

Faith: The Infinite Task of Passionate Belief

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter identifies some of the most pertinent aspects of Kierkegaard's concept of faith for those interested in understanding Kierkegaard's theology. The topic of faith is one of the most widely discussed in the Kierkegaardian corpus, and not surprisingly, it is also extensively covered in secondary literature. Synthesizing all of Kierkegaard's ideas about faith would therefore be an impossible task for a single chapter. We have decided to focus on a number of topics that will be familiar to those well-versed in Kierkegaard studies, while also attempting to look at Kierkegaard's conception of faith in a fresh way. The chapter is divided in two parts. Section I discusses Kierkegaard's conception of how faith and reason interact, focusing on the tension between the two but arguing that the tension does not mean that faith and reason are ultimately opposed. We explore the ways that Kierkegaard understands faith to be 'against' reason, the extent to which it is, and why he thinks the tension must be resolved either in faith or offence. We also explain how the tension between faith and reason can be both conceptual and practical in nature. Section I concludes with a discussion of Kierkegaard's important claim that the opposite of faith is offence rather than doubt. There we develop Kierkegaard's idea that faith is a type of passion and not merely a belief state.

Section II shifts gears to focus attention on the ways that Kierkegaard thinks faith is an ongoing activity, a never-completed task. We do this primarily by examining two conditions that Kierkegaard thinks are necessary if one is to come to faith. First, we examine Kierkegaard's idea of infinite resignation, a requirement for faith that is not yet faith itself. Then we examine Kierkegaard's claim that faith requires a type of decision or 'leap'. We argue that this second condition does not mean that Kierkegaard's concept of faith is non-orthodox or Pelagian. Nor does it make him a direct volitionalist, who thinks we can acquire faith simply by an act of will. Rather, the Kierkegaardian 'leap' of faith must be understood as a response to the uncertainty that exists in the historical foundations of Christian faith and the need to close deliberation regarding that uncertainty. Faith requires a 'leap' because faith must express itself in change in a person's life.¹

¹ In selecting the topics to cover, we have ignored several important themes and distinctions that Kierkegaard makes. Many of these will be of interest for those who want to study further Kierkegaard's theology of faith; chief among these is what Kierkegaard calls Socratic faith, or the faith that is found in 'religiousness A'. The definitive discussion of religiousness A is found in *CUP*, 385–525, and a helpful overview in C. Stephen Evans,

I. FAITH AND REASON

There are of course many uses of the term ‘faith’ in philosophical and theological contexts, but one of the most common centres on the formation of beliefs that are grounded in trust for another person. Thus, if a friend tells you that he will help you repair your car next Saturday, and if you trust your friend, you may form a belief that he will help you repair your car next Saturday. Christian theology’s concept of faith also centres around trust, though it is a complex dispositional state of the person that typically includes beliefs and a willingness to act in certain ways as well. Although faith is primarily trust in God, a person who trusts God will typically have certain beliefs *about* God (particularly that God is good) and also a willingness to believe what God says, if God speaks to humans. A person of faith also will manifest a willingness to act on the basis of God’s promises and obey God’s commands. So although faith is primarily trust, it normally includes belief as well and typically shows itself in actions. This certainly seems to be how Kierkegaard conceives of faith. It is noteworthy that the Epistle of James, which affirms that ‘faith without works is dead’ (Jas 2.14–26), seems to have been Kierkegaard’s favourite book of the Bible.²

Discussions of the ‘problem of faith and reason’ usually focus on the ‘belief’ aspect of faith. In this context the term ‘reason’ usually represents what humans can come to believe or know by the unaided exercise of the human intellect – that is, reasoning that is without the aid of any special divine revelation. The term ‘faith’, by contrast, generally represents an acceptance and appropriation of truth that has been received through special revelation, and at least some of these truths are usually thought to be ones that unaided human reason would be unable to reach.³

It is often claimed that faith and reason can and do come into conflict with one another. A tension could arise if faith is understood as calling a believer to accept some claim that seems unreasonable, or to act in ways that appear unreasonable. Thus, the question of how one should think about this apparent tension has been a common starting point for theological discussions of faith. Some theologians have argued that the tension is merely apparent⁴; other thinkers (usually not theologians, of course) have argued the conflict is real and intractable.⁵ Kierkegaard certainly thought that there can be, and frequently is, a tension between faith and reason. We begin, then, by discussing this tension, attempting to understand why Kierkegaard sometimes speaks of faith as believing ‘against reason’ or ‘against the understanding’. This tension between faith and reason can be both conceptual and practical in nature.

Kierkegaard: An Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 110–38. We have also provided a list of helpful (but far from exhaustive) references at the back of this chapter for those who wish to study Kierkegaard’s concept of faith further.

² See Richard Bauckham, ‘Kierkegaard and the Epistle of James’, in *Kierkegaard and Christian Faith*, ed. Paul Martens and C. Stephen Evans (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 39–54.

³ Theologians commonly distinguish between general and special revelation, where special revelation is revelation that is received through God’s specific acts in human history, including the prophetic and apostolic interpretations of those acts. General revelation, by contrast, refers to ways that God may be known apart from his acts in human history. In our discussion of divine revelation that follows, we intend to refer to special revelation.

⁴ For a good example, see Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard’s Vision of the Incarnation: By Faith Transformed* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁵ For examples, see Louis Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 136–7, and also Herbert M. Garelick, *The Anti-Christianity of Kierkegaard* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 25–8.

We will try to show that Kierkegaard holds a 'perspectival' view of human reason and that the tension between faith and reason arises when human reason is shaped by the perspective of sin or 'worldliness'. There is also, we shall argue, a perspective (the perspective shaped by faith) in which faith and reason are on good terms. Section I concludes with our examination of why Kierkegaard thinks the tension between faith and reason must be resolved either in faith itself or in offence. Faith and offence are both passions, and there is a sense in which neither is more 'reasonable' than the other. Neither is the product of the intellect alone.

Historical Perspectives: Faith as below, above or against Reason

Broadly speaking, theologians have responded in three ways to the apparent conflict between faith and reason. First, there are those who have assumed that faith is *below* reason. These thinkers argue that divinely revealed truths must be viewed in the light of what is 'reasonable' to believe. Religious doctrines or teachings that are unreasonable, incomprehensible or seemingly immoral must therefore be rejected or reinterpreted according to reason. Faith is free to accept revealed truth only so long as it does not conflict with what is 'rational'. This is one way, then, that faith can be 'against' reason; but here whenever the two conflict faith is subordinated to the rational.⁶ Kierkegaard, as we shall see, does not give priority to reason in this way; he always gives priority to faith over reason if the two are thought to conflict.

