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## The Self in the Mirror of Despair: Søren Kierkegaard on the Authentic Christian Life

Yi Shao  
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The Self in the Mirror of Despair: Søren Kierkegaard on the Authentic Christian Life

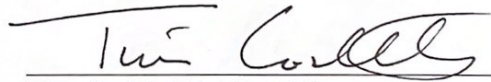
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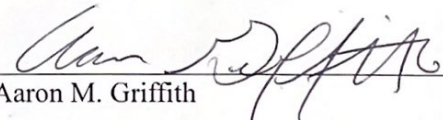
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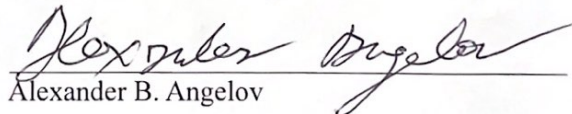
Yi (Yee) Shao

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Accepted for Honors  
(Honors)

  
Timothy M. Costelloe, Director

  
Aaron M. Griffith

  
Alexander B. Angelov

**The Self in the Mirror of Despair: Søren Kierkegaard on the Authentic  
Christian Life**

Yi (Yee) Shao

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## Abbreviations of the Primary Texts

[FT] *Fear and Trembling*, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (ed. and trans.) (Kierkegaard's Writings vol. 6), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.

[CUP] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments,"* Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (ed. and trans.), 2 volumes (Kierkegaard's Writings vol. 12), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

[CUP]<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard's *Concluding unscientific postscript*. Trans. by David F. Swenson. Princeton: Princeton university press, for American Scandinavian foundation, 1941.

[SUD] *The Sickness Unto Death*, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (ed. and trans.) (Kierkegaard's Writings vol. 19), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

[JP] *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (ed. and trans.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–78, 7 volumes.

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<sup>1</sup> CUP refers to Hong's translation unless otherwise noted.

To stop a man on the street and to stand still in order to speak with him is not as difficult as having to say something to a passerby in passing, without standing still oneself or delaying the other, without wanting to induce him to go the same way, but just urging him to go his own way—and such is the relation between an existing person and an existing person when the communication pertains to the truth as existence-inwardness.

—Søren Kierkegaard

## Introduction

Søren Kierkegaard describes a human life as a dialectic of three stages: the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. He argues that there is a qualitative break between the ethical and religious spheres, which requires a “leap” for the individual to cross. In this thesis, I argue that the key to understanding the concept of the leap is to focus on its inevitable failure. Failure is essential to an individual’s transformation to becoming a Christian, as no human beings in this life can ever achieve authentic faith, become a knight of faith, or arrive at *Religiousness B*. For an individual, the progression towards the religious stage is a development of his consciousness of the self. In the process of a continuous self-deepening, the subject eventually reaches the moment where he is fully conscious of his ideal self, the truly authentic lifestyle, and his negative self, consisting of past faults and wrongdoings. In this moment, the individual is pushed to the apex of his existential pathos, thereby arriving at the brink of the ethical, and taking the leap. Here, the *failure* of the leap is critical because the individual is far from landing secure in the religious sphere after the leap. Instead, as the failure is inevitable and predestined, the subject is ushered into aporia, a liminal stage between the ethical and religious. This individual in aporia is marked by despair and emptiness due to the complete annihilation of the self. That is, the subject realizes the impossibility of becoming a complete self and the inability to eradicate its negative self. In aporia, the individual is offered the final chance to bring himself before God in a total submission, as he truthfully accepts his guilt as sin in humility. In doing so, the individual ultimately remains content in an eternal striving to be a better ethical being without daring to claim himself as the faithful.

The thesis consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, I will discuss Kierkegaard’s use of three major pseudonyms. Each fictional persona is uniquely crafted to represent a part of



Kierkegaard's self. Through pseudonymous writings, Kierkegaard indirectly communicates to the readers that an existing person's self is first found in broken pieces, and it stands in need of being recollected and unified. Readers are thus obligated to reflect upon themselves and examine the process of completing the self by looking into each pseudonymous narrative. In the second chapter, I explain how a subjective existing person is capable of double-reflection and engages in developing the self as an ongoing synthesis of opposites. The individual continually shapes himself by appropriating his acquired knowledge of the external world, and the most significant knowledge is the religious truth. In the third chapter, I will examine the problem of faith, namely, that the subjective appropriation of religious truth is paradoxical in nature. To properly appropriate the religious truth and accept his life as an existential task, the individual needs to deepen his pathos by renouncing everything he loves. By going through a dialectical stage consisting of three steps, he eventually realizes himself as a guilty being. In the fourth chapter, I will discuss the concept of the leap as the individual's final attempt to deny and escape his totality of guilt, which is doomed to fail. By failing the leap, he falls into a total depravity, where he becomes conscious of the existence of Christian God and the concept of sin. In sin-consciousness, the individual admits his limitations and inability as a human being before God. In the fifth chapter, I explain that a Christian self is a never to be completed task of eternal striving, where the individual appears to be in peace and harmony from outside but remains in suffering and pain from inside.

## Chapter 1. The Broken Self

Almost half of Kierkegaard's works are signed with pseudonyms. All of these pseudonymous works can be understood holistically as one authorship. In the first chapter, I present an overview of three major pseudonyms, examine each one's distinct qualities and narratives, and explain how we, as readers, should employ the perspectives of the fictional persona to approach the problem of faith. I argue that Kierkegaard's use of various pseudonyms suggests the concept of a broken self, and the readers are responsible for the task of recollecting and completing their own selves.

Kierkegaard explicitly addresses his use of pseudonyms at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

From the beginning, I have been well aware and am aware that my personal actuality is a constraint that the pseudonymous authors in pathos-filled willfulness might wish removed, the sooner the better, or made as insignificant as possible, and yet in turn, ironically attentive, might wish to have present as the repelling opposition. My role is the joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the author or the authors. (627)

The pseudonymous authorship, consciously and carefully constructed, not only serves as an essential part of the writings, but also functions as an independent individual in a dialectical relationship with Kierkegaard. This relationship cannot be strictly defined in a formulation; the pseudonymous author is neither a complete opposition nor an indifferent interlocutor. To fully appreciate Kierkegaard's works, it is important to examine how pseudonymous authors differ and

what messages lie hidden. I propose to take a step back and examine the special functions and connections of each narrative to Kierkegaard himself.

The pseudonymous works in chronological order are Kierkegaard's reflection of his ongoing selfhood, and each authorship represents a slice of himself in a specific stage. As the self is ever progressing towards the ideal, each pseudonymous work is a time stamp of Kierkegaard's self-consciousness. Described as "the repelling opposition," the pseudonymous authorship is best viewed in a negative light, as something to be overcome both by the author and the readers (CUP 627). That is, writing as the "reduplicated author," Kierkegaard is in a process of superseding the part of self through his reflection on the fictional persona (CUP 627). It aligns with his idea that "the essentially Christian is always the positive which is recognizable by the negative" (JP 4.4680). By presenting the pseudonyms as the negative, Kierkegaard attempts to delineate a positive account of Christianity. Here, the negative does not mean that the pseudonymous writings are problematic; it suggests that the narrative is partial and incomplete, representing only slices of Kierkegaard's ideas. In other words, the pseudonymous works are a result of the ongoing synthesis between Kierkegaard's own personal actuality and the pseudonymous author's fictional actuality; each character reflects Kierkegaard's self at different specific stages of the development. As readers, it is our task to appreciate these fictional personas' specific points of views, and, more importantly, find out each one's limitations and biases suggested from their narratives. This is the purpose of the pseudonymous authorship, as the pseudonyms serve as a mediated ground between Kierkegaard and the reader. Kierkegaard presents his own self as an ongoing synthesis developed throughout the pseudonyms; readers start to reflect upon their own selves when moving beyond the limited pseudonyms. Thus, a genuine communication between the author and readers is established indirectly through pseudonyms. To be specific, by

eliminating the fictional personas, both the author and the readers move forward dialectically in their own development of selves.

I will now move to the discussion of three major pseudonyms. Concerning the name references, Kierkegaard states as follows: “it is my wish, my prayer, that [the readers] will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author’s name, not mine” (CUP 627). Out of respect for Kierkegaard’s wish, I will discuss each work using the corresponding pseudonym, and only use his real name when referring to his own voice. The three pseudonymous works in chronological order are *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de Silentio, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* by Johannes Climacus, and *The Sickness unto Death* by Anti-Climacus.

Silentio, used only once as the pseudonym of *Fear and Trembling*, is presented as a subject individual deeply connected with the story of Abraham. Like his own interpretation of Abraham, Silentio exhibits a paradoxical nature proved by his contradictory claims of self. His comments on his self-identity are constantly shifting: “The present author is by no means a philosopher. He is *poetice et eleganter* a supplementary clerk;” “I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically” (FT 7, 90). Though he disclaims being a poet or philosopher, he does carry out the task of a poet and a philosopher by praising Abraham and analyzing his actions in a dialectical movement. In addition, Silentio as a paradox is evident in his contradictory employment of passion and reason. Though he is driven by a powerful passion to imitate Abraham and constantly claims faith as unintelligible to human mind, he has a strong tendency to rationalize Abraham’s actions. Therefore, to correctly interpret *FT*, we should first examine Kierkegaard’s purpose of creating Silentio as a paradoxical figure with conflicting narratives.

Kierkegaard designs Silentio as a person who experiences intense sufferings in his pursuit of faith. *FT* is not about Kierkegaard's exegesis of the story of Abraham; instead, Silentio is created as the protagonist to show what it means to approach faith as an existing person. By assessing Silentio's self-consciousness, we can pin down the relationship between Silentio and Kierkegaard, and thus have a clear sense what *FT* aims to convey. I suggest that we examine the exordium, the opening passage of *FT*, as it can be read as Kierkegaard's hint for readers. It describes a man's developing relation with the story of Abraham over the years. This passage appears odd when compared to the rest of the book. First, it does not address the story itself, but gives an account of one man's appropriation of the story; second, this man is not revealed and never mentioned again; and third, unlike any other passages, it is written in third-person as a distanced and reflective perspective. These oddness makes sense if we consider this passage to be written in Kierkegaard's own voice as an inspection of Silentio as the man. This passage is Kierkegaard's hint for readers not to approach *FT* as a study of the biblical story; instead, the focus is to explore what it means for an individual to appropriate the Scriptures. *FT* is a unique example about how Silentio, as a hypothetical individual created by Kierkegaard, appropriates the story of Abraham, and the exordium can be treated as a preview of Silentio's characters. Silentio's relation to the story can be summarized as follows: "The older he became, the more often his thoughts turned to that story; his enthusiasm for it became greater and greater, and yet he could understand the story less and less" (FT 9). Two qualities are emphasized here: the increasing passion to go near Abraham and the lack of rational understanding of Abraham. The strong passion is confirmed by Silentio's discussion of the knight of faith and praise of Abraham (FT 46-49); the failed attempt to analyze Abraham's dialectical movement is confirmed by Silentio's open claims of inability to understand the paradox (FT 50, 99). The exordium serves as

Kierkegaard's implicit preview of Silentio as an imaginary subject individual dealing with a biblical story. It suggests that Kierkegaard creates Silentio as being unconscious of his own paradoxical nature. This unconsciousness becomes apparent in Silentio's discussion of Abraham's silence in the third Problema. The third Problema can be understood as a manifestation of Silentio's own silence, as he radically attempts to rationally approximate religious passion yet fails. The silence is characterized as an inability to move forward in the pursuit of faith. Silentio in the third Problema will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and 5.

