

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF
FAITH AS CONTAINED IN
KIERKEGAARD'S FEAR AND TREMBLING

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

STEPHEN HORNBUCKLE

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

APRIL 1991

The problem that interests me and that will be the subject of this paper can be stated briefly as the relationship between 'faith' and 'reason'. I will not offer a precise definition or way of characterizing faith at first, but I think it can be thought of as the holding of a belief or set of beliefs that are somehow beyond the scope of rational inquiry to confirm or deny. I am using 'reason' here as a term that signifies man's capacity for rational thought or deliberation. 'Reason' is in part the intellectual capacity of man to form hypotheses, investigate problems, propose solutions and form theoretical insights. It is not a capacity that I think can be used for evaluating 'faith' as I understand the term. Faith can be thought of as a kind of 'leap' or 'jump' into the unknown or unknowable. Evidence or knowledge would not play a significant part in this jump. It seems to me that if conclusive evidence could be brought forth that would confirm a belief that is held on faith (such as a belief in God), then there would be no need for faith at all. If the statement 'God exists' were somehow 'known' to be true, then the necessity for a capacity beyond that of reason that could express a relationship with that statement would disappear. One of the questions I intend to examine is what reason can say about faith or what the 'limits' of reason might be.

An undertaking that looks at the subject of faith that interests me and that I find insightful is Fear and Trembling, a work that was written pseudonomously by Soren Kierkegaard as Johannes de Silentio (John of Silence). Silentio is fascinated by

the figure of the patriarch Abraham, whom he identifies as the 'father of faith' (for Christianity and presumably for Judaism as well). The figure of Abraham puzzles Silentio, who (from the standpoint of one who does not have faith) cannot understand him, just as he cannot understand how someone could accept the paradox that is faith. My paper will be in part an attempt to explore what Silentio might have been getting at in Fear and Trembling, as well as a presentation of some points in this work which I have difficulty understanding and some areas in which I have some problems with his presentation. To help bring out aspects of this work, I intend to introduce parts of Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript, which Kierkegaard wrote under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. I will use these portions in part as support and explanation for a certain way of looking at the notion of the 'teleological suspension of the ethical.' I will present this concept as a way of characterizing the 'jump' between two life views, the religious and the ethical (the 'leap' of faith into the religious). The two will not be commensurable, or as Silentio might say, an action based on faith will not necessarily be able to be mediated within the ethical.

In Fear and Trembling, Johannes de Silentio ponders the example of Abraham, specifically the story contained in Genesis 22 of the binding of Isaac for sacrifice on Mount Moriah. The exposition takes the form of a series of attempts to understand the patriarch (the 'father of faith'). The author is not a speculative philosopher; he does not seek to build a metaphysical system within

which faith would be placed and somehow surpassed or in which someone could somehow get beyond it. After a brief preface, Silentio begins a series of attempts to understand Abraham; the first is from the standpoint of a poet, a man who tries to imagine what the three-day journey to Moriah might have been like for Abraham. This first attempt is the Exordium (a kind of beginning or introduction), and after its failure this attempt is followed by the Eulogy on Abraham. But the Eulogy fails as well, and the author decides that perhaps the power of dialectics can be brought to bear in helping to understand Abraham. At this point Silentio begins the Problemata: the Preliminary Expectoration followed by three Problemata. Where the poet and eulogist failed to comprehend faith, perhaps the dialectician can become clear on faith and the status of Abraham, or at least understand these matters by analogy. However, as will be seen later, even dialectics can only make these matters clear in a sense; the author cannot himself make the movement of faith. Standing outside of it, he can only come a certain distance towards an understanding of what it would be like to live with the faith of Abraham, a faith in the absurd or the paradoxical.