There are two ways that one might give priority to faith over reason. One is represented by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas argued that faith can grasp truths that are *above* reason. On this view, faith is not seen as necessarily antagonistic to reason. Rather than being against reason, faith is thought to augment, enhance or come to the aid of reason. When the object of faith is trustworthy, then what a person of faith believes should still be considered rational, even though the truths believed might be beyond the powers of reason. Aquinas thinks that God's gift of faith is a gracious power that perfects man's natural rational capacities, and thus the antagonism between faith and reason is not fundamental.⁷

Kierkegaard certainly agrees with this view that some of the truths of faith are beyond the power of reason to comprehend. Indeed, he sometimes describes his view in terms very similar to those used by Aquinas.⁸ However, Kierkegaard does not merely affirm that faith is above reason but often maintains that faith is *against* reason.⁹ Faith should not be

⁶ Early modern Western thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Benedict de Spinoza and John Locke held this kind of view. The title of one of Kant's books expresses the idea nicely: 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason.' See Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason' and Other Writings*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, intro. Robert Merrihew Adams, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁷ See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 2, Art. 3–4.

⁸ See, for example, a passage where Kierkegaard quotes approvingly from Hugo de St Victor. In the passage Hugo maintains that although there are truths of faith that reason cannot fully grasp, there is still something 'by which reason becomes determined or is conditioned to honor the faith which it still does not perfectly succeed in grasping'. See JP 1:7, p. 4 / SKS 23, NB15:25, p. 23. For further discussion of this point see C. Stephen Evans, *Faith beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account*, Reason and Religion Series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 85–6.

⁹ For a discussion of this theme in Kierkegaard, see Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 220–1. C. Stephen Evans also discusses the theme of 'faith against reason' in Kierkegaard in chapter 7 of *Faith beyond Reason*, 93–113.

thought of as something that simply perfects human nature; rather faith is something that *overcomes* human nature. Kierkegaard goes so far as to say that faith requires the ‘crucifixion of the understanding’.¹⁰ He regularly describes that which faith believes (or that which faith requires) as ‘unreasonable’,¹¹ ‘absurd’,¹² ‘foolishness’¹³ and a ‘paradox’.¹⁴ This has caused some interpreters to go so far as to think that Kierkegaard is advocating a kind of irrationalism (an interpretation we will argue against in the next section). Regardless, Kierkegaard clearly takes seriously the idea that there is some kind of natural tension between faith and human reason. In the next two sections, we explore why Kierkegaard thinks this is the case.

Kierkegaard on Faith and Theoretical Reason: Conceptual Tensions

A divine revelation may require a person to believe something that cannot be fully understood because reason is unable to conceptualize the ideas presented. There may be something about the revelation itself that appears contradictory (to unaided reason). If this happens, unaided reason will reject the concept as unreasonable. Kierkegaard thinks the most important example of this type of conflict is contained in the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. In the *Fragments* and *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus argues that when reason attempts to comprehend the idea of the ‘god-man’, it is unable to grasp how any individual could be both divine and human. Climacus calls the idea of the god-man the ‘absolute paradox’: ‘The thesis that God has existed in human form, was born, grew up, etc. is certainly the paradox *sensu strictissimo*, the absolute paradox.’¹⁵ Reason cannot comprehend the paradox. Human thought reaches towards it but finds something that it ‘cannot think’.¹⁶ Climacus calls the paradox absolute because of ‘the absolute difference’ between human nature and the divine nature.¹⁷ There are a number of reasons why unaided reason or the understanding naturally tends to recoil from believing in the incarnation.

First, the incarnation affirms what seems to be a ‘contradiction’ because Christ is seen as both God and human and these categories appear to be mutually exclusive. Since God is eternal and humans are temporal, it is not easy to see how one being could be both eternal and temporal.¹⁸ Such an idea may simply seem impossible to reason. (We shall argue, however, that what seems to be the case is not necessarily known to be the case and that Kierkegaard does not in fact see the incarnation as logically contradictory and therefore logically impossible.) Climacus even describes the incarnation in ontological terms, saying that the paradox is that God can become historical ‘against [His] nature’.¹⁹ Climacus repeatedly claims that the absolute paradox can only be believed ‘against the

¹⁰ CUP, 564.

¹¹ FT, 17.

¹² FT, 37, 40, 48–50.

¹³ PF, 39, 52, 102.

¹⁴ FT, 69–75; PF, 37–9, 50–2.

¹⁵ CUP, 217.

¹⁶ PF, 37.

¹⁷ PF, 44–7; CUP, 412–13, 492. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard describes the absolute difference as the ‘most chasml qualitative abyss’, SUD, 122, and the ‘infinite qualitative difference’, SUD, 126–7. From the perspective of ‘reason’, the absolute difference appears to be metaphysical in nature. However, in PF Climacus says that the ‘absolute difference’ is not metaphysical but is constituted by sin. PF, 47.

¹⁸ CUP, 574.

¹⁹ CUP, 578, cf. 512.

understanding' and that 'if anyone fancies that he understands this [the incarnation], he can be sure that he misunderstands it'.²⁰

If faith believes what seems to go against reason, one might think that it follows that faith must be irrational. Several interpreters of Kierkegaard have made this charge against Kierkegaard.²¹ The critique of Kierkegaard as an irrationalist assumes that reason is a kind of neutral, disinterested judge that examines faith and finds it intellectually deficient. Reason as an objective, detached faculty is supposed to provide a reliable gauge of truth. Such a view sees 'reason' as a kind of timeless and unconditioned faculty that humans possess. Kierkegaard rejects this view of reason, and thus his claim that faith is 'against' reason should not be understood as the claim that faith goes against the findings of such a timeless, objective faculty, for no such faculty exists in humans. Reasoning, for humans, is an activity engaged in by historically situated human beings, and what seems 'reasonable' will always reflect the character of the humans who are doing the reasoning.

Specifically, for Kierkegaard there is a vast difference between what seems reasonable from the perspective of what might be called 'worldly wisdom', that is, what seems reasonable to sinful humans and what seems right to the person of faith. There is no such thing as *the* perspective of reason for Kierkegaard, and thus there is no intrinsic or inherent opposition between reason and faith. Kierkegaard admits, even insists, that there is a tension between faith and human reason, which is manifested in a strong tendency on the part of human reason to recoil from faith. However, this tension is not an absolute or intrinsic tension between faith and reason per se but a tension between faith and human reason as it historically exists, shaped by human sinfulness. There is, therefore, a long tradition of arguing that Kierkegaard is not an irrationalist.²²

The historical character of human existence for Kierkegaard implies that 'reason' and 'reasonable' are ambiguous terms. The concept of reason is a mixed concept, partly normative and partly descriptive. To say that a person's thinking is 'reasonable' is to say that her patterns of thinking mirror the way a person *should* think, because it is likely to lead to truth. However, to put such a normative concept to work it must have descriptive content; one must have some idea as to what actual patterns of thinking are likely to reach the desired goal. When one looks at actual human reasoning one cannot find a single pattern or a set of patterns that ought to be followed or that all thinking should conform to. What has been considered reasonable has differed radically at different points in history and in different cultures. For example, the philosophies of David Hume, Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel give different accounts of 'reason' that are all mutually incompatible. Kierkegaard consistently contrasts the patterns of thinking that are considered reasonable by the worldly mind from the patterns that make sense to a person of faith. A fine example comes from Johannes de Silentio's description of Abraham's decision to emigrate from his native land: 'He [Abraham] left one thing behind, took one thing along: he

²⁰ *CUP*, 579.