Johannes Climacus is considered as the most important and decisive pseudonym to Kierkegaard as he originally planned to conclude his pseudonymous authorship with Climacus' *Postscript* (later he wrote in a new one called Anti-Climacus, which will be discussed next). Climacus is a dialectician, who has a genuine interest in Christianity and initiates a philosophical investigation on how to become a Christian. Compared to Silentio and Anti-Climacus, Climacus shares the most similarities with Kierkegaard. He infuses personal experiences and frequent reflections of his role as a writer into his arguments. When explaining what a writer's task is to him, Climacus provides both a humoristic but honest soliloquy (185-88) and a heartfelt and moving personal experience (234-51). Right after it, he also devotes a complete separate appendix to a reflection of Kierkegaard's entire pseudonymous works, which is only made possible from Kierkegaard's own perspective. It is also confirmed by the fact that Climacus's *Philosophical Fragments* was initially planned to publish under Kierkegaard's own name, and was only changed at the last minute. In addition, at the end of the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard reveals himself as the author of all previous pseudonymous works, which weakens the existence of Climacus in some degree. It is evident that Kierkegaard's own thoughts and voices remain intimate and close to Climacus' narrative throughout the work.

While it is tempting to attribute Climacus' view to Kierkegaard completely, one should be careful about the distinction between the two. Though Climacus provides a more logical and composed narrative than Silentio does, his narrative is still not fully reliable. According to his own account, he is "neither a religious orator, nor [him]self a religious individual, but merely a humoristic experimenting psychologist" (Swenson CUP 431). Here, Climacus refuses to claim authority or take responsibility for his writings by denying his religious identity. Instead, he is merely an observer and a distanced dialectician, who has interests in religion. In other words, the description of the specific religious stage is not to be taken as a fully reliable account. Let us examine "a humoristic experimenting psychologist" more closely. "Humoristic" refers to Climacus' constant uses of irony, jest, and subversions. The aim to be humoristic is to relieve himself of certain responsibilities and distance himself away from the readers. In the appendix, Climacus addresses directly to the readers:

So then the book is superfluous; let no one therefore take the pains to appeal to it as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it. To be an authority is far too burdensome an existence for a humorist who regards it precisely as one of the conveniences of life that there are men of a sort who can and will be authorities, from whom one has the profit that one can without ado accept their opinions—if one is not foolish enough to pull these men down, for in that there is no profit. (Swenson CUP 546)

Here, Climacus disclaims the validity of *CUP*, and subverts his own dialectical arguments on what it means to be a Christian. In other words, *CUP* is presented as a detailed instruction for an individual to progress towards Christianity, yet it is written by a non-religious abstract thinker. By doing this, readers are struck unbalanced by the contradictory nature of the work itself, and

ushered into a reflection their own actuality. In addition, it is to be noted that this disclaimer itself is also written in a humoristic and ironic tone, targeting those who avoid the tasks of self-reflection by quickly appealing the authority. Individuals cannot blindly submit to Christian authorities without first grasping a clear understanding of “authority.” An “experimenting psychologist” is to be understood as someone who posits hypothetical conditions on an existing individual. Climacus constructs *CUP* by breaking down Christianity into a series of theses and hypothetical psychological conditions, and tests them on himself as an existing individual. In other words, *CUP* is a thought experiment run by Kierkegaard, where the subject is Climacus. Climacus represents merely a possibility when one individual is introduced to Christianity. By going through Climacus’ dialectical movements, both the author and the readers become aware of their own actualities under the “hypothetical conditions” of Christianity, thereby experimenting with their own selves. Climacus describes the experiment as follows: “By taking place in the form of an experiment, the communication creates opposition for itself, and the experiment establishes a yawning chasm between reader and author, posits the separation of inwardness between them, so that an immediate understanding is rendered impossible” (Swenson *CUP* 235). If we become aware of the experiment itself and consciously distance ourselves from Climacus, the distance between us, the readers, and Kierkegaard, the author, is drawn close through indirect communication in our own inwardness. In this way, Climacus’ narrative is separate from Kierkegaard’s own voice as biased and incomplete.

Finally, let us look at the last pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, which, in the literal sense, is a response to Climacus. In the same year, Kierkegaard published works under his own name other than *The Sickness unto Death*. The natural question is why he feels the need of a pseudonym specifically for this work when his pseudonymous authorship is rather completed in *CUP*. It is



evident that Anti-Climacus was neither a planned response to Climacus nor a mere continuation of his habit of pseudonymous writing. Deciding on the use of Anti-Climacus was difficult and cost Kierkegaard roughly a year. After the publication of the book, he writes in his journals as follows:

It is absolutely right—a pseudonym had to be used [on *The Sickness unto Death*].  
When the demands of ideality are to be presented at their maximum, then one must take extreme care not to be confused with them himself, as if he himself was the ideal. Protestations could be used to avoid this. But the only sure way is this redoubling. The difference from the earlier pseudonyms is simply but essentially this, that I do not retract the whole thing humorously but *identify myself as one who is striving*. (JP 6.6446, italics added)

The intention of this pseudonym clearly differs from the other two; while Silentio and Climacus are designed to push readers to think for themselves, Anti-Climacus is about Kierkegaard's worries for his own actuality. For Kierkegaard, publishing *SUD* under his own name posts a danger or temptation for him to misidentify himself as an ideality, and the use of Anti-Climacus, as a redoubling can prevent the confusion. It suggests that *SUD* is written from the perspective of one who has progressed further than Kierkegaard, and reached a state of ideality. As the title goes "A Christian Psychological Exposition," it is reasonable to think that the perspective is from an authentic Christian, in Kierkegaard's own terms, a knight of faith, the one in *Religiousness B*. As I mentioned above, pseudonyms represent Kierkegaard's ongoing development of the self, and Anti-Climacus, unlike the other two, is the ultimate end that Kierkegaard has not reached. In other words, the relationship between Kierkegaard and Anti-Climacus is decisive and unique because Anti-Climacus renders Kierkegaard as incomplete. The nature of *SUD* is contradictory in

that Kierkegaard, as an insufficient religious practitioner, attempts to write in the voice of an authentic Christian.

This unique relation makes the narrative seemingly reliable but still limited. It is reliable in a sense that, in order to depict Anti-Climacus as a true Christian, Kierkegaard “do[es] not retract the whole thing humorously” as he does in the case of Climacus. *SUD* presents a comprehensive analysis of human psychology of despair in a formal and disciplined style. Anti-Climacus refrains from employing any humorous or comic subversion. He focuses on providing an accurate description of the different stages of despair based on his past experiences. However, it is limited especially on the account of faith. If Kierkegaard identifies himself as “one who is striving,” he is unable to offer a description of faith even he is wearing the cape of Anti-Climacus. Conscious of the problem himself, he avoids directly talking about the specific transformation of faith. Upon the discussion of faith as a paradox, Anti-Climacus exhibits neither difficulty of understanding nor infinite passion; instead, he goes over it with ease in a purely dialectical way. The intentional omission of a direct discussion of faith is due to Kierkegaard’s genuine lack of knowledge of this state. In other words, though Kierkegaard is fully invested in Anti-Climacus in *SUD*, he leaves the most critical part, the transformation into a genuine Christian, unexplained.

Based on the three pseudonyms, Kierkegaard’s account of faith and self is never fully and clearly presented, but indirectly communicated from the mouths of different personalities. “Kierkegaard does not give his readers results. He rather attempts in the pseudonymous literature to embody these existential viewpoints or ‘spheres.’ Readers are not simply given information, they are imaginatively presented with existential possibilities which they must reflect on and interact with” (Evans 14). The various and sometimes conflicting narratives lead to a

complicated and elusive picture of faith and self. He avoids offering anything didactic or instructional, and intentionally leaves readers in confusion and uncertainty to create an effect of anxiety. In this way, the readers' task is not completed when they stop reading; they are induced to turn inward and reflect upon themselves, trying to fully understand what is in Kierkegaard's mind. The purpose of the pseudonymous authorship is to establish an indirect communication between the author and readers, which goes beyond time and space: "To me it seems better truly to come to a mutual understanding separately in inwardness, even though this occurs slowly...It seems to me to be more consistent on the part of the communicator not to have made the slightest adaptation in order to have someone understand him, and the first and last to watch himself lest he become important in relation to others, which, far from being inwardness, is external, noisy conduct" (CUP 278). As Kierkegaard wrote each work with pseudonyms, he was collecting each broken piece and progressing his self. For readers, the ambiguity and uncertainty of the pseudonymous writings serve as an external force and motivation to attend to and develop their own selves. Thus, the author and readers engage in a conversation in their own separate inwardness through the mediated ground of pseudonyms. Eventually, readers realizes that the task is never to understand the pseudonymous authors' selves or Kierkegaard's self, but to complete their own selves.

In this chapter, I have addressed specific characteristics of three major pseudonymous authors. While they all engage in a discussion of faith, they approach it from various perspectives, which are unique to their characters but also limited in specific ways, and thus manifest drastically different attitudes and writing styles. The pseudonymous personas are designed to reflect a sense of brokenness in Kierkegaard's self and represent an evolving understanding of faith in different stages. Readers are thus obligated to go beyond each author's

limitations, and look for what Kierkegaard indirectly communicate through each pseudonymous figure. By doing this, the reader becomes conscious of his own broken self. In the next chapter, I will explain the concept of an existing person's self and demonstrate how it is connected to faith.

## Chapter 2. The Self at the Door of Christianity

In the previous chapter, I argued that the pseudonymous writings show the multiple layers of Kierkegaard's self. Through the contradictory and complicated voices of different fictional personas, Kierkegaard implies that every individual's self is first discovered in broken pieces, and waiting to be completed. The implicit task of the pseudonymous writings is to reach a unified and integral self through the pursuit of faith. In this chapter, I will examine the relation between the self of a subjective existing individual and the religious truth. An existing person's self is an ongoing synthesis of positive and negative, eternal and temporal, infinite and finite. To complete the self, an individual is required to subjectively reflect on his relation with God in inwardness. First, I will explain that a subjective existing person is defined by his ability to double-reflect, namely, to rationally understand and subjectively appropriate the knowledge of the external world; through double-reflection, he gradually recognizes the distinct concept of self as an ongoing synthesis. Second, I will explain how religious truth is based on the most important series of historical events with the most intensive objective uncertainty for an existing person.