The Exordium contains a story within a story, that of a man who as a child heard and understood the story of Abraham, but as he grew and matured lost that childlike understanding and is now bewildered by Abraham. The man enters into four poetical attempts to recreate what the journey to Moriah might have been like for Abraham and in this way he hopes to understand him. However, these

attempts fail when the poet is faced with the contradictions that seem to be inherent in the story (and inherent in the concept of faith). Abraham, as the father of Isaac, loved him and yet was willing to respond to what he believed was a divine command and sacrifice him. Further, after having given him up and drawing the knife that would end Isaac's life, Abraham has no problem in receiving Isaac back again and doing so with joy. Abraham is able to give up the promised son for whom he had waited into his old age. He can respond to the command and draw the knife, and yet believe that he will have Isaac once again. In the face of contradictions such as these, the poet must cease in his attempt; the details of the story cannot be contained in the imagination and escape the power of the poet. He can go no further in understanding Abraham and faith.

It is interesting to note the point of view of the man portrayed in the Exordium. He is not a learned scholar. He does not understand Hebrew and the author notes that if he did then presumably the story of Abraham would cease to be of difficulty. The irony of this statement is clear, for if it were not made in this sense, then it seems that the task of the man in the Exordium would be to go and learn Hebrew and become a scholar, not to attempt through poetry to understand Genesis 22. Generally, I think this means that a scholarly understanding of this part of the Bible will not be able to resolve the difficulties and paradoxical nature of Abraham's actions. A second comment on this part of the exposition that I want to make is that it is not yet entirely clear

just how Abraham's thoughts and actions are paradoxical. Abraham gives up Isaac and draws the knife, and yet can receive Isaac back again in rejoicing. I do not yet understand why Abraham could not have somehow believed deep down that Isaac would be resurrected and returned to him even if he were killed in the sacrifice. At any rate, one of my tasks will be to try and make this clearer later on when I treat the dialectical portion of the exposition (the Expectoration and the Problemata).

The poet has failed to understand Abraham through the imagination, and the second (and last) poetical attempt of the exposition now begins, that of the Eulogy on Abraham. This is a kind of hymn of praise to Abraham; the poet sings to his greatness and the power of faith. But the greatness of Abraham is not to be measured by the greatness of his effect on the world. Other heroes have been eulogized by poetry, but they are different from Abraham in that they strove with the world. Other heroes had worldly power, wisdom or love, but, "Abraham was the greatest of all, great by the power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by that love that is hatred to oneself." (pp. 16-17) These forms of paradox are formulations of the faith of Abraham. Abraham was great because he struggled with his faith in God and succeeded in his struggle not because of his own power but only through the help of God. Of course, this greatness would only be clear from the standpoint of the believer. A non-believer might be able to see the greatness of a worldly hero or sage, but Abraham is

in a different category altogether. Abraham's greatness comes from his faith: that he gave up on Isaac (that is, he relinquished the temporal, the goods and promises of the world) and yet was able to receive the temporal back again with joy. It was God (his faith) who gave Abraham the strength and resolution to hold up the knife and yet at the same time keep his faith in the God who demanded his only son.

At this point, the eulogist (like the poet) must cease in his attempt. Abraham does not need the eulogy of a poet; he is not like a worldly hero whose deeds might be forgotten without the poet. The father of faith will be remembered without the praise of the eulogist; he will be remembered as the first to feel the supreme passion that is faith. So the eulogist ceases in his praise, his attempt not being necessary. As with the Exordium, the power of the poet is not sufficient to the task at hand, and so Silentio the dialectician comes forth to try and help understand Abraham (as far as might be possible).

The Expectoration and the Problemata are not entirely dialectical in their attempt to get clear on Abraham and the category of faith. In this way they are not completely unlike the attempts of the poet in the earlier part of the exposition. Silentio is not systematic and rigid in these sections, and the analogies he uses to help understand what the movement of faith is like are not of this sort. He can only understand these matters in a sense, in part because the analogies are not and cannot be perfect. Silentio cannot make the move of faith. However, this

part of the exposition is analytical: it poses problems and examines issues that are meant to get the reader to see the paradoxes he will encounter when he tries to understand faith.

