of the lowest class, this lowly man who moreover claimed to be God... So the lowly, destitute man with twelve poor disciples from the commonest class of people, for a long time an object of curiosity but later in the company only of sinners, tax collectors, lepers and madmen, because merely to let oneself be helped by him meant to risk one’s honor, life and goods, in any case exclusion from the synagogue.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 26.

²¹⁵ Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 33.

²¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 24.

²¹⁷ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 21.

²¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 37.

Anti-Climacus focuses on kenosis in two ways. First, Anti-Climacus focuses on Christ being human while claiming to be divine. He calls Christ's kenosis an "omnipotently maintained incognito."²¹⁹ Anti-Climacus means that the God-man was really a person and his personhood was maintained "omnipotently." Anti-Climacus does not mean that it was impossible to know who the God-man was. Rather, Anti-Climacus means that that the God-man did not merely appear to be human: the God-man was really a man with real human limitations. Second, Westphal says that Anti-Climacus focuses on Kenosis as the "continuing emphasis on Jesus as servant rather than master..."²²⁰ This refers to the lowliness of Christ, to the fact that although he claimed to be God, he lived as a servant who served people by meeting their needs.

VI. Believing the God-man's words

So far we have seen that faith is a person being a contemporary with the God-man. In addition, one must meet two requirements to have faith: believing the God-man's words and overcoming Offense. I shall begin by discussing believing the God-man's words; in the next section, I shall discuss overcoming offense. Silvia Walsh says, "Establishing its Christocentric focus at the outset, *Practice in Christianity* opens with an invitation from Christ to all those who labor and are burdened, that is, all those who are suffering, to come to him for rest."²²¹ Anti-Climacus focuses on the God-man's words, "Come here to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."²²² The God-man's words are

²¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 131.

²²⁰ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept*, 22.

²²¹ Silvia Walsh, "Standing at the Crossroads: The Invitation of Christ to a Life of Suffering," In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, Ed. Robert. L. Perkins, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 146.

²²² Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 11.

directed at people who are suffering. Anti-Climacus says that the rest Christ will give those who are suffering is not physical. Rather, he will free them from “sin.” Sin in *Practice in Christianity* is the sense of hopelessness and loneliness.²²³ Sin is the deep sense that one is lost and tumbling down into a state of hopelessness. Anti-Climacus uses the metaphor of a horse attached to an out-of-control cart:

Whereas sin leads onward with winged speed, with mounting hate – or leads downward so easily, and indescribably easily, indeed, as easily as when the horse, completely relieved of pulling, cannot even with all its strength stop the wagon, which runs it into the abyss.²²⁴

Anti-Climacus explains that this invitation to believe the God-man’s words occurs at a “crossroad.”²²⁵ In one direction is the rest that Christ gives; in the other is sin. Anti-Climacus says:

Come here, all you who are lost and gone astray, whatever your error and sin, be it to human eyes more excusable and yet perhaps more terrible, or be it to human eyes more terrible and yet perhaps more excusable, be it disclosed here on earth or be it hidden and yet known in heaven – and even if you found forgiveness on earth but no peace within, or found no forgiveness because you did not seek it, or because you sought it in vain: oh, turn around and come here, here is rest!²²⁶

At the crossroad, Christ calls out to give people rest from their sin, but, as Westphal puts it, there is “the barrier between the helper and those who need help.”²²⁷ This barrier is offense.

²²³ To fully understand what Anti-Climacus means by “sin,” we would have to turn to a previous work written by Anti-Climacus, *The Sickness unto Death*.

²²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 19.

²²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 81.

²²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 19.

²²⁷ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 255.

VII. Overcoming Offense

Anti-Climacus defines offense in general as rejecting something because of a personal animosity toward the cause of offense.²²⁸ In *Practice in Christianity*, all with faith will have the possibility of offense. Anti-Climacus says, “One never comes to faith except from the possibility of offense.”²²⁹ A necessary part of having faith is the possibility of offense, but “offense is only possible, not necessary...”²³⁰ One can be offended by the God-man in different ways: a “preliminary offense,”²³¹ essential offense (of which there are two forms) and offense at the God-man’s indirect communication. I shall discuss each these forms of offense separately in the next subsections.