A subjective existing individual is distinguished from an objective abstract thinker for his ability to double-reflect:

Whereas objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker as existing is essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has another kind of reflection, specifically, that of inwardness, of possession, whereby it belongs to the subject and to no one else. (CUP 73)

For Kierkegaard, the self-identity is defined by two crucial activities: thinking and acting. For an objective thinker, the self is solely defined by the process of thinking, which is characterized as a movement directing outward. The objective thinker, represented by the Hegelian intellectuals in Kierkegaard's time, dismisses the personal actuality of existing individuals by abstracting from the external world, historical events, and religious truth. This process, called the first reflection or the objective reflection, is a one-direction outward movement as the individual transforms his thoughts into rational speculative knowledge. The objective reflection is marked by the individual's indifference towards both his existence and thoughts. As the line of thoughts is made into the objective truth, the thinking process is complete, and the truth is a finished, universal product divorced from the thinker. Therefore, the objective abstract thinker in the first reflection is not concerned with his own personal existence.

For a subjectively existing individual, by contrast, thinking is only the first stage, and the process is far from finished, as he puts more emphasis on the activity of being. He is interested in how his thoughts are associated with his personal daily life; as such, he initiates a second reflection. The second reflection, also called subjective reflection, is a movement directed inward, transforming universal speculation into a subjective truth. Climacus defines subjective truth as follows: "An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person" (CUP 203). To be precise, it is an appropriation of the knowledge of the external world, where the subjective individual turns the world-historical knowledge into his own by acting on it. The subjective reflection does not require the individual to make his thoughts universally known or understood; in fact, the subject is required to carry it out alone by fixating inwardly on his existence. Because one's personal existence is known only by himself, the only expression of the subjective truth is

implicit and indirect through the individuals' concrete actions. As we can see, the subjective existing individual possesses a distinct kind of inwardness based on his capacity for subjective reflection. Therefore, an existing person is distinguished with double-reflection, consisting of objective outward reflection and subjective inward reflection.

Double-reflection is essential for an individual to become aware of the self as a dialectical progression. Since the abstract thinker stops at the first reflection, he is not aware of a distinct presence of self. Because mere thinking is his sole activity, his existence is permeated with rational understanding of the external world. "In historical knowledge, he comes to know much about the world, nothing about himself" (CUP 81). The closer he moves to historical facts in the first reflection, the more abstract his personal actuality becomes; eventually, it reaches a point that his self is defined by a series of ideas. While he is immersed deeply in the speculative knowledge, he does not know what he really is, and is not even conscious of the concept of self. The emergence of self-consciousness requires one to reflect in a double direction, in other words, to be a subjective existing individual. According to Climacus, "In thinking, [the subjective individual] thinks the universal, but, as existing in this thinking, as acquiring this in his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated" (CUP 73). Here, the subjective isolation means that one has a growing awareness and interest in his personal existence, and begins to distinguish his existing self from pure thinking. The notion of self is reinforced as the subject tries to relate his personal experiences to each objective truth. After the individual realizes that his existing self is distinguished from his thinking and defined by his actions, he becomes aware that the self is a dialectical progression pushed by the double-reflection. In each subjective reflection, as the individual tries to act on the objective truth, he realizes that his self is shaped and changed by his actions. Self is no longer a static concept but constantly evolves

through the subjective appropriation of truth. In this process of double-reflection, the subject becomes increasingly interested in the development of his self; as a result, he examines his personal existence more closely by plunging deeper into his inwardness and subjective isolation.

I have given an overview of a subjective existing person, who begins to develop his self through double-reflection. However, questions still remain about the subjective person's appropriation of truth: What exactly does the subjective person try to appropriate? What is the specific process of the appropriation? What does it mean for a person to be subjectively inward? Why does the appropriation necessarily happen in subjective inwardness? These questions concern two main aspects of the subjective person: first, in what an existing person should be interested, and, second, how to become subjective. I propose to approach these two questions by looking at Climacus' two claims on truth: truth is subjectivity; truth is inwardness (CUP 192). Appearing to be short and general, these two claims are easily confused and misinterpreted, yet they are the corresponding answers to our two questions. I will now further elucidate a subjective existing person from these two aspects.

Truth is subjectivity means that the existing person is infinitely interested in objectively uncertain truth that is most related to subjective experiences. Climacus does not mean that the subjective truth and objective truth are mutually exclusive, or there is no universal speculative knowledge. Instead, the existing individual should invest his interests in particular kinds of truth related to his existence. Recall the definition of a subjective truth: "An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person" (CUP 203). Here, the subjective truth is achieved through appropriation of "an objective uncertainty." What Climacus has in mind is moral and religious truth, which are neither fundamental nor self-evident axioms. For example, the proposition,



“murder is wrong,” is a universal moral truth. However, it is a contingent truth for its lack of objective certainty, and distinguished from a necessary truth such as “two plus two equals four.” For Climacus, an objectively uncertain truth cannot simply be accepted through rational understanding; it requires one to relate it to his personal existence. The proposition, murder is wrong, is properly appropriated only if the individual abides with it personally by actively refraining from committing murders. The objective uncertainty demands an intimate connection between the subject and truth, where the individual reduplicates the truth in his actions.

Truth is inwardness means that subjective inwardness is required for the appropriation of truth to successfully happen. Let us look closely at the process of appropriation: “When a thought has gained its proper expression in the word, which attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator’s own relation to the idea” (CUP 76). Here, for an individual to be in his inwardness does not suggest that he has a private and exclusive truth that cannot be understood by anyone else. The existing person is neither physically nor socially isolated, nor unable to engage in any communication; all ideas can be openly and properly expressed in the first reflection. The inwardness is implied in the condensed discussion of the second reflection. There are two relations in the appropriation of objectively uncertain truth. First, “the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator” refers to the form of a subject’s expression of the appropriated truth. To be specific, a person’s expression of subjective truth is essentially action-based. The objective uncertainty is successfully removed when the individual translates the truth into his actions. It cannot be eradicated through oral expressions or any other open expressions. Second, “the existing communicator’s own relation to the idea” means that the existing person’s existence is under the influence of the truth. As he tries

to complete the appropriation by acting upon the truth, his existence, which is essentially defined by his actions, is simultaneously changed in the process. Therefore, as one voluntarily initiates the subjective reflection, the self is “the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation” (SUD 13). To put it simply, in the process of appropriation, the individual continually expresses his thoughts through his actions, which in turn shape and redefine his existence. One can already see how secrecy and privacy are built in the two relations. Based on the first relation, the fundamental form of communication in the subjective reflection can only be indirect and nonverbal actions, so the individual is not allowed to adopt any open expressions. Based on the second relation, the development of the self is initiated and driven by actions. Becoming open means that the individual wishes to terminate the appropriation and return to the first reflection. Therefore, when an existing person turns inward, he voluntarily enters the subjective reflection, withholds any information about his personal existence, and focuses only on expressing his truth through his actions.

At this point, it should be clear that a subjective existing individual actively engages in double-reflection by appropriating objectively uncertain truth. In the appropriation, he freely enters into his subjective inwardness, and attempts to eliminate the objective uncertainty by expressing the truth through actions. In this process of subjective reflection, the connection between the truth and actions is strengthened, and the individual grows more passionate for his existence. Through double-reflection, one’s notion of self is allowed to emerge, and his self-consciousness is continually deepened. As we have talked about the broken self in the first chapter, it is now natural to explain the concept of self with the definition of an existing person clear.

According to Climacus, an existing person's self is an ongoing synthesis of positive and negative, eternal and temporal, infinite and finite. The self is intrinsically contradictory, and it constantly balances the opposites and synthesizes the contradiction. Climacus' claim about the self is made easy if we keep in mind that self-consciousness is developed through double-reflection. The whole concept of an existing person serves to redefine our fundamental perspective of viewing our rationality, knowledge, and life. In explaining double-reflection, Climacus tries to convince us that everything should be reconsidered with the priority of upbuilding and awakening one's self. Therefore, double-reflection is not merely an epistemic approach to our knowledge of the external world, but a way of life to locate our authentic selves. In this way, the pursuit of an ideal self is essentially an appropriation of truth, a subjective truth that is most intensively connected to one's existence.

Let us again look closely at the claim that self is an ongoing synthesis. It is explained as follows:

The negativity that pervades existence, or rather, the negativity of the existing subject, which should be essentially reflected in his thinking in an adequate form, has its ground in the subject's synthesis: that he is an existing infinite spirit. The infinite and eternal is the only certainty, but as being in the subject it is in existence; and the first expression for this, is its elusiveness, and this tremendous contradiction, that the eternal becomes, that it comes into being. (Swenson CUP 76)

Human existence, defined by the activities of thinking and acting, is essentially historical in the sense that it results from the interaction between the subject and the external world. The intrinsic contradiction lying within the existence is an expression of this interaction.

It can be made clear in two aspects: time and space. First, human existence is essentially “dialectical with regard to time” (CUP 203). An existing person can conceive a distinct concept of self only if he is conscious of time. His awareness of past and future as two opposites enables him to reflect what he has been and envision what he shall become. The concept of history is made possible when the contradictory theses of time are synthesized in an existing person. His consciousness of a distinct past and future allows him to recognize his self as an existing person in the present making choices based on the past to reach the future. Therefore, the human existence becomes distinct based on the contradiction between the past and future. Second, the contradiction with respect of time is reinforced in space and translated into human activities of thinking and acting. The consciousness of past and future is materialized. The pure thinking is an acquisition of world history, the objectively certain propositions about the external world. The activity of thinking represents an infinite possibility, as the subject conceives himself to be anyone or anything in his abstract thinking. In contrast, the individual’s existence is a fixed account of his past actions. The activity of acting reflects the temporality and finiteness of human physical capacities. The existence of an individual is thus inherently historical, as they become conscious of both the past and future, endeavoring to alter their past actions based on the historical possibility of what they can become. This is essentially the appropriation of truth, as the person translates objectively uncertain truth into his concrete actions.