²¹ For two examples, see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 106–8; Brand Blanshard, 'Kierkegaard on Faith', in *Essays on Kierkegaard*, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1969), 113–26.

²² Many Kierkegaard scholars including David F. Swenson, Alastair McKinnon, Cornelio Fabro and Niels Hansen Sørensen have argued for the claim that Kierkegaard is not an irrationalist. For more recent and extensive treatments of this topic, see chapter 7 of C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, Provost Series (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006); chapters 2, 6 and 7 of Evans, *Faith beyond Reason*; and chapters 5 and 11 of Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*.

left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith. Otherwise he certainly would not have emigrated but surely would have considered it unreasonable.²³

One concrete way that Kierkegaard thinks that this 'worldly' understanding differs from the reasoning of a faithful person centres around the question of whether there are limits to human reason. Kierkegaard recognizes that, if reason is unwilling to recognize any limits, then anything it cannot comprehend will seem to be 'against' it (from its own perspective). Here we can see that Kierkegaard is claiming that if the truths of faith are above reason they will *also* be in tension with human reasoning that does not recognize its limits. A reason that refuses to recognize the possibility that there may be some truths that it cannot discover on its own is already making an implicit claim to be without limits. This kind of reason possesses a domineering quality that wants to be the master of all knowledge and truth.²⁴ Such a faculty is far from being something purely objective or disinterested. Special revelation, by definition, purports to be a source of truth that comes from outside reason. If such revelation cannot be fully understood, and if reason, when it tries to understand it, finds that it appears contradictory, then 'natural' reason, shaped as it is by sin, will have a strong tendency to reject it or be against it.

We can therefore interpret Kierkegaard's 'against reason' thesis to mean that the incarnation is incomprehensible in relation to and from a particular human perspective. But that does not mean that the paradox is an *intrinsic* contradiction or what some philosophers call a formal logical contradiction.²⁵ Kierkegaard addresses this point in *Practice in Christianity* when his pseudonym Anti-Climacus argues that the 'God-man' is a sign of contradiction. As a sign, there 'must be something by which it draws attention to itself', and something by which it may point beyond itself. Utter nonsense cannot act as a sign. To be a sign of *contradiction*, he says, 'the contradictory parts must not annul each other in such a way that the sign comes to mean nothing'.²⁶ Thus Kierkegaard does not think the concept of the god-man is a logical contradiction; it is only a 'sign of contradiction'. If the contradiction were logical, it could not act as a sign.

One can also see that Kierkegaard is not an irrationalist because he argues that people must make use of reason in delineating and isolating the paradox in thought. Reason is what recognizes the absolute paradox as an idea that it cannot think. Reason also distinguishes the paradox from other kinds of absurdities and 'nonsense'.²⁷ Kierkegaard expounds on this point in a journal entry in which he says, 'not every absurdity is the absurd or the paradox. The activity of reason is to distinguish the paradox *negatively* – but no more.'²⁸ Reason, then, is responsible for isolating the concept of the incarnation and recognizing that it can only be believed by faith.

Finally, Kierkegaard does not think that what faith believes is chosen arbitrarily. If that were the case, one might claim that arbitrariness is evidence of irrationalism. He thinks

²³ FT, 17.

²⁴ This conception of reason is clearly described in chapter 3 of *Philosophical Fragments*, as well as in 'Offense at the Paradox (An Acoustical Illusion)', the appendix to that chapter. For a detailed exposition see C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's 'Philosophical Fragments'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), particularly chapters 5–7.

²⁵ For a detailed argument that Kierkegaard does not consider the incarnation to be a formal or logical contradiction, see C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's 'Fragments' and 'Postscript': The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 212–19. (This volume has been reprinted by Prometheus Press.)

²⁶ PC, 125.

²⁷ CUP, 504.

²⁸ Italics added, JP 1:7, p. 4 / SKS 23, NB15:25, p. 23.

that divine revelation is (or should be) accepted on the basis of its religious authority. Authority provides a rational grounding for accepting a stated truth *as* divinely revealed. In *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard argues that reason must be involved in recognizing religious authority, because not every claim to divine revelation can be authoritative. There he identifies criteria by which a person might recognize a purported divine revelation as authentic, and the application of such criteria requires the use of reason.²⁹

It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard contends one mark of a genuine revelation is that it ‘did not arise in any human heart’.³⁰ In other words, Kierkegaard thinks that it is *reasonable* to expect that revealed truths will be paradoxical, at least to persons of faith. Thus Kierkegaard affirms that it may be more rational to accept some claims to divine revelation over others while simultaneously affirming that the content of a given revelation may not be understandable by reason.³¹

In summary, Kierkegaard claims that faith’s acceptance of the absolute paradox of the incarnation is truly described as ‘against reason’. However, he does not see faith’s acceptance and appropriation of this Christian truth as intrinsically irrational. Reason will see what faith believes as irrational insofar as it strives to dominate or assumes its own unlimited power. But this does not mean that there is something logically contradictory in doctrines like the incarnation. Reason actually has a positive role to play in receiving revelation and accepting its authority; faith’s acceptance of divine revelation *as* divine is not arbitrary. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard does think that certain revelations, and the incarnation in particular, will always remain paradoxical if considered by human reason alone.

Kierkegaard on Faith and Expectation: Practical Tensions

The tension between faith and reason does not lie merely in a person’s theoretical understanding. Faith’s conflict with reason can also be pragmatic; it may conflict with people’s expectations about their futures and how they think they should act. God might ask people to expect things (and do things) that are against what human experience teaches people to reasonably expect and do. In this section we will explore Kierkegaard’s account of faith’s *expectancy* and how it may conflict with reason.

Kierkegaard contends that a person may come to expect something about the future in one of two ways. The first is through a kind of inductive reasoning process: a predictive, calculative thought process that extrapolates from past experience and forms expectations about the future. Kierkegaard identifies this type of reasoning when he speaks of a person setting her expectations by ‘inference’, ‘guessing’ and ‘calculation.’³² Second, a person may form expectations by faith. Such expectations are founded on a trust in God and in his promises. Because these two ways of forming expectations have fundamentally different bases, it may happen that faith’s expectations are perceived by reason as irrational or unreasonable.

²⁹ See C. Stephen Evans, ‘Kierkegaard on Religious Authority: The Problem of the Criterion’, in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 239–60.

³⁰ PF, 109.