A. Preliminary Offense

Preliminary offense is being offended by Christ because he is in “collision with an established order.”²³² Anti-Climacus explains that the established order wants to be a totality that recognizes nothing above itself but “has every individual under it” and “judges every individual who subordinates himself to the established order.”²³³ The established order makes itself supreme, and individuals acquire meaning through it. It is not merely an abstract system of thought. It is the method, practices and traditions of a specific institution. This reflects Johannes’ discussion in *Fear and Trembling* of the ethical which

²²⁸ I have adapted this general definition of offense from Cappelørn’s description of offense (Cappelørn’s, “The Movements of Offense,” 104-105).

²²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 81.

²³⁰ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 256.

²³¹ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 111.

²³² Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 85.

²³³ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 91.

is “the concrete universal, the community whose values sustain, guide, judge and reward the individual.”²³⁴

There are two things that should be noted about the established order. First, there is no “fear and trembling” in this order.²³⁵ Anti-Climacus explains this concept using a metaphor: “To live in such an established order, particularly to be something in it, is a continuation of being tied to mother’s apron strings or is even more secure.”²³⁶ There is a false security that comes along with being a part of the established order.²³⁷ “‘Why,’ says the established order to the single individual, ‘do you want to torture and torment yourself with the enormous criterion of ideality; turn to the established order, join the established order, here is the criterion.’”²³⁸ The individual’s own decisions are made by the established order without involving the person. One does not have to go through the anxiety and stress of figuring things out for oneself since it has already been prepared without involving the individual.

Second, the established order is “deified.”²³⁹ The established order has made itself to be God in the sense that it is absolute. All things are understood and done in reference to it, even if they contradict God’s commands. Cappelørn explains, “A presupposition for the full realization of this preliminary offense is that the establishment has deified

²³⁴ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 63.

²³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 90.

²³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 90.

²³⁷ I think it is worth noting that Anti-Climacus sounds a lot like critics of the Soviet Union. Vaclav Havel’s “Power of the Powerless” is one example that is strangely similar to Anti-Climacus’ critique of the established order.

²³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 90.

²³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 91.

itself.”²⁴⁰ One who causes the established order to be offended does not necessarily intend it. Rather, it happens when the individual does not subordinate him or herself to the established order.

In Christ’s day the established order was the “tradition of the elders.”²⁴¹ In one passage that Anti-Climacus discusses, Christ offends the religious authorities by accusing them of being “hypocrites” because, Christ says, “for the sake of your tradition you have annihilated the command of God.”²⁴² Because Christ points out that the established order of the Pharisees is not absolute, he brings himself into “collision” with it. Christ “revealed the highest ethical and religious ideals held by his contemporaries were sensuously and relatively determined, and lacked any relation to God’s word.”²⁴³ This means that the God-man is an “enemy... of the establishment.”²⁴⁴

Cappelørn explains that preliminary offense can also occur with other people besides Christ. “He [Anti-Climacus] underscores the fact that this kind of preliminary offense – that is, an offense that remains within the human sphere – can also have other human beings as its object.”²⁴⁵ This offense can occur in any situation and does not involve the God-man directly. Rather, it focuses on the God-man who is against the established order.

²⁴⁰ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 111.

²⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 86.

²⁴² Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 85.

²⁴³ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 111.

²⁴⁴ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 112.

²⁴⁵ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 111.

B. Essential Offense

Essential offense is being offended by the God-man in (at least) one of two ways. First is offense by Christ's claim to divinity. Anti-Climacus says, "the possibility of offense in relation to loftiness, that an individual human being speaks or acts as if he were God, declares himself to be God, therefore in relation to the qualification 'God' in the composition God-man."²⁴⁶ Anti-Climacus is saying that people can be offended by Christ's claim to divinity.