We are clear now that the self is an ongoing synthesis since human existence itself is intrinsically contradictory. To synthesize the opposites, the person properly appropriates objectively uncertain truth through actions. In this process, self-consciousness is gradually

heightened so that the broken self is slowly pieced together. When defining the subjective truth, Climacus clearly has a “highest truth” in mind (CUP 203). This would be the complete and authentic self for an existing person. This truth needs to be the most difficult to be appropriated, with the most intensive objective uncertainty, and most connected to subjective existence. A person’s sensitivity to truth propositions differs based on each proposition’s uncertainty and connection to his existence. The objectively certain truth, two plus two equals four, is easily appropriated and requires no substantial changes from the person’s existence (e.g., one believes that he has four coins if he has two in each hand). On the contrary, the objectively uncertain proposition requires the person to take a risk and change his life according to this uncertain truth. If one properly appropriates the proposition that murder is wrong, he is devoted to not killing anyone in his life. The more uncertain the truth is, the more efforts and passion is required from the individual to build his life on that truth. “Objectively [the existing person] then has only uncertainty, but this is precisely what intensifies the infinite passion of inwardness, and truth is precisely the daring venture of choosing the objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite” (CUP 203). The highest objective uncertainty makes the appropriation of the truth impossible with an infinitely dire risk. As the appropriation becomes the most difficult, the subject plunges into his inwardness, and his existence is altogether changed. Therefore, to properly start the synthesis of the self, we need to first find what matters most to a subjective existing person’s existence and what makes the most intensive subjective appropriation.

An eternal happiness is the highest good, representing the ultimate stage for one’s existence. “[N]othing else can be said of eternal happiness than that it is the good that is attained by absolutely venturing everything” (CUP 427). For an existing person, the pursuit of an eternal happiness is essentially the task of completing the self and living an authentic life. In other

words, the eternal happiness directly pertains to one's personal existence, and becomes the single most important thing for any subjective individual. An existing person is essentially historical, engaging in subjective appropriation of the external world. In this process, the individual acquires knowledge of the external world, and attempts to act according to their beliefs on them. In this way, one's personal existence is changed and shaped through their actions; the self is in turn developed during the appropriation. An eternal happiness, which represents the ideal self, is then pursued through the subjective appropriation. "[E]ternal happiness, as the absolute good, has the remarkable quality that it can be defined only by the mode in which it is acquired" (CUP 426-27). To be specific, the existing person decisively chooses one specific piece of historical knowledge, and builds his entire existence based on it. In this way, he constantly relates himself to that historical truth, and strives for the eternal happiness through actions.

The religious truth is the decisive and most objectively uncertain historical truth for an existing person to appropriate.<sup>2</sup> It requires its believers to devote themselves absolutely:

The religious address can deal with everything, but it must continually bring everything into relation to the absolute category of religiousness. It must walk along every path, must know the habitat of every error, where moods have their hiding places, how passions regard themselves in solitude (and every human being who has passion is always somewhat solitary; it is only drivelers who are swallowed up in social life), know where illusions tempt, where the paths swing

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<sup>2</sup> The paradoxical nature of Christianity makes it the most suitable religion to obtain an eternal happiness. However, at this point, any religion can deepen one's self-consciousness as long as it demands an absolute duty. The acceptance of Christian God is a qualitative step for one to complete the self, which will be discussed later in Chapter 4.

off, etc.—in order to bring everything continually into relation with the absolute category of religiousness. (CUP 427-28)

The religious life is the only qualified point of departure for an eternal happiness because it demands an absolute commitment, where the existing person voluntarily puts everything at stake. For example, the subjective appropriation of Christianity requires one to put faith in a series of contingent historical events, and regard it as the highest truth. In this way, he is to be joined to the Kingdom of God, and promised with an eternal happiness. Religion is then the most important truth to an existing person's existence compared to objective knowledge and moral truth. Recall the propositions "two plus two equals four" and "murder is wrong." The first objectively certain truth is easily appropriated without any substantial change of one's life. The second objectively uncertain moral truth requires some effort from the individual, but it is still relatively easy, as the subject's existence is only partially changed, and the self does not undergo a substantial change. In contrast, the religious truth is the most difficult proposition to be appropriated because it requires the subject to transform into a new self. First, it is objectively uncertain based on approximating historical evidences, yet it promises an eternal happiness and claims to be the highest truth. Second, it is so intimately connected to one's existence that it does not just ask the individual to alter some of his actions, but to inspect and reconsider everything with respect to the eternal happiness. In other words, the subjective appropriation of the religious truth is a thorough transformation of the self through faith.

In this chapter, I have completed two tasks. First, I have argued that, for Kierkegaard, subjective existing individual is defined by his willingness and ability to initiate double-reflection. The double-reflection allows the individual to recognize that some propositions are objectively uncertain, and required to be properly appropriated. During the appropriation of

truth, the existing person overcomes the objective uncertainty by reduplicating the truth through his concrete actions. As the subject appropriates more, his self-consciousness is deepened in his inwardness; eventually, he realizes that his notion of self is a constant synthesis of opposites. Second, I have argued that, in Kierkegaard's view, the religious truth is critically related to an existing person as the most objectively uncertain truth. It is directly connected to human existence, and promises the answer to one's broken self. In the next chapter, I will discuss the problem of faith, and explain the paradoxical appropriation of Christianity in detail.



### Chapter 3. The Self in the Paradox of Faith

In the previous chapter, I argued that the subjective appropriation of religious truth is the most important task for an existing person to obtain an eternal happiness and complete his self. In this chapter, I will examine the problem of faith and the detailed dialectical progression of subjective appropriation. The pursuit of faith is inherently paradoxical and strenuous because it requires the individual to slowly and gradually develop an absolute pathos for life as an existential task. The development of existential pathos is a double-directional dialectical progress, where the individual becomes conscious of himself as guilty and powerless. With the pathos intensified to the extreme, the individual is pushed to the crux of the paradox.

Let us now look at the subjective appropriation of religious truth. A subjective existing individual is contradictory in nature due to his ability to double-reflect; the contradiction is further intensified into a paradox during the appropriation of religious truth. This paradox is the problem of faith. As the central issue in both *Philosophical Fragments* and *CUP*, it is characterized as follows: “The individual’s eternal happiness is decided in time through a relation to something historical that furthermore is historical in such a way that its composition includes that which according to its nature cannot become historical and consequently must become that by virtue of the absurd” (CUP 385). Here, the eternal happiness is decided when the individual recognizes religious truth as the most significant historical knowledge to appropriate. However, as the individual’s personal existence is defined and expressed through actions, one’s eternal happiness is also action-based, and cannot be expressed purely in abstract propositions based on historical evidence. In other words, an eternal happiness, which can only be obtained and expressed through actions, is decided, and based on abstract historical knowledge. Therefore, the task of pursuing an eternal happiness based on historical truth as an existing person is

contradictory in nature. In addition, as the eternal happiness is the most important and dear thing to an individual, and religion requires an absolute devotion, the objective uncertainty of the religious truth is thus infinitely intensified; the task of faith eventually becomes an absurd paradox for the existing person.

The subjective appropriation of the religious truth is pathos-filled and dialectical. First, since the problem of faith is essentially connected to one's personal existence, the contradictory nature of the task stirs up and intensifies the existing person's various emotions towards the self such as passion, anger, and despair. These emotions constitute the existential pathos. It can be understood generally as an urge to progress: to complete the self, to properly appropriate the religious truth, to obtain an eternal happiness, to overcome the objective uncertainty within the paradox, and to have an authentic faith. "To love is plain and simple pathos" (CUP 385). In other words, existential pathos is the sign of the individual's interests and commitments to his own life. Second, the subjective appropriation can be understood as a dialectical development of self-consciousness. The task of faith requires one to become aware of the concept of the self, the self being broken, and the concept of an ideal complete self. To put it in the context of the truth-appropriation, one first becomes conscious of the objective truth, then the truth being objectively uncertain, and finally a subjective personal truth. Therefore, a person's relation to the eternal happiness is dialectical because it is matured through reflections. As the dialectical progression pushes further, the existential pathos is intensified; the individual is more deeply engrossed within the contradiction alone in his subjective inwardness. In concrete existence, the individual does not openly show his pathos or prove his consciousness since the progress is action-based. Self-consciousness is developed through reduplication of the truth through actions, and these actions express the subject's pathos.

As the self is shaped and altered, the individual at each different dialectical point has different expressions of pathos. There are three qualitative points: the absolute respect as the initial expression, suffering as the essential expression, and guilt as the decisive expression. As the individual adopts each expression, the difficulty of achieving faith is intensified, and the passion for the religious truth is raised higher. “The dialectical consists in this, that the eternal happiness to which the individual is assumed to relate himself with proper pathos is itself made dialectical by additional qualifications, which in turn work as an incitement that brings passion to its extreme” (CUP 385). Here, the additional qualifications refer to the conditions needed to qualify one’s passion for the eternal happiness. The absolute respect, suffering, and guilt are the necessary expressions that signify one’s development to the highest pathos and complete self-consciousness. When one reaches the decisive expression, the eternal recollection of guilt, he is at the crux of the paradox, and pushed to the brink of his existence.

I will now present the difficulty that an existing person faces in the three expressions of the existential pathos, and explain how the subject is deepened and intensified in the paradox. The task of faith, where the individual expresses his pathos through actions, is in double-direction. It is progressing forward as well as moving backward. Climacus’ succinct description of the three moments and how each one is conceived is worth citing as a whole passage:

Existence is not an abstract rush job but a striving and an unremitting ‘in the meantime.’ Even *at the moment* the task is assigned, something is already wasted, because there is an ‘in the meantime’ and the beginning is not promptly made.

This is how it goes backward: the task is given to the individual in existence, and just as he wants to plunge in straightway (which can be done only *in abstracto* and on paper, because the garb of the abstracter, the big spender’s trousers, is very

different from the existing person's straitjacket of existence), and wants to begin, *another beginning* is discovered to be necessary, the beginning of the enormous detour that is dying to immediacy. And just as the beginning is about to be made here, it is discovered that, since meanwhile time has been passing, *a bad beginning* has been made and that the beginning must be made by becoming guilty, and from that moment the total guilt, which is decisive, practices usury with the new guilt. The task looked so grand, and one thought 'like for like'; as the task is, so must the person be who is supposed to carry it out. But then along came existence with one but after another; then came suffering as a more definite qualification, and one thought: Well, a poor existing person must put up with it since he is in existence. But then came guilt as the decisive qualification—now the existing person is really in agony—that is, now he is in the existence-medium. (CUP 526-27, italics added)

This passage describes an existing person's struggle to initiate the subjective appropriation, a paradoxical moment that pulls in two opposite directions. The subjective appropriation is initiated due to the individual's strong urge to progress, to push himself forward. However, this wish to strive forward is made possible only by constantly looking back in reflection. In the first moment, life as an existential task is made aware to the individual that religious truth demands constant works in daily lives. The individual's life is completely transformed because everything is now examined based on his relation to the eternal happiness. The first moment is *the beginning*, as the individual vows to carry out the task. Once the first moment is completed, the dichotomy of the self is revealed. Though the individual is so desperate to initiate the task, he is also made aware of his former existence, which, reconsidered from the perspective of his relation

to the eternal happiness, is a complete waste of time filled with indulgence and aimless wandering. Therefore, in order to initiate *the beginning*, one is required to go backward and complete a preliminary task of eradicating the past self. In the second moment, the individual maintains an absolute passion for the task by dying to the immediacy. Keeping the existential task as the top priority is proved through a renunciation of the former existence, which constitutes the immediate material things and relative earthly ends. The second moment is *the new beginning*, as one attempts to abandon all the relative deeds and have a clean start of the life as an existential task. This process of resignation keeps the individual in constant suffering. However, as the subject attempts to eliminate his negative self by renouncing things he loved one by one, he also puts himself into a reflection and confession of his past. The act of resignation means that he needs to reconsider each and every single action and admit his fault in it. In this way, even though the conviction and passion to carry out the task is strengthened during the resignation, the hope to abandon the past self diminishes. Therefore, the preliminary task of creating a *new beginning* turns out to be *a bad beginning*, a failed attempt to begin the life as a blank slate. Then the third moment comes, as the individual realizes that, to truly begin the existential task, he must become conscious of himself as a guilty being in nature. The infinite resignation is essentially an eternal recollection of guilt. Though the subject intends to move forward and begin the task, he is forced to first move backward and intensify his pathos for the task. Thus, the dialectical progression of the subjective appropriation is paradoxical and moves in double-directions.