³¹ The issue of religious authority is also discussed in Paul Martens, ‘Kierkegaard and Apostolic Authority’, in *Kierkegaard and Christian Faith*, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Paul Martens (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 55–72.

³² EUD, 18–19.

The conflict between faith and reason, especially with regard to expectations, can be clearly seen in Johannes de Silentio's discussion of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. God promises Abraham that he will have a son and that through that son he will be the father of a great nation. Abraham and his wife conceive, naming their new son Isaac. But the story takes a dramatic twist when God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham obeys, taking his son to Mt Moriah to perform the sacrifice. As Silentio tells the story, Abraham, in faith, never stops believing that he will still be the father of a great nation *through* Isaac.³³ Abraham *expects* that he will somehow get Isaac back. When Abraham finally binds Isaac and raises his knife, God interrupts the act and commands Abraham to sacrifice a ram instead. Silentio remarks that Abraham's trust in God's promise and willingness to obey earns Abraham the title of the 'father of faith'.³⁴

Silentio recognizes that the Abrahamic story can only be described as 'terrifying'³⁵ or 'madness'³⁶ if understood from a perspective outside of faith. In other words, the story illustrates perfectly how faith can expect something that seems irrational to the ordinary human understanding.³⁷ Abraham expects by faith that he will get Isaac back. But Silentio contends that Abraham could have believed this only 'by virtue of the absurd'.³⁸ One might speculate that Abraham thought that God was testing him; or perhaps he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Either way, Silentio argues, there is no basis in human experience or 'human calculation' to make it rational for Abraham to believe as he does.³⁹ Human experience teaches that once people are dead they remain that way. Apart from faith and trust in God, who is able to do what seems impossible to humans, Abraham has no basis to expect an outcome other than Isaac's death.

God's promise to Abraham and the subsequent command to sacrifice the son who was promised generate a type of practical paradox for Abraham. The paradox is obviously different from the conceptual paradox of the god-man; it is not 'absolute' in the same sense. Abraham does not expect the 'impossible' in a conceptual sense; it is conceivable that someone might come back from the dead. Nevertheless, Abraham's faith expects something that human experience teaches is 'impossible'.⁴⁰ It is an 'impossibility' given what we know about human beings. Thus, seen from a perspective outside of faith, Abraham's expectation is 'irrational' in the same way that it would be irrational for someone to jump out of an airplane with no parachute and expect to live. Silentio affirms that human reason is actually correct when it thinks that Abraham expects the 'impossible', summarizing, '[T]he understanding continues to be right in maintaining that in the finite world where it dominates this having was and continues to be an impossibility. The knight of faith realizes this just as clearly; consequently, he can be

³³ Cf. Heb. 11.17.

³⁴ *FT*, 55. Cf. Rom. 4.16, cf. Heb. 11.8.

³⁵ *FT*, 75, 77.

³⁶ *FT*, 16–17.

³⁷ One of the primary themes found in *Fear and Trembling* is the way faith can require one to 'suspend' one's ethical reasoning processes, or what Kierkegaard calls 'the teleological suspension of the ethical', in order to obey God's commands. *FT*, 54. This theme has been discussed extensively so we have chosen instead to focus on the issue of expectancy here.

³⁸ *FT*, 36–7, 40, 48–50.

³⁹ *FT*, 35.

⁴⁰ *FT*, 16. There is a parallel here with the 'impossibility' of the incarnation, since it is also human experience that suggests to us that someone who appears to be an ordinary human being could not be God.

saved only by the absurd, and this he grasps by faith.⁴¹ This tension presents itself as another dimension to the tension that appears between faith and human reason as it actually functions.

Of course, Silentio argues that Abraham's faith in God was 'unreasonable' even before God gave the command to sacrifice Isaac.⁴² Abraham's decision to leave his homeland already did not make sense to 'worldly understanding'. For he expected that, no matter what happened in his life, no matter where God took him, it would somehow be for his good; that he would be 'victorious'. Abraham's faith anticipated the New Testament promise that 'all things must serve for good those who love God'.⁴³ Abraham's life thus points to how faith and reason may form expectations differently. Faith expects 'victory' in all circumstances, and this is unreasonable from a merely human perspective.

Kierkegaard discusses the concept of faith's expectancy at length in his *Upbuilding Discourses*. Three discourses are particularly relevant: 'The Expectancy of Faith' (1843), 'Patience in Expectancy' (1844) and the 'The Expectancy of Eternal Salvation' (1845).⁴⁴ In these essays Kierkegaard argues that faith has a particular kind of evaluative stance regarding what it expects of the future: it expects 'victory!' But such an expectation cannot be based on what one learns through everyday experience. The hurts, losses and disappointments of the past make it reasonable that one should expect similar losses in the future. But Kierkegaard argues that the expectancy of faith is victory, and this expectancy is not based on past experience; it is grounded in God's promises.

The most perplexing aspect of faith's expectation of victory is that it is not based on anything *particular* occurring in the future.⁴⁵ Reason cannot understand this. 'Victory' is a term of positive evaluation, where some anticipated outcome is achieved or a conflict is positively resolved. Reason only knows how to declare a victory if it can verify that a particular expectation has been met according to some empirical criterion.⁴⁶ If *ex hypothesi* no such criterion is available, then reason thinks it unreasonable to expect victory. Faith, by contrast, expects victory in *all* circumstances. Kierkegaard says that faith expects 'victory in all strife, in all spiritual trials, because experience had taught that there could be

⁴¹ FT, 47.

⁴² FT, 17–18.

⁴³ Rom. 8.28.

⁴⁴ See *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*.

⁴⁵ EUD, 27. Cf. George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses* (London: Routledge, 2002), 50. There is a tension here between the *Upbuilding Discourses* and *Fear and Trembling*, since in the latter it does seem that Abraham believes something specific. This may reflect the more 'generic' form of religiosity present in the *Upbuilding Discourses*, since it does seem that Christian faith, like Abraham's, involves some expectations about specific promises being fulfilled. However, the difference is not absolute, since the Christian does not know exactly what form 'eternal life' will take, or precisely what God's promises mean or how they will be fulfilled. Thus, the Christian also holds that God's love is not refuted by any specific empirical events.

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard formulates reason's objection in this way: 'An expectancy without a specified time is nothing but a deception; in that way one may always go on waiting; such an expectancy is a circle into which the soul is bewitched and from which it cannot escape.' EUD, 23. Robert C. Roberts has called this the 'circle objection'. He interprets it to mean that if an expectancy is not specified in time (which he equates to its verifiability conditions), then it is not really *an expectancy at all*. In other words, since the expectancy is not specified, it is doing 'no work'. See Robert C. Roberts, 'The Virtue of Hope in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*', in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 181–203. But if Roberts is right, then faith really is not expecting anything at all, even though it thinks it is. There is reason to think that this interpretation is not correct. People commonly (and genuinely) expect things from their futures without specifying times or places for those expectations. People may reasonably expect to get married, have children, die, etc., all without defining their expectations in terms of particular times or places. Thus the paradoxical nature of faith's expectancy does not seem to lie in its genuineness *qua* expectancy.

battle ... but with the help of faith, it expects victory in all of them'.⁴⁷ This expectation of victory contradicts those expectations based on experience. These teach a person that hopes will be disappointed, hurts will happen and people must be 'prepared for a certain degree of unhappiness'.⁴⁸ The question, then, is what *sense* can one make of Kierkegaard's concept of 'victory,' especially in the midst of life's hurts and disappointments?