Christ claims to be divine by pointing out his miracles, but he does not conclude that he is divine because of his miracles. Rather, the God-man concludes his "demonstration"²⁴⁷ with the statement, "blessed is he who is not offended at me."²⁴⁸ Christ's demonstration brings a contemporary of him to the point of offense. Demonstrations about claims in mathematics are certain in their validity, "just as certain as $2+2=4$."²⁴⁹ No doubts are left about the conclusion. Yet a demonstration of Christ's divinity with his miracles as the premise is "still ambiguous."²⁵⁰ Demonstrations of divinity are different from demonstrations about claims in mathematics: whereas the latter are certain in their validity, the former are ambiguous because they can lead to different conclusions: faith or offense. Anti-Climacus explains, "The miracle can make you aware – now you are in the tension, and it depends upon what you choose, offense or faith; it is your heart that must be disclosed."²⁵¹ One has to make a choice after one understands the

²⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 94.

²⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 94.

²⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 94.

²⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 95.

²⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 96.

²⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 97.

demonstration. The decision is open to how one wants to take it. Westphal says, “The phenomena, the data, [miracles] are open to two diametrically different interpretations: offense or faith.”²⁵² Cappelørn says that the choice one makes does not depend on “straightforward knowledge”²⁵³ of Christ’s divinity. Rather, one has to decide without any “straightforward marks of his [Christ’s] divinity.”²⁵⁴ Westphal agrees with Cappelørn when he says:

It is not ‘*directly* visible that Christ was the one he claimed to be.’ This is the sense in which Climacus²⁵⁵ (and Silentio) refer to faith as a leap, a decision without the security and support of an adequate ground.²⁵⁶

Whether one chooses to believe Christ or be offended is ultimately arbitrary.

The second essential offense involves the possibility of being offended by Christ’s lowliness. People are offended that the person they believe to be God is claiming to be a man. What Christ’s lowliness refers to is Christ being that “lowly, poor, suffering and finally powerless human being.”²⁵⁷ Anti-Climacus looks at examples in which people believe that Christ is divine but are offended that he would come down as a “powerless human being.” The first example is when the people are amazed that a lowly carpenter’s son was able to teach so well. They say

is this not the carpenter’s son? Is his mother not called Mary? And his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are all his sisters not

²⁵² Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 270.

²⁵³ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 113.

²⁵⁴ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 114.

²⁵⁵ Westphal does not mean Anti-Climacus. He is referring to an earlier chapter in his book in which he discusses Johannes Climacus’ claim that faith is a decision that lacks any external reason or support for one’s decision.

²⁵⁶ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 270.

²⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 102.

with us? Whence, then, did that man get all this? And they were offended at him.²⁵⁸

Cappelørn explains that “If one puts emphasis on the sentence, ‘Is this not the carpenter’s son?’ they are offended with regard to contemptibility, that is, they are offended by the fact that God is said to be the son of a simple laborer.”²⁵⁹ The people were offended by the social position of the person whom they believe to be God: this lowly man.²⁶⁰

The second example is that Christ’s own disciples are offended that the person they believe to be God claims that he must suffer on a cross. Anti-Climacus describes their offense. “It [the disciple’s offense] is in relation to lowliness, that he, the loftily exalted one, the Father’s only begotten son, that he should suffer in this manner, that he should be surrendered powerless into the hands of his enemies.”²⁶¹ Cappelørn again explains, “Everyone took offense, even the apostle Peter who had otherwise claimed that if necessary he would die together with Christ.”²⁶²

It is important to recognize that offense from Christ’s lowliness or from his divinity are triggered only by thinking of oneself as a contemporary of Christ. Cappelørn explains, “The individual person must honestly imagine himself or herself as a contemporary of Christ in order to put himself or herself to the test: how would I as a contemporary of Christ react to him as the paradigmatic example?”²⁶³ The reason is that one must see that it is a mere man who is making these claims. One must try to determine

²⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 103.

²⁵⁹ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 115.

²⁶⁰ Anti-Climacus says the “direction of the offense is ambiguous” (Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 103) because one could interpret that the people are offended in the first kind of essential offense, offended that a man is claiming to be God.