With the general progression clear, let us now look at each moment, and how the existential pathos is intensified. In the first moment, the existing person expresses his existential pathos by paying the absolute respect to the religious truth. The individual realizes that his life is

an existential task, and there is an essential self defined by his actions. As one begins to relate himself to the eternal happiness, the task is assigned: the eternal happiness is an absolute τέλος requiring a total commitment. It means that everything in one's life should be considered based on his relation to the eternal happiness, and the appropriation of the religious truth is the top priority. According to Climacus, "What is the maximum a person gains by relating himself to the absolute τέλος? In the finite sense there is nothing to gain, but everything to lose. In temporality, the *expectancy* of an eternal happiness is the highest reward, because an eternal happiness is the absolute τέλος, and the specific sign that one relates oneself to the absolute is that not only is there no reward to expect but suffering to endure" (CUP 402, italics in original). The absolute respect to the absolute is shown through a relative respect to the relative; the appropriation of the objective and moral truth happens in the esthetic and ethical sphere, while the appropriation of the religious truth strictly stays in the religious sphere. An absolute orientation to the task means a quick and willing renunciation of immediate goods with no hesitation. The eternal happiness does not come in a shopping list following after health, wealth, and marriage. It is not obtained casually on a sunny Sunday morning when one is free and needs something to kill time. To be thoroughly conscious of the task, one is "to keep the specific spheres separated from one another, to respect the qualitative dialectic, the tug of decision that changes everything, so that what was the highest in another sphere must be absolutely rejected in this" (CUP 388). "Two plus two equals four" and "murder is wrong" should be distinguished from "God promises an eternal happiness" as the latter is always the highest and the most relevant truth. The first moment concerns the individual's awareness of the infinite risk within the existential task. To accept the task means to "change everything in his existence in relation to the highest good" (CUP 389). "To venture everything" is not a catchy phrase, but a sincere recognition of the risk in the

existence, and the uncertainty within the task. To truly orient towards the existential task in the first moment, the individual should prepare himself for putting everything at stake for the eternal happiness.

In the second moment, the existing person expresses his existential pathos through the suffering of dying to immediacy. As the first moment is established, the individual realizes that his life is a strenuous task demanding constant passion and efforts since every moment that is not devoted to the task is wasted; his past before the first moment is drenched in the indulgence of immediacy. Thus, a *new beginning* is craved. Dying to immediacy is the individual's resolve to carry out the task and start the life anew. The suffering then is a sign and expression of one's resolve:

[S]uffering as the essential expression of existential pathos means that there is actual suffering or that the actuality of the suffering is the existential pathos, and by the actuality of the suffering is understood its continuance as essential for the pathos-filled relation to an eternal happiness, so that the suffering is not deceitfully revoked and the individual does not advance beyond it, which is a regression, accomplished by somehow shifting the setting from existence into an imaginary medium. Just as resignation saw to it that the individual had the absolute orientation toward the absolute τέλος, the continuance of suffering is the guarantee that the individual is in position and keeps himself in position. (CUP 443)

As the subjective appropriation is reduplicating truth in one's existence through actions, the actuality of the suffering is an indication of the infinite resignation. The conviction to initiate the task assigned in the first moment is still an idea in embryo and susceptible to regression, and the

task can be easily forgotten and dismissed. This conviction and decision to devote to the existential task needs to be intensified and solidified. In other words, the second moment is the subject's confirmation of the task as the absolute by voluntarily renouncing everything else in his life. The hypothetical risk of pursuing an eternal happiness is translated into actuality; the suffering is the expression of frustration and anxiety over this risk. In the Gospel of Luke, one reads "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (KJV, Luke 14:26). Here, this is an example of what should be renounced for the eternal happiness, which incites the most intensive suffering. To hate the loved ones is not to be taken in a literal sense; instead, it shows that the appropriation of the religious truth has the top significance for one's existence. The process of resignation is like spectating everything one by one; if the individual flinches or shows any hesitation, he is not treating the task as the absolute. In front of an eternal happiness, one's family is only a relative end. The process is strenuous because the things that should be renounced are still dear and valuable to him. It does not mean that he dismisses everything else as irrelevant and worthless; instead, it means that the immediacy should never interfere his pursuit of the eternal happiness. The infinite resignation, which is permanently reducing the urgency of everything for the sake of the religious truth, is essentially a practice or preparation for giving them up in actuality, and this simulation in mind is severe enough to cause actual suffering to the subject. In addition, the infinite resignation is a continual process happening at every moment, as the individual constantly reminds himself of the absolute existential task. Thus, the continuance of the suffering is the essential expression of an existing person's pathos.

Dying to immediacy is a failed attempt to eliminate the negative self, a detour to initiate the existential task. The continuance of the suffering in the second moment is a necessary



confirmation of one's conviction to carry out the subjective appropriation, yet it is also a detour, *a bad beginning*. The second moment is paradoxical:

The basis of this suffering is that in his immediacy the individual actually is absolutely within relative ends; its meaning is the turning around of the relation, dying to immediacy or existentially expressing that the individual is capable of doing nothing himself but is nothing before God, because here again the relationship with God is distinguishable by the negative, and self-annihilation is the essential form for the relationship with God. (CUP 461)

To initiate the existential task and properly appropriate the religious truth, the individual feels the need to prove to himself that he is ready to enter a relationship with God. The proof would be a total denial and elimination of the former way of life by dying to the immediacy and annihilating his negative self. While this infinite resignation does strengthen the individual's passion for the task, the self-annihilation is still a failure, and the passion is not decisively qualified. The fact that the individual is in a continuance of suffering proves that his existence is still immersed in relative ends and defined by his immediacy. The actuality of suffering makes him conscious that dying to immediacy does not make him free of his past, but only shows the finiteness of humans and his minimal power before God. Thus, dying to immediacy is paradoxical as the individual enters the suffering with the intention to get rid of it once for all, and finds himself trapped in a continuance of the suffering. Therefore, dying to immediacy turns out to be *a bad beginning*, and task is still not properly initiated. One's existence in the second moment is "a feigning of self-transformation" because he "is unable to transform himself" (CUP 433). That is, the individual in the second moment does have a higher pathos for the task, but he still has the illusion that he can only partially change himself to obtain the eternal happiness. The pathos is yet to reach the

extreme since the self should be ready to be completely annihilated before the beginning of a new self. Therefore, the individual is again required to go further backward into the eternal recollection of guilt.

In the third moment, the individual's existential pathos is decisively qualified as the highest by his guilt-consciousness. In the second moment, the subject is feigning the self-transformation because the suffering is still on a childish and accidental level. Suffering from the renunciation of the immediacy one by one can be understood as the individual recognizes his guilt, which is his own limitation and inability to absolutely orient toward the task in each particular case. By admitting his guilt in each case, he is only recollecting guilt accidentally, but avoids accepting the totality of guilt on a qualitative level. The individual treats every suffering separately as "a childish matter of beginning all over again, of being a good child again" (CUP 533). Even though he is in a continuance of the suffering, he uses the suffering as a minor punishment to ease the guilty feeling, so that he can refuse to acknowledge himself as an essentially guilty being incapable of anything in before God. For example, one inflicts suffering upon himself through some punishments such as "a toilsome task, charity to the needy, denying oneself a wish," so that the guilt in a particular case is satisfied in a shallow way, and the task can be postponed. The totality of guilt-consciousness is the decisive realization that an existing person is perpetually at fault, being powerless in his pursuit of the eternal happiness. One's continuance of the suffering from the infinite resignation serves essentially as an eternal recollection of guilt. The individual eventually realizes that he, as an existing person rooted in immediacy, does not have the power and capability to obtain or even come closer to the eternal happiness. The totality of guilt comes into existence as the finiteness and the limitations of his existence. "In the eternal recollecting of guilt-consciousness, the existing person relates himself

to an eternal happiness, but not in such a way that he now has come closer to it directly; on the contrary, he is now distanced from it as much as possible, but he still relates himself to it” (CUP 535). At this point, one’s consciousness of himself is complete, and he reaches the center of the paradoxical problem of faith; his pathos to achieve faith is infinitely heightened, but his existence is infinitely distanced away from the eternal happiness. The existing person as the guilty being is now “really in agony,” at the brink of his existence (CUP 527).

In this chapter, I have explained the problem of faith as inherently paradoxical, and how the individual is engrossed within the paradox. As one enthusiastically progresses further in his quest for a complete self, he is constantly pushed back and conscious of his self being powerless and incapable in relation to the eternal happiness. At this point, the individual is finally qualified in the existence-medium in agony. That is, he is completely invested in building his life as an existential task, yet he cannot move as a guilty existing being. The individual is pushed to the apex of the paradox, and faces, what Lessing calls, “an ugly broad ditch,” and he has no choice but to “leap” across it. In the next chapter, I will discuss the concept of leap and its inevitable failure.

## Chapter 4. The Self in Total Depravity: Toward the Leap of Faith

In the preparation for subjective appropriation of religious truth, the individual is infinitely deepened in his existential pathos marked by the dialectical progression of three expressions: absolute orientation—suffering—guilt. As he becomes conscious of the totality of guilt, he is finally qualified to initiate the existential task of relating himself to an eternal happiness. However, at this critical point, the individual is paralyzed at the brink of his existence. His pathos is pushed to the highest marked by intensive agony and despair as he gradually realizes the paradoxical nature of faith and his own limited power as an existing person. Thus, the individual is confined at the crux of the paradox; this state is what Climacus calls *Religiousness A*. In this chapter, I will discuss the notion of “the leap,” as the individual’s final attempt to assert himself as a capable being to obtain the eternal happiness on his own. While leaping, the individual becomes aware of “the break” between *Religiousness A* and *Religiousness B*, which symbolizes the authentic Christian faith, and inevitably fails to make the leap. The individual falls into a state of aporia defined by a complete self-annihilation and total depravity; in aporia, he is given the final chance to reach *Religiousness B* through sin-consciousness.