Kierkegaard does not think that faith's expectation is blind to disappointment. He admits that a believer may at times 'look at his life with sadness and pain'.⁴⁹ He also thinks that a certain acquaintance with disappointment is a proper part of maturing.⁵⁰ Kierkegaard's conception of victory, then, is distinctly theological. It is based in God's promise that, 'as Scripture so earnestly and so movingly teaches us, all things must serve for good those who love God'.⁵¹ The believer says, 'There is an expectancy that the whole world cannot take from me ... since I did not believe that the world would keep the promise it seemed to be making to me; my expectancy was not in the world but in God.'⁵² This expectancy, then, is not based on worldly wisdom but on God and his promises.

Faith's concept of victory is not that a person's life will be a series of 'victories' in the sense that all of one's hopes and wants will be satisfied. Rather, Kierkegaard contends that 'faith expects only one [victory], or more correctly, it expects victory'.⁵³ Faith expects that no matter what kinds of experiences or difficulties one encounters, they will all contribute to one's total good. It trusts that *each* future life event will be a constitutive part of *one* victorious life.

Here it is important to note that Kierkegaard thinks faith's expectation of victory is still an expectation *for this life*;⁵⁴ Christian faith's expectation is not merely for victory in the eschaton, though Kierkegaard clearly affirms that one's victory does not end with death. But this raises a question about what Kierkegaard would say about the faith of those who faced martyrdom. In what sense could they have expected 'victory' in this life? We think that Kierkegaard might answer this question by pointing to the many martyrs who saw their own deaths as a kind of final good or achievement they were able to attain in life. There are numerous stories of saints who, while going to their death, did so rejoicing and thankful for the opportunity to partake in the same sufferings as their Lord.⁵⁵

But obviously this concept of victory is not something reasonable from the perspective of worldly understanding. Therein lies another natural tension between reason and faith. Reason (often) cannot comprehend how particular events, especially those that cause pain or suffering, can be a constitutive part of one's good.⁵⁶ And faith acknowledges this fact. Nevertheless, faith's expectation is that the tension will someday be resolved, and that

⁴⁷ EUD, 21.

⁴⁸ EUD, 21.

⁴⁹ EUD, 24.

⁵⁰ He chides the person 'who does not know life's dangers', saying that 'his courage is only a scarcely praiseworthy foolhardiness, and the person who does not know life's deceit – his expectancy is an intoxication in dreams'. EUD, 212.

⁵¹ EUD, 19.

⁵² EUD, 24.

⁵³ EUD, 21.

⁵⁴ This theme is also present in *Fear and Trembling*. See below, Section II, the subsection on 'Infinite Resignation', for a further discussion of this point.

⁵⁵ Many examples can be found in Rev. Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and other Principal Saints* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier, 1846).

⁵⁶ The reader may notice that the tension between faith and reason in this sense is related to what has historically been called 'the problem of evil' in philosophy of religion.

in eternity 'your life will become transparent to you ... in blessed understanding with your God and with yourself, undisturbed by that troubled passion that seeks to guess the riddles of providential dispensation'.⁵⁷ In other words, one's expectation of victory includes the expectation that one's life will someday be fully understandable as victorious in eternity's 'blessed understanding'. Faith thereby recognizes that its expectation may seem unreasonable, but it is not intrinsically so.⁵⁸

Faith, Doubt and Offence

In the previous two sections, we discussed different ways that faith can be against human reason. In this section, we will discuss Kierkegaard's important claim that this conflict is always resolved in either faith or offence, not doubt.

Kierkegaard argues that questions about God, immortality and the future are too important, and too personal, for humans to address dispassionately. He thinks a person is only fooling herself if she wants to confront such questions merely as an objective and neutral spectator. Thus, Kierkegaard argues, the human response to divine revelation is always an impassioned one. He frequently describes faith as a kind of passion⁵⁹ and claims that the opposing passion is not doubt, but offence. In *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus says, 'there is a confused discussion of doubt' with regard to Christianity because 'the practice has been to use the category "doubt" where the discussion ought to be about offence'. Therefore a person's relation to Christianity 'is not to doubt or believe, but to be offended or to believe'.⁶⁰

To explain why Kierkegaard thinks this, we must pause briefly to say something about how Kierkegaard uses the term 'passion'. For Kierkegaard, passions are connected to the emotions, the will and human action. Reflection alone does not lead to action.⁶¹ He agrees with Hume that merely knowing that something is good or some act is right would not suffice to bring about action. A person must want to do what is right or good. A person's actions stem from the heart, and to speak of the heart is to speak of what people care about: what they love, fear, desire and so on. So passion is essential to human action and therefore to human life. Passion is connected to what we feel and to our conscious life, which Kierkegaard calls 'immediacy'. However, there are two importantly different kinds of immediacy.

Kierkegaard distinguishes between 'natural' kinds of immediacy, which are momentary and episodic in nature, and a higher form of immediacy. The former kinds of immediacy (feelings, moods, momentary cravings, etc.) occur in everyone. This must be distinguished from the higher kind of immediacy, sometimes called the 'second' or 'new' immediacy, or 'immediacy after reflection'.⁶² The former are the kinds of desires, wishes, hopes and fears

⁵⁷ EUD, 216. We have modified the translation of this passage slightly.

⁵⁸ John Davenport and Sharon Krishek both emphasize the aspect of faith that is 'trust in divine promises', which is a central feature of what it means to expect victory. Davenport emphasizes especially the 'eschatological' component of such trust. See John Davenport, 'Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*', in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 203–6; Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5–6, 14, 46, 76, 130.

⁵⁹ For example, 'the highest passion in a person is faith'. FT, 121.

⁶⁰ PC, 81n.

⁶¹ See the long discussion about the relation between thinking, acting and being in CUP, 318–43.

⁶² See, for example, TA, 65; FT, 60; CA, 10. Gregor Malantschuk provides an excellent overview of Kierkegaard's use of 'immediacy' (both the first and second kinds) in his note on 'Immediacy' in JP 2, pp. 594–5. The note lists examples from almost every published book of Kierkegaard.

that naturally and spontaneously occur and develop in humans, and which change from moment to moment. The second, or higher kind of immediacy, is made up of the types of enduring passions that can give shape to a person's life over time. Kierkegaard's favourite non-religious example is a great lover, someone whose love endures and shapes his or her whole life. It is such enduring passions that shape a person's identity. Kierkegaard thinks that those who lack such enduring passions really lack any clear identity, since they change from moment to moment through the immediate passions that rule them. Kierkegaard even at times describes such a person as someone who simply lacks a self.