²⁶¹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 103.

²⁶² Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 116.

²⁶³ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 119.

whether being a contemporary of Christ does not bring about offense when one is expected to *imitatio Christi*.

In summary, essential offense can occur in one of two ways: one can be offended by the divinity of the God-man or by the lowliness of the God-man. The third and last form of offense is being offended by Christ's indirect communication.

C. Necessity of Indirect Communication

The last category of offense arises from the fact that the God-man can use only indirect communication because he is a sign of a contradiction. Anti-Climacus defines a sign as “the denied immediacy or the second being that is different from the first being.”²⁶⁴ He explains that a sign is “something different from what it immediately is.”²⁶⁵ The physical parts of a sign are not what it actually is. Rather a sign points beyond itself. Anti-Climacus explains that a sign of a contradiction is “a sign that intrinsically contains a contradiction in itself.”²⁶⁶ This means that there is a contradiction between the sign itself and its meaning. For instance, one drives up to a light which is green but sketched in the light is the word “stop.” The sign itself says “stop,” though we attribute to it the meaning “go.”

The God-man is a sign of a contradiction when he communicates directly that he is God but one sees that he is merely a human, or when he communicates directly to those who believe that he is God the fact he is lowly. Cappelørn explains that these direct communications are a form of indirect communication, “Straightforward statements

²⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 124.

²⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 124.

²⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 124-125.

function to draw attention to Christ in order that a human being will stumble on the contradiction, be shoved backwards and forced into a situation of choice. The decision either to believe in Christ or to be offended by him will thereby be disclosed.”²⁶⁷ The God-man, in communicating himself to be God or that he is lowly, appears to his contemporary not to be this way. Because of this, Anti-Climacus claims that the God-man was able to speak only through indirect communication.

Anti-Climacus distinguishes between two kinds of indirect communication. The first kind is when the communicator makes himself “into a nobody, purely objective, and then continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity. This is what some pseudonymous writers are accustomed to calling the double-reflection of the communication.”²⁶⁸ The subject matter becomes the primary focus in this first kind of indirect communication, and the communicator becomes a “nonperson.”²⁶⁹ This means that the communicator is no longer a factor in how one interprets the subject matter. The “double reflection” refers to communicating two contradictory sides of an issue so that the result appears agreeable to both sides. Anti-Climacus uses the example of faith. Where someone presents faith in double reflection, those who hold faith see the presentation as a “defense of the faith and the atheist sees it as an attack.”²⁷⁰

The other kind of indirect communication involves the speaker communicating about himself or living out his own communication. The speaker is not a nonperson as in the first kind of indirect communication but is what is being communicated. The

²⁶⁷ Cappelørn, *The Movements of Offense*, 123.

²⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 133.

²⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 133.

²⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 133.

communicator is fundamental to the communication. This is the indirect communication of the God-man, an indirect communication that is used because the God-man is the sign of a contradiction and is unrecognizable as God. Consequently, a contemporary of the God-man can be offended that the God-man does not speak directly and instead speaks with indirect communication.

IX. Summary

Anti-Climacus presents a rigorous account of faith as being a contemporary of the God-man and meeting the requirements of believing his words. When one becomes a contemporary with the God-man one can become offended by the God-man because the God-man is in collision with the established order, because he, as man, claims to be God or because he, as God, appears to be man, or because the God-man speaks indirectly. What we are going to look at next is how Johannes' point of view of faith and Anti-Climacus' point of view of faith complement each other to form Kierkegaard's view of faith.

Chapter 4

I. Introduction

At the outset of this thesis, I posed three questions. Chapter two and chapter three focus on the first two questions: What is Johannes de Silentio's view of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, and what is Anti-Climacus' view of faith in *Practice in Christianity*? In this chapter I will answer the third question: how are these Kierkegaard's conclusions?

This chapter has two parts. First, I look at important differences between Johannes and Anti-Climacus. Second, I will explain what I believe is Kierkegaard's view of faith.