I will now offer an overview of *Religiousness A* and *B*. In *A*, the individual prepares himself for a complete self-transformation in the existential task by deepening his pathos. He reflects upon his existence based on his relation to the eternal happiness, and carries out the process alone by resigning the relative ends step by step. The subject is qualified to be in *A* when he expresses his pathos through guilt. Recall the problem of faith: faith is paradoxical because the individual decides his eternal happiness based on his relation to something historical. Progressing towards *A*, the individual becomes conscious of the problem, and becomes fully convinced that the subjective appropriation of the religious truth is the highest existential task. In

other words, he is, for the first time, completely aware of his life as an strenuous existential task; though the recognition of the task is already hard enough for most people, it is only a start, and the individual has not even begun the task. Thus, one needs to go beyond *Religiousness A*, and carry out the subjective appropriation of the religious truth. *Religiousness B* is then proposed as a state superior to *A*, where one becomes a Christian with genuine faith. It is described as follows:

*Religiousness B*, as it will be called from now on, or paradoxical religiousness, as it has been called, or the religiousness that has the dialectical in second place, makes conditions in such a way that the conditions are not the dialectical concentration of inward deepening but a definite something that qualifies the eternal happiness more specifically (whereas in *A* the more specific qualification of inward deepening is the only more specific qualification), not by qualifying more specifically the individual's appropriation of it but by qualifying more specifically the eternal happiness, yet not as a task for thinking but as paradoxically repelling and giving rise to new pathos. (CUP 556)

In *A*, the individual's eternal happiness is initially qualified by his intensified existential pathos, which is a result of recognizing the paradoxical nature of the subjective appropriation; he is awakened and prepared to transform his existence based on the absolute religious truth. In *B*, the eternal happiness is decisively qualified because that religious truth is specified as Christianity, which is itself a paradox based on objectively uncertain historical events. In other words, in paradoxical religiousness, the individual is in a double-paradox: first, the inward deepening in the form of subjective appropriation is paradoxical; second, the object (Christianity) that is subjectively appropriated is paradoxical. Therefore, the subjective inwardness is doubly intensified in *B*, manifesting the state of "paradoxically repelling and giving rise to new pathos."

As one may have expected, *Religiousness A* and *B* are drastically different that the individual needs to take “a leap” to cross a qualitative “break.”

For a better understanding of *Religiousness B* and the leap, I will first examine how these concepts are developed in different pseudonymous accounts. The leap is mostly employed in *FT* and *CUP*. Though the definition of the leap remains consistent, Silentio and Climacus have rather different attitudes towards it. Recall the first chapter that Silentio’s narrative is chaotic and inconsistent, while Climacus has a more stable and well-composed analysis of *B* from a distanced perspective. Silentio is extremely passionate about the leap, and regards it as the key to becoming a knight of faith, which is parallel to *Religiousness B* in Climacus’ terms. Silentio can be understood as someone in *A*, who is aware of the paradoxical nature of faith and qualified with intensive pathos. His existential pathos consists of strong self-doubt:

But this movement [to faith] I cannot make. As soon as I want to begin, everything reverses itself, and I take refuge in the pain of resignation. I am able to swim in life, but I am too heavy for this mystical hovering. To exist in such a way that my contrast to existence constantly expresses itself as the most beautiful and secure harmony with it—this I cannot do. And yet, I repeatedly say, it must be wonderful to get the princess. (FT 50)

Here, this strong passion for faith embedded within a deep despair of himself is prevalent throughout the whole book. Silentio’s longing to understand Abraham is analogous to an individual’s urge to leap into *B*. For Silentio, the leap is the last step to be free of the suffering, to win the princess back, and to be forever secure in the eternal happiness. The knight of faith, who has successfully leaped into *B*, representing a completely positive state without any anxieties or

worries. However, his interpretation of the leap is called into question in comparison to Climacus'.

On the other hand, Climacus has a neutral or even negative view of the leap. He dismisses the positive aspect of the leap where humans can progress and obtain an eternal happiness; instead, he emphasizes on the aftermath of the leap, which is the inevitable fall back to the ground. Climacus describes the leap as follows:

Leaping means to belong essentially to the earth and to respect the law of gravity so that the leap is merely the momentary, but flying means to be set free from telluric conditions, something that is reserved exclusively for winged creatures, perhaps also for inhabitants of the moon, perhaps—and perhaps that is also where the system will at long last find its true readers. (CUP 124)

Here, Climacus clearly holds a deflationary, if not negative, attitude towards the leap, and emphasizes on human's temporary and limited ability reflected in the leap. In addition, the landing point is not depicted in an entirely positive light, but rather suggested as a state still bounded by earthly conditions. Interestingly, while Silentio describes the leap as “this mystical hovering” that he wants to but cannot achieve, Climacus clearly distinguishes it from unrealistic “flying.” The conflicting narratives suggest a more complicated interpretation of the leap and what exactly one leaps towards. Notably, Climacus refrains from using “the leap” when discussing the transition from *Religiousness A* to *B*; instead, he employs the term: “the break” (CUP 570). In a literal sense, it seems that the concepts of leap and break are defined by each other: there is no leap if there is no gap, and vice versa. However, it is important that Climacus regards the leap as prior to the break; in addition, the action of leaping makes one aware of the breadth of the break. Let us look at the concept of the leap originally coined by G.E. Lessing:

“That, that is the ugly broad ditch that I cannot cross, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap” (CUP 98). Climacus interprets it as follows: “since it is not the breadth of the ditch in an external sense that prevents it but the dialectical passion in an internal sense that makes the ditch infinitely broad” (CUP 99). Here, the infinite pathos for the paradoxical faith is what makes the paradox infinitely difficult to solve. In other words, the critical part is not how one successfully crosses the broad gap, but that one realizes how terribly wide the break is by taking a radical leap. In this way, it makes sense why Climacus characterizes the leap in a rather negative fashion because the result of the leap is not landing secure in *Religiousness B*, but an inevitable fall into the ditch. Climacus’ interpretation can be thought as a response to Silentio’s partial and misguided understanding of the leap. According to Edward Mooney, “Climacus finds the suspension of ethics in *Fear and Trembling* to be incomplete, defective, and in need of another more religious expression” (56). Silentio mistakes the leap as a direct answer to the paradox and the final step to become an authentic Christian, and knight of faith (*Religiousness B*) is not free of any earthly conditions.<sup>3</sup> This is also the reason that Climacus avoids using the leap to describe the transition to *B*.

Based on the two pseudonymous narratives, the concept of leap is better understood from the aspect of its failure, the fall into the break, which is the critical factor in deciding one’s transformation to a Christian. *Religiousness B* is composed of two tasks: first, recognizes Christianity as the single most important religious truth for himself, and second completely surrenders himself and submits to God. Let us look at the first step; Climacus characterizes *B* as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> A detailed discussion of Silentio’s progression is in Chapter 5.



The paradoxical-religious defines the distinction absolutely by paradoxically accentuating existing. In other words, because the eternal has come into existence at a moment of time, the existing individual in time does not come to relate himself to the eternal or to collect himself in his relation (this is *A*) but *in time* comes to relate himself to the eternal *in time*. Consequently, the relation is within time, a relation that runs directly counter to all thinking, whether one reflects upon the individual or upon the god. (CUP 570, original italics)

*Religiousness B* is marked by a double-paradox, where the first paradox is the individual's pathos-filled relation to the eternal happiness (*A*), and the second paradox is Christianity as the eternal coming into existence in time. In *B*, the individual is no longer relating to any religious truth, but solely invested in Christianity as the highest historical events. To become conscious of the presence of God means that the subject is relating to "the eternal in time." This is the paradoxical nature of Christianity: God as the eternal being comes into existence as an ordinary finite human being. God, who is omnipotent, actively confines himself into a limited individual to die for every single existing person. The God-Man relation is intrinsically paradoxical as a synthesis of eternal and temporal, infinite and finite. In *A*, the eternal based on something historical is "everywhere and nowhere;" in *B*, "the eternal is present at a specific point" (CUP 571). That is, the individual in *A* is vaguely aware of an absolute being based on his intensified pathos for the religious truth; in *B*, this objectively uncertain religious truth comes into existence distinctively as God, and enters into a private relationship with the subject. "Since Christianity is essentially a transcendent religion that did not originate in any human heart but, on the contrary, sees man as essentially unable to reach the essential truth about himself through natural reason alone, it is quite natural for Christianity to conflict with human speculative viewpoints" (Evans

249). This God-Man relation, the individual's direct relation to Christianity, "runs directly counter to all thinking" from either the perspective of the individual or God because it consists of two paradoxes. From the perspective of the subject, he establishes a relation to the eternal happiness solely based on his existential pathos; from the perspective of the eternal, God confirms the relation by transforming into the temporal and finite. This is the first task of the paradoxical-religious, becoming conscious of the presence of Christian God.

The first step of being conscious of God is made possible only if the individual fails the leap and falls into a state of aporia. As one may have expected, the double-paradox causes the qualitative break between *Religiousness A* and *B*. Recall that the individual who expresses his intensified pathos through guilt-consciousness in *A*. At the apex of the paradox, he fails to completely annihilate himself and desires to resolve the paradox by asserting a new self on his own. If he remains at the agonized point long enough without regressing, the leap is inevitable as his one last attempt to reach for the eternal happiness. As he is making the leap, he infinitely resigns everything, and renounces every possibility of turning back:

If the individual is paradoxical-dialectical, every remnant of original immanence annihilated, and all connection cut away, and the individual situated at the edge of existence, then we have the paradoxical-religious. This paradoxical inwardness is the greatest possible, because even the most dialectical qualification, if it is still within immanence, has, as it were, a possibility of an escape, of a shifting away, of a withdrawal into the eternal behind it; it is as if everything were not actually at stake. *But the break makes the inwardness the greatest possible.* (CUP 572, italics added)

The leap, a decisive progression further into the paradox, exposes the individual to the doubly-paradoxical *Religiousness B* (Christianity). This leap itself helps the individual become aware of the break, which is the great difficulty of transitioning from achieving an eternal happiness by himself to accepting and submitting to the Christ. The break further pushes the individual's inward pathos to a new high as he is too far away to turn back. At this point, the subject eventually realizes that he is not "hovering" or "flying," but only momentarily "leaping;" the failure of the leap is inevitable, and he falls into a liminal space between *A* and *B*, which is the state of aporia. The self is completely annihilated as the individual cuts off every connection to the immediate, yet he cannot become a new self because he has not appropriated Christianity as a second paradox. "The existing person must have lost continuity with himself, must have become someone else (not different from himself within himself), and now, by receiving the condition from the god, become a new creation" (CUP 576). In this state of aporia, one completes the first step of becoming absolutely conscious of the presence of God. Now the second and final step is a total surrender and submission through sin-consciousness.