Faith for Kierkegaard is not a natural form of immediacy but a type of higher immediacy, or immediacy after reflection. This means that faith is a passion that can be formed or developed over time. Faith is 'immediate' in that it manifests itself through emotions such as the fear of doing evil, a love of the good and righteousness, and sorrow over sin. However, faith, as an enduring passion, also has a dispositional character. A person of faith does not cease to have faith at some moment just because the person is not at that moment thinking about God or feeling any particular emotion. As an enduring passion, faith does not come and go in that way. Faith is a complex inner state that manifests itself both in emotions, beliefs and actions.⁶³ As we shall show in the next section, achieving faith is an ongoing task, and one of the ways faith is cultivated is through learning to think in certain ways about oneself, God and the world. The role of thought in developing faith is why faith is a form of 'immediacy after reflection'.

Christian faith is the passion that shapes the life of a person who has been transformed by an encounter with the God-man. Such a Christian will think differently, act differently and have a disposition to have different emotions than the person who lacks faith. When this passion is present, reason recognizes its limits and gratefully trusts in a God who cannot be fully understood.

Let us now return to the concept of offence, which for Kierkegaard is the opposite passion to faith. The source of offence lies in reason's natural disposition to want to have the final say on knowledge and truth, as discussed above. Reason naturally has a domineering quality that wishes to explain or make intelligible whatever it does not know, and it strives to make the mysterious explicable. It continually searches for the unknown, 'that [which] thought itself cannot think', in order to bring this unknown into its understanding. Kierkegaard calls this seeking quality a 'passion fundamentally present everywhere in thought'.⁶⁴ Reason, then, is not something merely calculative, neutral or objective; it is *passionately active* as it seeks to conquer unknown mysteries and make them understandable. Insofar as reason thinks that nothing is beyond its limits of understanding, it will reject any claim that there is ultimate mystery in the universe. A claim to ultimate mystery is a source of *offence* against reason's own abilities. Thus, when a divine revelation shows itself to be something that cannot be understood, reason's claim to authority is rebuked, and offence is the result. Kierkegaard summarizes this nicely in a journal entry where he states, 'It is claimed that the arguments against Christianity

⁶³ Robert C. Roberts discusses emotions and what he calls 'emotion-dispositions'. It is tempting to describe faith as an emotion-disposition, but this might obscure the fact that faith manifests itself in beliefs and actions as well as emotions. See Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

⁶⁴ PF, 37. Strictly speaking, this passage (and those we discuss in what follows) should be attributed to Johannes Climacus. However, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard originally intended to publish *Philosophical Fragments* under his own name, with the pseudonym added at the last minute, with only a very few changes to the text. PF, xv–xvi. Hence we think that these texts can safely be regarded as capturing Kierkegaard's own thought.

arise out of doubt. This is a total misunderstanding. [They] arise out of insubordination, reluctance to obey, mutiny against all authority.’⁶⁵ In other words, if reason is unwilling to recognize any other authority, it will be offended at revelation’s claim to authority. This rebellion, Kierkegaard argues, is a form of sinful pride.

Offence is, thus, reason’s ‘natural’ reaction to Christian revelation, but this is only because of sin. Kierkegaard does not think that offence is a more ‘rational’ response than that of faith in some objective sense. Nor must reason respond by being offended. It is possible for the human understanding to ‘surrender itself’, to ‘step aside’ or be ‘discharged’.⁶⁶ It is important that reason itself is the one who steps aside or surrenders; put in other terms it is reasonable for reason to recognize its own limits. Reason may let go of its claim to authority and be ‘taken captive’ by revelation.⁶⁷ If this happens in response to divine revelation, Kierkegaard calls it the ‘happy passion’ of faith. Once a person is inside the perspective of faith, faith’s conflict with reason is then, at one level, resolved. A person may happily (and passionately) hold to God’s revelation while relinquishing reason’s claims to ultimacy. Nevertheless, faith recognizes that its beliefs and expectations, grounded as they are in the wisdom of God, continue to look foolish from the perspective of human wisdom. In that sense, faith continues to recognize that what it believes is ‘against’ reason.

II. CONDITIONS FOR FAITH

We have discussed Kierkegaard’s contention that a natural tension exists between faith and reason and explained why this produces a response of either faith or offence. Since faith is a passion, it would, however, be incorrect to conclude that Kierkegaardian faith is primarily about what one believes or expects simply at one point in time. One of the more important contributions Kierkegaard makes to the topic of faith is his claim that faith is not something that one can ever arrive at or be finished with. Faith is a type of activity or task that is always ongoing. This activity includes believing and expecting, but it also manifests itself in actions and emotions.

To pursue the task that is faith, Kierkegaard argues that certain conditions must be present. These conditions shed further light on the active and appropriative aspects of faith. In what follows, we show how Kierkegaard’s concept of ‘infinite resignation’ is a condition for faith that also illuminates what faith is not. Then we turn to Kierkegaard’s famous claim that faith requires a decision or ‘leap’.

Infinite Resignation

One of the preconditions for faith is what Kierkegaard calls ‘infinite resignation’, which requires that a person be willing to resign all of his or her attachments to finite goods and goals. These must be given up necessarily if one is to relate properly to God in faith. (Furthermore, Kierkegaard thinks that this willingness will at some points actually demand giving something up.)

In *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio argues that the ‘movement of infinite resignation’ is a precondition for faith, saying that this movement is ‘that last stage

⁶⁵ JP 1:778, p. 359 / SKS 20, NB:121, p. 87.

⁶⁶ PF, 54, 59.

⁶⁷ PF, 48.

before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith'.⁶⁸ The movement involves a willingness to give up one's loves, desires and will for the sake of God.⁶⁹ Resignation is not primarily a movement of the intellect; thus resignation is even more existentially demanding than mere reason's 'stepping aside'. Silentio describes infinite resignation as a person giving up the relationships and things that she loves most in the world if this is required; in resignation a person is willing to give up her finite attachments for the sake of 'the eternal' and in order to obey God. In *Postscript*, Climacus describes resignation as a willingness to surrender one's goals or ends. There Climacus describes faith as 'simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to one's absolute τέλος [end, goal] and relatively to relative ends'.⁷⁰ One must be willing to resign or give up all finite goals (one's relative ends) in order to relate oneself absolutely to an eternal happiness or God (one's absolute τέλος).