II. Important Differences

There are two important differences between Johannes and Anti-Climacus. The first is that they are at different stages in the Kierkegaard corpus. Johannes is at the ethical stage whereas Anti-Climacus is at the religious stage.

Johannes is a pseudonym in tension. He is a poet seeking faith and admiring Abraham's faith. He is offended at Abraham's faith and at a "quasi-religious stage."²⁷¹ This means he is at the ethical stage, where duty and living a moral life are fundamental. But he peers into the religious stage, where one is a follower of the God-man through faith.²⁷²

In contrast to Johannes, Anti-Climacus is at the religious stage. Kierkegaard says that Anti-Climacus is a Christian "on an extraordinary high level."²⁷³ Mackey describes

²⁷¹ Mooney, *Knights of Faith*, 5.

²⁷² My position is similar to Ryan Kemp who argues, as does Edward Mooney, that Johannes is a "knight of infinite resignation" ("Johannes de Silentio," 156).

²⁷³ "Johannes Climacus places himself so low that he even says that he himself is not a Christian, one seems to be able to detect in Anti-Climacus that he considers himself to be

Anti-Climacus as "that 'ideal Christian' that never was and never will be."²⁷⁴ Because of his position as the ideal Christian, Anti-Climacus has the ability to call his audience to faith in a way that Kierkegaard believed he himself would not be able to.

The second important difference between Johannes and Anti-Climacus is that they are writing in different genres. *Fear and Trembling* is a "dialectical lyric."²⁷⁵ It is dialectical in the sense that there are two theses put in tension with one another. For instance, there is a tension between Abraham being a murderer and a man of faith. It is lyrical in that Johannes has a tendency toward the dramatic and storytelling. He has an eulogy to Abraham and three exordiums. The focus of the work is the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

Johannes' "dialectical lyric" forms a confusing but stimulating picture of faith. Johannes' goal is to challenge the Danish people to consider whether or not they have faith. He says near the beginning: "But the point is to perceive the greatness of what Abraham did so that the person can judge for himself whether he has the vocation and the courage to be tried in something like this."²⁷⁶ Poetry and dialectics are used to encourage the reader to consider for themselves whether they have faith.

The genre of *Practice in Christianity* is different from that of *Fear and Trembling*. It is a religious work intended "for awakening and inward deepening."²⁷⁷ Rather than encouraging the reader to consider for themselves whether they have faith, Anti-Climacus

a Christian on an extraordinarily high level... I would place myself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus" (JP, VI 6433).

²⁷⁴ Mackey, *Points of View*, 245.

²⁷⁵ This is the subtitle of *Fear and Trembling*.

²⁷⁶ Kierkegaard *Fear and Trembling*, 53.

²⁷⁷ This is the subtitle of No. 1 of *Practice in Christianity*.

is calling on individuals to be contemporaries of the God-man.²⁷⁸ He lays out the call of the God-man and the possibility of offense faced by contemporaries of the God-man.

Anti-Climacus' call to faith forms a clearer and fuller picture of faith. His goal is to "help in making people aware of the situation and help them understand."²⁷⁹ Unlike Johannes, who seeks simply to challenge Danish society's view of faith, Anti-Climacus seeks to give people a picture that will awaken them to consider the possibility of faith.

Although Johannes and Anti-Climacus are at different stages and writing in different genres, their differences complement one another in a way that helps us see what Kierkegaard's own view of faith is.

III. Kierkegaard's Conclusion about Faith

Johannes does not understand faith because he lacks faith. He lacks faith because he lacks the courage to carry it out. To Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*, faith is when one becomes a contemporary with the God-man and lacks offense. Given their conclusions, I argue that Kierkegaard's view of faith is the aligning of the self in a trusting²⁸⁰ relationship with the God-man. One outside of faith can perceive faith to be a paradox or find faith offensive; one must have faith to avoid offense and overcome the paradox.