The Expectoration introduces the Problemata. In it, Silentio explains the role of the dialectician and among other things, contrasts it with the role of the preacher, whom he claims does not properly treat with the story, and only vaguely mentions that Abraham's greatness lay in the fact that he was willing to give his 'best'. However, the dialectician will not simply chat happily about Abraham and not mention or paint over the fact that this 'best' was his only son, and that, ethically speaking, what Abraham meant to do was murder Isaac.

Silentio writes: "What is omitted from Abraham's story is the anxiety, because to money I have no ethical obligation, but to the son the father has the highest and holiest." (p. 78) The preacher ignores this, but Silentio's task is to bring it out in all its terrifying implications. However, one aspect of this sentence puzzles me, because I am not sure why Abraham's ethical obligation to his son is to be understood as his "highest and holiest." Perhaps this is the case because of the tribal standpoint of Abraham; that is, Abraham had a duty to preserve Isaac, in whom his family name would be continued. Or perhaps it was the case that people of that time had such a strong notion of family loyalty that they would have understood if Abraham had placed Isaac ahead of any other obligations he might have. However, these speculations do not make it clear to me why those particular words are used and why

Abraham's ethical obligation to Isaac would not have been just one among a number of duties that Abraham would be ethically obligated to uphold. For example, Abraham might have had an ethical duty to protect his wife that was equally as strong. At any rate, I do not think it is absolutely necessary to hold onto that particular wording. It would suffice for Silentio's purposes just to show that Abraham had moved outside of the bounds of the ethical when he bound Isaac for sacrifice, even if it were not a violation of that obligation of ethics which is his 'holiest and highest.'

The task of the Expectoration is in part to prepare the reader for the ideas explored in the Problemata. Faith is not characterized as something that is one and the same with the ethical. It can make a murder into an act pleasing to God. Silentio proposes an either/or: either there is something outside (higher than) the ethical, or Abraham is a murderer and ought to be condemned as such. The dialectician must have the courage to think this thought all the way through, and if it terrorizes him too much to do so, then he should put it aside and not think it at all rather than brush over the aspects of it that terrify him. Or if (perhaps because of the local conditions of the time), it turns out to be something different, and Abraham's act was not something extraordinary (and repugnant ethically speaking), then Abraham ought to be laid aside and forgotten.

Silentio the dialectician tells how he, though he cannot make the movement of faith, can presumably describe it. One of the analogies he uses is that of a person who, while suspended from the

ceiling by means of a harness, learns the motions of the swimmer. He can describe the movements but is not himself actually swimming. Presumably if he were dropped into the water, he would swim. But Silentio has not himself dropped (or been dropped) into the water, and he makes different movements. These movements are those of the 'knight of infinite resignation,' he who is able to give up the finite (the world of actuality) for the infinite (God, the eternal). But the knight of infinite resignation cannot take the further step in which he, while having given up the finite for the infinite, can yet go back and reclaim every inch of the finite. Silentio identifies this as part of the absurdity or paradox of faith. He cannot understand how someone can give up the finite for the infinite and then turn around and joyfully receive the finite back again. One example he uses to explain this is that of the man who, having given up the girl of his dreams (the finite), joins a monastery and becomes a monk (makes the move of the infinite). The absurdity comes in the man believing that he can somehow still receive the girl of his dreams, and that he might one day wake in his monastery cell and find her in his arms. This the absurdity or contradiction that perplexes Silentio; this is the movement he cannot make, the movement of faith.