Resignation is required for faith because if a person is not willing to surrender her finite goals and attachments, she will not be able authentically to pursue an *eternal* happiness. Climacus argues that an eternal happiness cannot be pursued in the same way one pursues finite goals like 'a good job, a beautiful wife, health, the rank of a counselor'.⁷¹ In order to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute (i.e. to God), these other goals must be resigned infinitely. Climacus summarizes this thought when he says, 'If [the goal of eternal happiness] does not absolutely transform his existence for him, then he is not relating himself to an eternal happiness; if there is something else he is not willing to give up for its sake, then he is not relating himself to an eternal happiness.'⁷² Infinite resignation is thus a movement that must occur if one is to relate oneself absolutely to God. And this relating oneself absolutely to God is a precondition for faith.

The renunciation of finite goods and goals is a prerequisite for faith, but infinite resignation should not be confused with faith itself. Returning to *Fear and Trembling*, Silentio argues that the movement of resignation gives up the finite, but, paradoxically, the movement of faith expects to receive the finite back. Silentio states, 'Through resignation I renounce everything ... by faith I do not renounce anything; by faith I receive everything.'⁷³ Faith conceives of this receiving back in both temporal and eternal terms. Silentio is skeptical of any concept of faith that resigns everything in this life and only hopes for the eternal; he thinks that faith concerns one's present life as much as it concerns one's life in the eschaton. Abraham, for example, believes that by 'virtue of the absurd' that he will get Isaac back *in this life*. Likewise, Silentio's knight of faith 'find[s] pleasure in everything ... [and] the finite tastes just as good to him'.⁷⁴ And as we already saw in Kierkegaard's expectancy discourses, faith always expects victory in this life: 'If expectancy does not, then it is fraudulent, the craftiness of a sick soul that wants to sneak out of life, and is not the authentic presence of a healthy soul in the temporal.'⁷⁵ Faith, then, is a

⁶⁸ *FT*, 46.

⁶⁹ In *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus sometimes describes infinite resignation more formally as a willingness to give up all finite goods for the sake of the 'Absolute', but it is clear that the Absolute here must be identical to God.

⁷⁰ *CUP*, 387, 431.

⁷¹ *CUP*, 391.

⁷² *CUP*, 393.

⁷³ *FT*, 48–9.

⁷⁴ *FT*, 39–40.

⁷⁵ *EUD*, 259. Climacus also confirms this idea in *Postscript* when he claims that infinite resignation cannot mean that the 'existing person becomes indifferent to the finite'. *CUP*, 413. As noted earlier, however, there is a

double movement. Where resignation is a form of giving up, faith is both a giving up and an expectation of receiving back.

In summary, the movement of infinite resignation is the movement by which one gives up one's loves, goals and desires if this is necessary, so that one can relate absolutely to God. In relating absolutely to God, however, one does not stop being concerned with the temporal. Faith's requirement is only that one *relativizes* all finite goods in comparison to one's absolute good, God. This process is continual; the faithful person must continually make the movement of infinite resignation as she continually lays holds of faith. She must continually loosen herself from worldly attachments in such a way that she is always prepared to let go of them whenever they conflict with her pursuit of God. Thus, seeing that infinite resignation is the movement that always precedes and accompanies but never is identical to faith helps us understand why faith is a task for a lifetime.

Decision and 'the Leap'

Kierkegaard affirms orthodox views of faith that conceive faith as a gift that God graciously bestows upon believers. In the *Fragments*, Climacus makes it clear at many points that God gives a person 'the condition' to believe in the absolute paradox, and this condition is faith.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Kierkegaard also affirms that faith requires a kind of decision, which he sometimes describes as the 'leap'.⁷⁷ In this section, we will examine the role that a person's decision or 'leap' plays in overcoming the historical uncertainty that surrounds Christianity.

Kierkegaard views Christianity as a historical religion grounded on the truth of certain historical events. Specifically, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, is the divine Son of God. Jesus is a man who is reported to have performed miracles and made astounding claims about himself. Without such 'signs' there would be no reason to think that Jesus was indeed God. But on Kierkegaard's view, historical claims cannot be proven, and a narrative about such historical events can never be objectively certain. Kierkegaard argues that all historical knowledge can only, and at best, be an 'approximation' to truth. He also claims that there can never be any 'direct and immediate transition' from historical knowledge, no matter how certain, to faith.⁷⁸ There is a qualitative transformation involved when a person makes the transition to faith, and that transformation involves a 'leap'.

In *Postscript*, Climacus proposes a thought experiment where his reader is asked to assume that 'there has been a successful demonstration of whatever any theological scholar in his happiest moment could have ever wished to demonstrate about the Bible'.⁷⁹ In other words, we are to suppose that every historical event in the Bible could be proven with utter certainty. Climacus asks, 'What then? Has the person who did not believe come a single step closer to faith? No, not a single step. Faith does not result from straightforward scholarly deliberation, nor does it come directly; on the contrary, in this

tension between the lack of specificity present in what is expected in the *Upbuilding Discourses* and the specific promises Abraham believes in *Fear and Trembling*.

⁷⁶ PF, 15, 18, 62–3, 65.

⁷⁷ It is true that the phrase 'leap of faith' never occurs in Kierkegaard's writings. However, Kierkegaard uses the term 'leap' to refer to any qualitative transformation in a person which is free in the sense that it is not an inevitable result of the past. In that sense, faith clearly requires a 'leap'.

⁷⁸ CUP, 49.

⁷⁹ CUP, 28.

objectivity one loses that infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness, which is the condition of faith.⁸⁰ The thought experiment is supposed to illustrate two important features of Christian faith. First, Climacus wants to make sure that people do not identify faith with propositional belief. Faith indeed has a 'what' (propositional content), but when it comes to Christian faith, propositional belief is never enough. Faith is always a passionate *response* to that 'what', and this response requires personal interestedness and appropriation. It requires that the individual 'venture everything'.⁸¹ If one had certain knowledge about the events, one would not thereby have faith. In fact, Kierkegaard seems to see objective knowledge, which can be gained from a detached perspective, as incompatible with faith, which requires a willingness to risk everything on the basis of a risky belief. Climacus even suggests that if the historical events surrounding Christ's life could be proven with complete certainty, it would be dangerous to a person's faith. If the evidence were overwhelming for a person of faith, 'much fear and trembling [would] be needed lest he fall into temptation and confuse knowledge with faith'. Climacus contends that the uncertainty in Christian faith is a 'beneficial taskmaster' that keeps one 'passionately' believing, and 'if passion is taken away, faith no longer exists ... [because] certainty and passion do not hitch up as a team'.⁸²

A second feature of Christian faith that Climacus's thought experiment illustrates is the *logical gap that exists between historical facts and the theological claims about Christ*. Kierkegaard does not think that Christ's miracles, even if proven, would logically entail that he is God. One cannot validly argue from historical premises to theological conclusions, and historical facts do not prove theological facts. Thus, even if a person had no objection to the statement that Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, it does not follow from that statement that Christ is of the same essence as God. Likewise, a person can accept Christ's resurrection as a historical certainty without accepting the further claim that he is the Son of God. There is a logical gap between the historical events which are a part of Christian history and theological claims about the person of Christ.⁸³

Christian *faith* therefore involves crossing both of these gaps. Existentially, the gap is between intellectual assent and appropriation. Knowledge or belief in the events surrounding Christ's life does not automatically translate into the appropriation of his teachings. Resolution and decision are required for a person to put that teaching into action. A person must decide to 'venture everything'. Likewise, there is a logical gap between Christianity as a record of historical events and as source of theological truth. There is no direct entailment relation between Christ's performing miracles to his theological claim to be God. Even though people might not have taken Christ's claims seriously without his performing miracles, these miracles alone do not form a logical bridge to the claim to be God. Kierkegaard thus argues that crossing from one side to the other must involve the will. Since faith is a gift from God, this act of will is not one that human persons can create on their own, but the qualitative transformation is also not something that simply happens to humans without their willing involvement.