²⁷⁸ In the "Invocation," Anti-Climacus says, "Lord Jesus Christ, would that we, too, might become contemporary with you in this way, might see you in your true form and in the surroundings of actuality as you walked here on earth" (Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 9).

²⁷⁹ Marek, "Servant of the Word," 46-47.

²⁸⁰ I am using the term "trust" as John J. Davenport does in "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*." Davenport defines it as a "firm conviction that God's revealed promise will be fulfilled" (John J. Davenport, Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," In *Ethics, Love and Faith*, Ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 201).

A. Aligning the Self

We see how faith is the aligning the self in *Fear and Trembling* with Johannes' struggle with the paradox of Abraham's faith. Johannes says that if there is no faith then Abraham is "lost"²⁸¹ and a "murderer"²⁸² because he is making a moral mistake in light of society's rules that govern ethical norms (the ethical or the universal). Johannes' point of view of faith is that to have it, one must be aligned to receive guidance outside society's ethical norms. "Thus there is a paradox, that the single individual or the self as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute."²⁸³ Johannes' single individual, or self, is Abraham. Johannes thinks that Abraham is not acting as a member of culture: Society has not made the decision for him. Society makes decisions for an individual when they act in accordance with its rules and principles. Abraham has self-consciously chosen to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham makes his decision from the position of an "absolute relationship," a relationship that transcends the ethical norms of his society. The absolute is God who issued Abraham a command to sacrifice his son. So Abraham, as a self/individual, is aligned so that he is outside the ethical and in a position that is directly open to the command of God.

We also see this aligning of the self in *Anti-Climacus* when he says that having faith is one being a contemporary with the God-man. This means taking on an "attitude or stance"²⁸⁴ like Christ's contemporaries. Westphal explains that one with faith "is in the same epistemic situation as those who were eyewitness contemporaries of the inviter and

²⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 81.

²⁸² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 66.

²⁸³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 123.

²⁸⁴ Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard*, 13.

the invitation.”²⁸⁵ Faith is aligning of the self when one comes into the same epistemic position as Christ’s contemporaries. An epistemic position is a point of view or perspective that provides knowledge. To be in the same epistemic position as another means to have a similar point of view that provides the same or similar knowledge. This is similar to Abraham’s position. Both a contemporary of the God-man and Abraham are directly open to the command of God.

B. A Trusting Relationship

To Kierkegaard, faith is when the self is aligned in a trusting relationship with God. Johannes sees that Abraham is in a trusting relationship with God. Abraham “has an absolute duty to God.”²⁸⁶ Abraham was required to give up Isaac, believing that Isaac’s death was inevitable, but he trusted God to fulfill God’s original promise to provide Abraham an heir.

Likewise, in *Practice in Christianity*, the God-man calls “come here...and I will give you rest.”²⁸⁷ In return for becoming a contemporary with the God-man, one finds rest from one’s sin. Yet, one has to trust that this man who claims to be God is who he claims to be. There is no “demonstration”²⁸⁸ that gives sufficient reason to believe his words. Rather, one must first come into the relationship, trusting the God-man. Westphal describes this trusting as “a mode of understanding” that has “its own interior rationale.” There is a ‘logic of insanity.’²⁸⁹ What this means is that this “trusting” makes sense only

²⁸⁵ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 257.

²⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 70.

²⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 11.

²⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 95, 96, 26, 27.

²⁸⁹ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, 260. Westphal is quoting from Walter Lowrie’s earlier translation. (See Walter Lowrie, *Fear and Trembling*, Princeton:

when one first agrees with it. Sufficient reasons emerge with the experience of being in this trusting relationship. Once one believes the God-man's words, according to Anti-Climacus, then one begins to acquire reasons for believing it.

Johannes is one looking at this "logic of insanity" from the outside and, precisely because he is outside it, he is unable to understand it. Abraham trusts God to return Isaac though God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Johannes does not understand how Abraham can trust God to return Isaac.