One further point I wanted to draw from the Expectoration comes when Silentio makes the following observation: The knight of faith is someone who has understood the absurdity or paradox of giving up the finite for the infinite and yet believing he will have the finite back again. Silentio writes at this point,

Consequently, he acknowledges the impossibility, and in the very same moment he believes the absurd, for if he wants to imagine that he had faith without passionately acknowledging the impossibility with his whole heart and soul, he is deceiving himself and his testimony is neither here nor there, since he has not even attained infinite resignation. (p 47)

My difficulty is this: if Silentio is correct in saying that the preachers and scholars and theologians of his day have managed to muddle the category of faith and have confused the absurdity attached to the movement of it, then it does seem that dialectics might be necessary to put the problem straight again. The knight of faith, according to the passage above, is going to have to "passionately acknowledge the impossibility with his whole heart and soul" and if he does not, he is deceiving himself in thinking he has faith and is not the knight at all. My problem comes from the fact that Silentio also claims in Fear and Trembling that anyone is able to make the movement of faith (although few may actually do so), and this would include even the simplest of people (p. 67). However, in the passage above it seems that in order to be in a position to do so, it might also be necessary to become clear dialectically on the category of faith. If this is the case, then some people might be excluded from the possibility of making the movement of faith, because dialectics is by nature difficult to understand for some, and presumably beyond the capacity of many to understand at all. I am not accusing Silentio of saying that someone would have to read and comprehend all of Fear and Trembling in order to understand the category of faith but am only noting that as muddled as he claims that category has been made by the

philosophers and theologians of his time, it would seem to be necessary to comprehend some dialectical distinctions to be in a position to make the movement of faith as Silentio describes it. I myself (and I think Silentio as well) would resist this as a possible requirement. Perhaps Silentio might say that these matters (or at least the point about the paradox that reason will encounter when it seeks to understand faith) are going to be recognizable to anyone. However, I am not so sure of this, and this difficulty remains unresolved in my mind. Further, it is something I would like to resolve, since Silentio's characterization of faith is the one which strikes me as insightful, and it is the one which makes clearest in my mind the problem concerning faith and reason that I outlined in the introduction to this paper.

Another comment along these lines comes from another essay in Kierkegaard's writings, "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle." Although Kierkegaard wrote this under his own name and the essay is not necessarily to be identified with Silentio or Fear and Trembling, it involves much of the same kind of thinking. That is, the 'power of dialectics' is brought to bear on a problem that concerns faith: the necessity that might arise to be able to identify an apostle for what he is. The problem that might arise here is similar to the problem that might arise in using dialectics to become clear on the category of faith. To identify a false apostle, someone would have to be clear on exactly what a true apostle is, and it may be necessary to use dialectics to do so. If

this is the case, then the status of believers who cannot grasp the nuances required may be in question. What is to happen to believers who are fooled by a false apostle or fail to recognize a genuine one? If the ability to understand some dialectics becomes necessary in order to understand the concept of 'apostle' (and how to distinguish between a true and a false apostle), then it seems that some people may be excluded from the possibility of becoming true believers. I think this might be a worry for Kierkegaard and for Silentio as well, and it is one aspect of his writing about which I am confused.

In the Exhortation, Silentio asks the question of why people in this age are not willing to stop with faith, which he identifies as a paradox that can turn a murder into a God-pleasing act, and that can give Isaac back to Abraham even after he has given him up. He ends this section of the exposition with the statement that "faith begins precisely where thought stops" (p.53) and proposes to draw out the dialectical aspects of this in the Problemata. The notion of "stopping with faith" and the notion of faith beginning where thinking stops are interesting ones. Drawing out statements such as these is one of my tasks in this paper, and I think they can be related to the difficult and controversial notion of the "teleological suspension of the ethical." To understand what is meant by these statements, it might be helpful to look at some of the writing of Kierkegaard as Climacus in the Fragments. Specifically, I think the notion of "stopping with faith" can be equated with the notion of a 'limit' or 'terminus' in human

thinking which can be drawn from the Fragments. This idea might come about when a person who is curious about something and is looking for it and does not yet know what it is. In this case their understanding (or their seeking of it) might collide with something they cannot understand. This could draw a frontier or limit on their thinking, and this frontier would be something that cannot be characterized (except negatively) and which belongs to the category of the inexplicable. This is one way of characterizing what Silentio means when he says that faith begins where thought stops. Rational inquiry would not then be able to bring someone to the status of the 'knight of faith,' and this would be precisely because the powers of reason cannot decisively determine those matters having to do with the possession of faith. The movement of faith itself remains inexplicable, absurd and paradoxical.