⁸⁰ CUP, 29.

⁸¹ CUP, 429.

⁸² CUP, 29.

⁸³ Kierkegaard's discussion on these points follows several arguments made by the German philosopher-theologian Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781). Merold Westphal discusses these two gaps and Lessing's thought further in his *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, 197–205.

Kierkegaard's account of faith or belief is complicated by the fact that he distinguishes what we might call ordinary historical faith or belief from Christian faith, faith in the 'eminent sense'.⁸⁴ However, the two are related since much of what is true of ordinary historical faith is also true of Christian faith, which includes historical content. Both kinds of faith require will, but Kierkegaard does not think a person can simply directly or consciously will to believe any historical statement, even for ordinary historical belief.⁸⁵ Even less is it possible for a person to simply decide, relying on his or her own power, to believe in the God-man, since the historical beliefs in question are paradoxical.

Kierkegaard holds that all human beliefs about contingent historical facts require the involvement of the will, since such facts cannot be proved or demonstrated. The evidence is never sufficient to prove or demonstrate the belief, and thus scepticism is always available at least as a logical possibility. Most of us are not sceptics, however, because of the will: we do not want to be sceptics. In the case of Christian faith or belief, the logical gap between historical evidence and belief is vastly larger since the historical beliefs in question are ones that are paradoxical and will seem absurd to the person in the grip of offence. However, in claiming that beliefs are shaped by the will, Kierkegaard does not mean that people can simply form a belief by forming an intention to have the belief. Rather, he means that what people in fact believe is partly shaped by what they want, what they hope, what they fear and what they love.

How much control do humans have over what they believe? Nowhere does Kierkegaard say that beliefs can be controlled by the will *directly*, a position sometimes referred to as direct volitionalism. Kierkegaard is rather best interpreted as advocating a kind of *indirect* volitionalism. This is the thesis that the choices a person makes can (and often do) play a role in the beliefs that he or she ends up with. These choices could include, for example, the decision to pray, to stop or start church attendance, or to read the Bible. Most important for our discussion is the choice to end deliberation. Kierkegaard holds the view that deliberation does not end itself.⁸⁶ A person must decide to stop deliberating, and the decision must be motivated by something. One can always go on seeking further evidence or reconsidering the evidence that one already has.

Returning to the case of Christian belief, Kierkegaard thinks it is possible to deliberate endlessly about Christianity and never come to a decision. A person could endlessly consider arguments for and against Christ's claims to be God, and so, out of a desire to achieve certainty, he or she may never come 'to the point of venturing at all'.⁸⁷ To bring deliberation to a close is a choice, and if one is to passionately appropriate the claims of Christianity, deliberation must end. This does not mean that one cannot thoughtfully reflect on Christianity's claims both before and after becoming a Christian. But insofar as a person is in the process of deliberating Christianity's truth, one cannot also be appropriating Christ's teachings. Thus, a condition for the activity of faith is that a person brings deliberation to an end. And when one accepts that a decision must be made, one is forced

⁸⁴ See the 'Interlude' between chapters 4 and 5 in *PF* for an account of this distinction, *PF*, 72–88.

⁸⁵ For an extended argument supporting this claim see 'Does Kierkegaard Think Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?', in Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, 299–309 [304, 307]. For an opposing view, see Louis Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

⁸⁶ See, for example, *CUP*, 111–16, 335–7 and 342, where Climacus says that the transition from possibility to actuality constitutes a leap.

⁸⁷ *CUP*, 429.

to either accept Christianity in faith or reject it in offence. When the result is acceptance, it feels like a 'leap' to the understanding because of the gaps that are crossed between historical evidence *about* Christianity to the stance of faith, in which one's relation to God impinges on one's life.

To say that faith involves a decision is not to say that it is simply a human action, one that humans can perform simply through their own efforts. Kierkegaard consistently thinks of Christian faith as a gift, something that is made possible only by the grace of God. In *Fragments* this is expressed by calling faith 'the condition', and claiming that the condition must be received first-hand from the incarnate God.

If faith is a gift from God, something that humans cannot achieve simply by an effort of willing, what role is left for human decision? Why do some people respond to God's revelation with faith and others with offence? One possible answer would be to affirm that it is simply God's sovereign decree that settles the matter, and human choice plays no role. However, Kierkegaard does not wish to follow that road. His answer, we think, lies in the decision humans must make about accepting their sinfulness. God's revelation begins with a revelation of sin, something humans could never discover on their own. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus affirms that when the incarnate God teaches us that we are sinners, the decision to accept our sinfulness represents the one and only analogy between the teaching of the incarnate God and the teaching of a Socrates. For just as Socrates is only the occasion for recollecting that one is in untruth, so too the teaching of the incarnate God is only the occasion for learning that one is a sinner.⁸⁸ Even if we cannot discover our sinfulness without God revealing it, we do have the power to accept this truth or refuse to accept it. The person who is willing to recognize his or her sinfulness will also be open to the possibility of a revelation that transcends what unaided human reason could discover. Such a person will be open to 'setting aside' or 'surrendering' the claims of an imperialistic or domineering reason. Thus, Kierkegaard consistently says that the road to Christian faith lies through the consciousness of sin.

CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard describes faith as a complex, multiform response to God's revelation in Christ that has many different aspects: trusting, believing, hoping, surrendering, expecting and obeying, among others. Faith is not merely assent to a proposition but a passion that manifests itself in emotion and action. That does not mean, we have argued, that faith is devoid of intellectual content, for faith includes belief as well. But even those aspects of faith that are intellectual are not merely so; reason is itself something that is passionately active. For Kierkegaard, humans are fundamentally passionate beings, and an encounter with God's revelation produces passionate responses. Christian faith involves such things as hoping for the kingdom of God, sorrowing over sin and believing that God will be victorious over death. Faith in this sense is indeed a task for a lifetime. It may go against those human ways of thinking that we give the honorific term 'reasonable' to, but when the passion of faith is present, faith and the intellect are in a 'happy relationship'.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ PF, 14.

⁸⁹ We would like to acknowledge Jeffrey Hanson for his help in developing the title for this chapter.

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