To truly accept and submit to God is to recognize oneself as a decisively sinful individual, who is essentially incapable of doing anything on one's own. "[T]he issue of sin in Kierkegaard's thought and life constituted a major focus and preoccupation in his writing" (Green 99). Recall that in *Religiousness A*, the individual reaches the apex by expressing his pathos through guilt-consciousness, which is becoming aware of his own limitations and powerlessness. Due to the break, the individual's guilt is infinitely intensified, as his last and most powerful attempt to grasp the eternal happiness is proved to be futile. In aporia, the subject's pathos is "sharpened;" he is cut off from the immediacy where he belongs, and he is

denied from the eternal happiness that he craves. Thus, he is in an extreme despair over himself. In front of God, the individual in aporia is given the last chance:

The individual is therefore unable to gain the consciousness of sin by himself, which is the case with guilt-consciousness, because in guilt-consciousness the subject's self-identity is preserved, and guilt-consciousness is a change of the subject within the subject himself. The consciousness of sin, however, is a change of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that he has become a person other than he was by coming into existence, that he has become a sinner. This power is the god in time. (CUP 584)

The transformation from guilt-consciousness to sin-consciousness is the birth of a new self after the self-annihilation in aporia. It is not a mere intensification of the quantitative guilt by arousing the subject's guilt in every accidental and particular cases. The individual's connection to the immediate is severed; the former self-identity, which is his relation to the eternal happiness, is annihilated. That is, the individual's attempt to merely modify his existence in relation to the eternal happiness fails, and both his life and the eternal happiness are lost. "The religious life arises as a possibility when the ethical project of actualizing oneself through choice suffers shipwreck. While the ethical life is essentially self-sufficient, the religious life has an essential dependent element. No longer convinced of individual self-sufficiency, the religious exister strives to allow himself to be transformed by God" (Evans 13). The sin-consciousness means that the subject realizes the necessity of a thorough and decisive change of his life; his existence is not partially altered, but is entirely constructed in dependence on God. The individual's idea that a human being is an independent and competent subject is shattered. It is not "logically

impossible” to do anything as a capable agent but “humanly impossible” to do anything without the grace of God (Hannay 74). An existing person is not only guilty about his flaws and inabilities, but, most importantly, a sinner as the creation of God. In other words, the individual’s ability to do anything including the most minute action relies on God’s power. This power, as the god in time, is the ultimate paradox that God comes into existence as Jesus Christ in flesh and blood, and dies on the cross as an ordinary man for each individual’s sin. By properly appropriating this second paradox, the individual achieves the sin-consciousness and reaches *Religiousness B*.

One may question the distinction between guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness. The individual feels guilty for his limitations, and becomes sinful for his inabilities. It seems that sin is only a quantitatively aggravated result of guilt, and the leap does not seem like such a dire situation. In response, *Religiousness B* consists of two steps: first, recognizes the existence of God, and second, accepts one’s total depravity before God. If we look at the concept of sin as a state of human powerlessness merely based on the second step, it appears that sin and guilt are essentially the same. However, a proper understanding of sin requires one to first complete the first step, which is a result of the fall into the break. The concept of sin is best understood based on one’s consciousness of God:

The point that must be observed is that the self has a conception of God and yet does not will as he wills, and thus is disobedient. Nor does one only occasionally sin before God, for every sin is before God, or, more correctly, what really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God. Despair is intensified in relation to the consciousness of the self, but the self

is intensified in relation to the criterion for the self, infinitely when God is the criterion. (SUD 80)

What makes sin qualitatively distinct from guilt is that the individual accepts inability as the foundation of his self. The inability to do many particular things is no longer regarded as a defect or abominable part of the self that needs to be eliminated (guilt); it is the key defining feature of an existing person. This objection itself can be seen as the objector's (whether conscious or unconscious) fear and terror of acknowledging the total depravity. Sin-consciousness is always harder in actuality than it is described on paper. First, it is only made possible after the failure of the leap. The presence of God is made known, and always serves as a reminder of one's perpetual inability. Second, even with God as the criterion for the self, it is still an extraneous task for the individual to actually accept the criterion by admitting the original sin. The subject in aporia can still avoid and escape his self before God. An existing person in aporia is in a constant thinking of God and worries for his ability to do anything, even the smallest thing such as going to Deer Park after the Sunday sermon.

In this chapter, I have explained the progression from *Religiousness A* to *B*, where the existing person takes a radical leap and inevitably falls into the break. When the individual's existence is totally annihilated in aporia, he is allowed to reconstruct his self in dependence on God. The authentic faith, which is represented by *B*, is made possible through sin-consciousness. In the next chapter, I will discuss what an existing person with an authentic faith is like, and explain the concept of a Christian self.

## Chapter 5. The Self as an Eternal Striving

In the previous chapter, I clarified the qualitative break between *Religiousness A* and *B*, and the inevitable failure of the leap. The qualification of sin-consciousness is a crucial transformation to an authentic Christian. As we go through the dialectical progression of faith, the individual's self-consciousness is constantly transforming. At this point, it is best to make the development of the self explicit, and further explain what it means for an existing person to arrive at *Religiousness B*. In this chapter, I argue that faith is a never-to-be-completed task as the subject ceaselessly synthesizes the positive and negative until death. The individual in sin-consciousness strives eternally to improve himself before God in an absolute humility. I will elucidate the concept of eternal striving by focusing on the personal actuality of the pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio. *FT* is specially structured for an indirect and silent communication as Kierkegaard implicitly encourages the audiences to not only look into Silentio's direct discussion of the biblical story, but also look beyond what he fails to understand.

Unlike other pseudonymous works, *FT* is meticulously constructed to indirectly deliver a specific message. Recall that in the first chapter, I established that Silentio is an unstable writer with an inconsistent narrative. While, like other pseudonyms, Silentio provides a specific narrative fit for indirect communication, he is distinct as a transforming character himself. From the first chapter, we know that the man described in the exordium who tries to understand Abraham all his life is Silentio. *FT* is not merely about Silentio talking about the problem of faith, but also about him pushing himself in his subjective inwardness. By showing the process of subjective appropriation, Kierkegaard creates Silentio as a messenger who does not understand what he delivers. Let us look at the epigraph of *FT*: "What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not" (Hamann

FT 3). This is Kierkegaard's hint for readers to approach *FT* with the task of searching for a hidden message, a message that the messenger fails to understand, but made clear to the readers (Kosch 77). Thus, it is the readers' task to find out what exactly Kierkegaard tries to communicate indirectly through Silentio. I propose to focus on the third problema. *FT*, titled as "a dialectical lyric," has a double-movement structure, where Silentio infinitely moves closer to Abraham in the first two problems, but infinitely distances away in the third. The movement is apparent in Silentio's changing attitudes towards the story of Abraham. While he extensively discusses the possible dialectical progression of Abraham from the "Preliminary Expectoration" to the second problema, the longest third problema is oddly devoted to a series of hypothetical literary figures, leaving few pages for Abraham. In addition, Silentio expresses high praise and passionate admiration for Abraham in the first part of *FT*, yet, in the third problema, he seems to be reluctant and doubtful for his understanding of the story. This confirms the third problema as Silentio's turning point, and suggests it as the key to spell out the hidden message concerning the theme of silence.

What Silentio fails to understand is that the leap is not the final step to achieve faith, and the task of faith is never completed in *Religiousness B*. The third problema consists of six love stories, where the poetic figures in the stories are altered and situated in an insufferable silence by Silentio. By pushing the figures' pathos to the extreme, Silentio attempts to understand Abraham's dialectical progression; without any success, he becomes more confused about story and rashly concludes Abraham as the "father of faith." All six stories show a similar pattern where the individual reaches the highest point of pathos in *A*, but cannot get out or progresses any further. This is analogous to Silentio's progression in *FT* as he gets closer to Abraham, yet cannot fully understand him. His attempt to push every imaginary character beyond their highest



pathos is parallel to his own urge to complete the subjective appropriation of the most erratic religious irregularity, Abraham killing his own son, which “makes fulfillment of the divine promise absurd, or inaccessible to human power and reason” (Davenport 206). Silentio can be understood as an individual in *Religiousness A* who tries to leap forward by writing about the leap. His misinterpretation of the leap is itself a leap, as a radical attempt to assert his own ability to obtain an eternal happiness. This attempt of rationalizing Abraham’s faith through hypothetical stories is a deviation of the subjective appropriation in inwardness, and based on a wrong understanding of the leap and *Religiousness B*. He mistakenly regards the leap as the final answer to faith as a completed process in *B*. The leap in the third problema shows that Silentio is unwilling to take the risk of faith and substitutes his own personal actuality with poetic imaginations. The failure is inevitable; Kierkegaard would describe him as failing to “keep the [esthetic and religious] spheres sharply separate from each other by means of the qualitative dialectic” (CUP 436). In other words, Silentio’s attempt in the third problema is a defiant move to radically assert his own ability to rationally abstract faith with the pride of a competent individual. It fits into the structure discussed in the previous chapter where the individual attempts to go beyond *A* with the intention of getting rid of the paradoxical suffering. Silentio leaps with a wrong concept of the leap, and, therefore, falls into aporia:

Here again it is apparent that one perhaps can understand Abraham, but only in the way one understands the paradox. I, for my part, perhaps can understand Abraham, but I also realize that I do not have the courage to speak in this way, no more than I have the courage to act as Abraham did; but by no means do I say that the act is of little importance, since, on the contrary, it is the one and only marvel.  
(FT 120)

This passage at the end of *FT* shows Silentio's contradictory and reluctant attitudes for faith as an indication of the state of aporia. He faintly realizes that there is more that he does not have the courage to achieve, which refers to the two steps in *Religiousness B*. However, *FT* ends here without making Silentio's further movements explicit.

The indirect message of *FT* is "God transcends the ordinary standards of the ethical—what, as sinners, we deserve—and through making both 'a teleological suspension of the ethical' and a sacrifice of God the son, redeems humanity" (Lippitt 93). The message that Silentio fails to grasp is that, to obtain faith, he should accept his sin and stop abstracting and imitating Abraham; the hidden message for the readers is that Silentio should be eliminated along with any other representatives of faith, the existential task is building a private relationship with God. However, we still do not know what an authentic Christian look like. Like all the other pseudonymous works, *FT* does not further explain how Silentio progresses and finds an eternal happiness. Recall that Climacus, claimed to be a non-religious person, avoids claiming authority for his analysis of Christianity; thus, the description of *B* should not be taken as a standard definition. While Anti-Climacus is the most qualified as a Christian, he does not provide a detailed account. As one's self is first found in broken pieces, it needs to be recollected by unifying the three pseudonymous accounts.