C. Relationship with the God-man

In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes does not speak much about God, much less the God-man.²⁹⁰ The focus is on Abraham and his relationship to God.²⁹¹ The reason is that Johannes did not have faith, and so it is reasonable to expect that he focuses on one with faith rather than the object of faith. The God-man is the primary focus of *Practice in Christianity*. The God-man is God in human form. Also, he is in a state of "abasement."²⁹² Earlier we referred to this as kenosis, which is Christ's emptying his divinity and appearing as a servant. Because of his state, the God-man appears as if he is merely human to his contemporaries. Yet, the God-man claimed to be divine. One with faith will believe his words to be true in spite of the offense.

Princeton University Press, 1944, 58.) The Hong translation reads "as they say in the context of madness" (*Practice*, 54).

²⁹⁰ Jesus is mentioned twice (28, 66), and they are off-hand comments.

²⁹¹ In "*Fear and Trembling's* 'Attunement' as Midrash," Jacob Howland explains that Johannes "effectively rewrite[s] the *Akedah* as a story in which Abraham has no substantial personal relationship or special familiarity with God" (35).

²⁹² Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 36.

D. Overcoming the Absurdity and Avoiding Offense

To Kierkegaard, in order to come to faith one must avoid offense and overcome the absurd. Johannes views Abraham's faith as "absurd."²⁹³ It presents a paradox to him since he is understanding faith from the point of view of the ethical. Westphal claims that in "all Kierkegaardian texts"²⁹⁴ concepts like faith being absurd are "only such in relation to 'human understanding,' which is... finite."²⁹⁵ With Johannes, he understands Abraham's faith from the point of view of the ethical.

Stephen Evans explains that the ethical begins with the assumption that one can live life within the domain of the ethical. The problem is that "this tidy, rational assumption is contradicted by experience; it [religious life] begins with the discovery that actual existence is 'incommensurable' with the demands of ethics."²⁹⁶ Certain areas of life are unable to meet the standards given by the ethical, which means that the ethical is incomplete and creates certain absurdities like God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but promising Abraham an heir. Evans says that faith comes by "grounding [the self] in a reality that transcends society."²⁹⁷ This means that one overcomes the absurdity by having a "direct and personal relationship with God."²⁹⁸

Anti-Climacus claims that one must avoid offense before one comes to faith.

Offense can take different forms, but the way one avoids offense is by living "in fear and

²⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 40, 46, 69.

²⁹⁴ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept*, 22 footnote 7.

²⁹⁵ Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept*, 22 footnote 7.

²⁹⁶ C. Stephen Evans, "Faith as the Telos of Morality," In *Kierkegaard and the Self: Collected Essays*, Ed. Stephen Evans, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 1998), 19.

²⁹⁷ Evans, "Faith as the Telos of Morality," 20.

²⁹⁸ Evans, "Faith as the Telos of Morality," 23.

trembling.”²⁹⁹ Fear and trembling “signify that we are in the process of becoming... and... signify that there is a God – something every human being and every Established Order ought not to forget for a moment.”³⁰⁰ Westphal considers this passage to be the “heart of *Practice in Christianity*.”³⁰¹ He explains that what Anti-Climacus means is that “faith is the recognition of the relativity of our individual beliefs and behaviors and of our collective theories and practices – before God.”³⁰² In order to avoid offense, one can include overcoming the absurd in this by recognizing that one’s point of view is not universal but relative before God.

IV. Conclusion

I set out with three questions. In Chapter one, I examined the connection between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. This gave the groundwork to answer the first two questions, what is Johannes’ view of faith and what is Anti-Climacus’ view of faith, questions I sought to answer in chapters two and three, respectively. In this last chapter I explained how one can use Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms to explain his view of faith. According to Kierkegaard, faith is the aligning of the self in a trusting relationship with the God-man. One outside of faith can perceive faith to be a paradox or find faith offensive; one must have faith to avoid offense and overcome the paradox.

²⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 88.

³⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice*, 88.

³⁰¹ Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 40.

³⁰² Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept*, 40.

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Ethics Bowl Member and Team Captain, Taylor University (2008-2011)

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Ockenga Honors Scholar, Taylor University (2009-2010)

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