Faith for an existing person is to have hope and confidence in the state of eternal striving, where he recognizes the impossibility of obtaining an eternal happiness, yet continues the progress of self before God until death. Let us first start with the most valid account of Christian faith by Anti-Climacus: "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (SUD 131). This formula is frequently stated as the definition of faith. Recall that the positive is distinguished by the negative in the religious

discourse. In his discussion of despair, Anti-Climacus states that faith and sin are direct opposites, and the genuine faith is defined by the complete void of despair (sin). The definition of faith can be interpreted in two parts. In the first part, the individual actively wills to progress towards an ideal self; in the second part, he passively relies on God's absolute power. It can be understood as a continuous synthesis of the positive and negative. Sin-consciousness reminds the individual of a total inability, and prevents him from demonically asserting his existence higher than God; it also reminds him that his self is a creation of God and a manifestation of God's power so that he would not fall into despair over himself. The two parts seem to suggest two conflicting images: the first shows the subject as desperately trying to grasp faith, and the second presents a rather passive and peaceful image.

Second, Silentio's image of an authentic Christian is similar to the second part of Anti-Climacus' definition, represented by the knight of faith:

“Good Lord, is this the man, is this really the one—he looks just like a tax collector!” ...He belongs entirely to the world; no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more. Nothing is detectable of that distant and aristocratic nature by which the knight of the infinite is recognized. He finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything, and every time one sees him participating in something particular, he does it with an assiduousness that marks the worldly man who is attached to such things. (FT 39)

A truly faithful person is vividly characterized as the image of the knight of faith, being indistinguishable from others and inevitably bound to worldly tasks. As I previously argued, Silentio's understanding of the leap and faith is mistaken. His strong urge to resolve the paradox leads to a simplified view of faith, which tends to emphasize the positive side. However, it does

not mean that the image of a tax collector is entirely incompatible with Anti-Climacus' account. While Anti-Climacus states that the development of self is never completed, he does not explicitly describe the everyday lifestyle of a Christian. In fact, the writing style of Anti-Climacus, being calm, collected, and well-composed, suggests an image of a bourgeois philistine, who is never disturbed by any religious thinking. Thus, though Silentio's view of faith is incomplete, the image of knight of faith echoes to the second part of Anti-Climacus' definition of faith.

Third, to see a full picture of the Christian life, let us turn to Climacus. He claims the eternal striving as essential lifestyle of a Christian:

That the existing subjective thinker is continually striving does not mean, however, that in a finite sense he has a goal toward which he is striving, where he would be finished when he reached it, No, he is striving infinitely, is continually in the process of becoming, something that is safeguarded by his being just as negative as positive and by his having just as much of the essentially comic as of the essentially pathos-filled, and that has its basis in the circumstance that he is existing and renders this in his thinking. The process of becoming is the thinker's very existence...as long as he is existing, he is in the process of becoming. (CUP 91)

Here, the individual, as one who bears the task of appropriating religious truth, is in a never-to-be-completed process of becoming. Climacus' picture of the faithful echoes to the first part of Anti-Climacus' definition of faith that the individual in sin-consciousness carries a great burden endlessly. The self, as a synthesis of positive and negative, has no finite end since it is essentially defined by its expression, which is the individual's temporal existence. In other words, the

individual is continuously expressed through living itself. If the individual is in eternal striving, and the self is in an endless process of becoming, what does this authentic Christian look like: treading elegantly like a knight of faith or suffering in agony like Silentio?

Combining all three narratives, the individual with genuine faith cannot be free of suffering in anxiety and despair because, as long as he is existing, sin-consciousness demands him to appropriate everything in relation to God as the top priority. In fact, the individual is held in a sharpened pathos, where each action qualified before God paradoxically arouses and repels new passion, and further shapes the self. However, the individual in excruciating pain looks exactly like a tax collector from the outside:

When we take a religious person, the knight of hidden inwardness, and place him in the existence-medium, a contradiction will appear as he relates himself to the world around him, and he himself must become aware of this. The contradiction does not consist in his being different from everyone else, but the contradiction is that he, with all this inwardness hidden within him, with this pregnancy of suffering and benediction in his inner being, looks just like all the others—and inwardness is indeed hidden simply by his looking exactly like others. (CUP 499)

The despair and angst caused by the eternal striving is put to rest as one's self is diminished and surrendered to God's power. This is the image of a Christian in eternal striving as absurd, a walking contradiction: suffering desperately as the inner man and living peacefully as the outer man.

Let me conclude this thesis by examining the most common practice of Christianity. What does it mean to go to church every Sunday? "It is a childish form of religiousness, for example, to receive permission once a week from God, as it were, to make merry all next week,

and then in turn on the following Sunday request permission for the next week by going to church and hearing the pastor say: We must always keep in mind that a human being is capable of nothing at all” (CUP 473). The appropriation of Christianity, or the quest of the self-identity, or the search for an eternal happiness is ultimately a development of self-consciousness, to have the courage to know and accept yourself as a finite human being existing in time and space. The greatest hindrance to the development of self-consciousness is always set by the subject himself as the unwillingness to accept his self at fault (e.g. losing a job, failing the marriage, wasting away the youth). The individuals, as the children of God, are marked by sins as soon as they start to exist, yet the unwillingness is so deviant that Christianity becomes a tool to childishly wash away their sins every Sunday for “a fresh new start” on every Monday. Going to church is indeed to get a permission; it is not a permission to indulge in worldly pleasure all week long, but a permission not to suffer constantly from thinking about God all week long.

## **Appendix. A First and Final Explanation**

This thesis is my attempt to approach and appropriate Christianity, and, most importantly, to understand myself. I firmly believe that Kierkegaard's ideas are still relevant and applicable in the 21st century society. This thesis, this appendix in particular, is by no means a social critique or political commentary. However, it is nonetheless my observation and experience as an existing individual situated in this world-historical context. It is a result of my personal reflection of living almost 200 years after Kierkegaard's time. Therefore, this appendix is both written as an homage to Kierkegaard and an invitation for the readers (if any) to reflect his thoughts and their relevance more intimately in this age.

In retrospect, Kierkegaard is correct that the Hegelian system is not or probably will never be completed. Unfortunately, his worries about a collective disintegration of responsibilities are also coming true. In the 21st century marked by an explosion of high technology, human beings have an ever so strong urge to advance ceaselessly in every aspect without considering the cost. The school mass shoot-out, global warming, indiscriminate bombing, etc. are grotesque results of a collective lack of care and guilts. Climacus' passionate outcry concerning the Danish society at his time is even more applicable now:

Whether our age is more immoral than other ages, I shall not decide, but just as a degenerated penance was the specific immorality in a period of the Middle Ages, so the immorality of our age could very easily become a fantastical-ethical deliberation, the disintegration of a sensual, soft despair, in which individuals grope as in a dream for a concept of God without feeling any terror in so doing but on the contrary boasting of this superiority, which in its dizziness of thought and with the vagueness of impersonality has an intimation, as it were, of God in

the indefinite, and imagination meets him whose existence remains more or less like that of the mermaids. And the same thing could easily repeat itself in the individual's relation to himself—namely, that the ethical and the responsibility and the power to act and the strong-nerved sorting out by penance evaporate in a brilliance of disintegration, in which the individual dreams about himself metaphysically or lets all existence dream about itself and confuses himself with Greece, Rome, China, world-history, our age, and the century. (CUP 544-45)

Kierkegaard sees this dangerous tendency that the ethical responsibilities are slowly eroded. In our age, we are so much more impatient that we do not even bother entertaining the thought of God, and skip right into being a superior, independent, and powerful individual. While people in the 19th century merely started to fantasize themselves by drenching in the world-history, we are so ready to get ahead of ourselves that we do not need to know or appropriate anything about Greece, Rome, or China. The technology, science, and artificial intelligence that we created are so powerful and convenient that we can simply dismiss God as irrelevant. We do not need to do anything to fantasize our lives; we are already powerful and superior. Kierkegaard is right that “it is difficult to repent of this superiority that has reached such heights; it has an appearance of the profundity that deceives” (CUP 545). Now, this superiority is almost impossible to repent because the concept of sin, one's perpetual inability, is eradicated everywhere except on the Sunday Mass. This sense of pride and superiority strengthens one's unwillingness to admit their faults. While it is already horrendous that one murders two people with an axe to prove his superiority, at least he directly faces the bloody consequences of his action. Now, one sits behind a screen and pushes a button, and a whole village in another continent is wiped. The collapse of moral responsibilities and a deep-rooted indifference are ever so prevalent in our age.



I am not suggesting that religions do not exist at all at our age or a conversion to Christianity will solve all these problems. In fact, it is popular and widespread, but in a rather superficial and strange way in, what Kierkegaard would call, a form of weakness and deviance. First, Christianity is politicized and reduced to mere indicators of certain ideological beliefs. It is often strongly associated with nationalistic sentiments, conservative political stances, and certain views of gender and race. It is externalized into a public affair, and no longer a deeply personal matter, even less about the transformation of the self in subjective inwardness. It becomes a label, which can be used and thrown away easily, to express one's stand quickly and conveniently. God becomes a trivial medium to link different communities up to thousands of denominations, and each one promotes their own way of God. Second, it is adopted rashly and superficially by the general public as a coping mechanism. It becomes a foxhole faith that people resort to counter specific cases of suffering (e.g., job loss, graduate school rejection, unrequited love), and never thinks about it afterwards. For example, the theme of AA meetings is to convince one into believing in higher power to get rid of drinking problems. God becomes a highly specific solution to the personal issues, and an excuse not to face one's problems directly alone. Christianity becomes the sole rule and criterion for these individuals that they cannot be ethical without the governance of God. The self is completely annihilated and never rebuilt. Individuals cower in group gatherings, in despair unwilling to be oneself, and hope to avoid the existential duty. The huge demand of therapy and incessant self-exposure on social media show a collective long-lasting despair. People are so eager to open up and share themselves even though they are not ready and barely know themselves. It becomes a necessity to let others constantly comment and judge the self, so that one can avoid the pain of "the strong-nerved sorting out by penance." Third, it is often seen in those who so vehemently claims to be a true Christian that

God is highly abstracted and reduced to academic details. They recite words from the Bible accurately and confidently, and debate for hours whether the Lord's flesh and blood are actually in the bread and wine. Eventually, they distance away their selves in their narrow interpretations, and get lost in the weed of historical details. For them, God becomes an existential quantifier.

I wonder whether Kierkegaard foresaw these problems in his final years as he launched an attack on the Danish state church and Christendom as whole. I wonder whether he finally reached the complete self when he affirmed his faith to his friend at his deathbed. At the end of the day, what truly matters is how an existing person lives his life. I sincerely hope my observations and experiences are merely exaggeration and overreaction. If not, the study of Kierkegaard is important, and the interpretation of the leap from its failure is the key to counter our false and dangerous sense of supremacy.

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