On this note, I will turn to that part of the exposition labeled as the Problemata. These three problems are tied to one another. Problema I suggests Problema II, and Problema III is crucial to understanding what makes Abraham such an extraordinary figure for Silentio. Each Problema begins with a question, and if the answer to this question is no (or in the case of the third question, yes), then Hegel (speculative philosophy) is right. Silentio refers to Hegel here as one of those who would somehow go beyond faith and place it within a broad metaphysical or scientific-conceptual system which would explain everything. For Hegel, there would be no possibility of a single individual being

higher than the universal. At any rate, the first question Silentio considers is this: "Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" In Problema I, Silentio explores the notion of a telos or end to which a man may dedicate himself. If there is a higher (or different) telos than the ethical (universal), then someone might be able to be related to this telos in such a way that the universal is suspended for him. A second question then arises that connects with this notion of a higher telos: "Is there an Absolute Duty to God?" This is the question of where a believer (or 'knight of faith') will find guidance for his actions. That is, will he find his guidance from rules (worldly authority) or from a decisive authority (God). The third question also follows from the exposition of Problema I: "Was it Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?" Exploring the implications of this question will be vital to establishing the extraordinary status of Abraham or in other words, to explain decisively the difficulty involved in mediating his actions within the ethical.

If the answer to the question posed in Problema I is yes, then I think Silentio would say that there are aspects of the religious (or at least, the concept of the religious in which Abraham finds guidance) that are not going to be one and the same as the ethical. Silentio uses the term 'ethical' here in two different senses. The first use of the term 'ethical' is as something like 'social morality' or the standards which people use to judge the actions of others in society. These standards or rules are labeled as 'the

universal'. Within these standards, one action will be judged in much the same way as another. For example, if someone were to go out and rob a convenience store at gunpoint, he would presumably be judged in much the same way as another person performing a similar act (unless there were extenuating circumstances, such as a case in which a person was forced to carry out the robbery). This example is a modern analog of one way in which Silentio uses the term 'ethical' (the universal). In our day, it is generally frowned upon to rob convenience stores at gunpoint, and there are laws in place that state this principle and authorities (courts, judges, police, etc.) appointed to enforce those laws. At any rate, I do not propose to give a rigid definition of all possible aspects of the ethical here but simply want by way of introduction to explain part of what Silentio meant by the term 'ethical' in this exposition.

The other use of the term 'ethical' in this exposition is as an 'absolute telos' or end to which a person may dedicate his life. This may be equated with the possession of an ethical 'life-view', a concept which I will examine in greater detail later in the paper. An example of a person who dedicates himself to the ethical is the tragic hero. The tragic hero would be someone who is willing to sacrifice any aspect of his life in order to maintain his relationship with the ethical. One of the examples of this type of person that Silentio mentions is Agamemnon, who must give up his daughter Iphigenia in order to perform what he sees as a higher duty, an enterprise of concern to the whole nation.

Agamemnon heroically sacrifices his daughter so that the fleet may sail to war. In doing so he maintains his relationship to the ethical as his 'absolute telos,' although he had to sacrifice his daughter to do so. The highest categories in an ethical life-view would be justice and injustice or something analogous to those concepts. In the case of Agamemnon, he believed that he had to sacrifice Iphigenia in order to fulfill his obligation to justice, and in doing so he became a tragic hero.

With this in mind, I will turn to a passage that I think offers a summary of the line Silentio takes in looking at Abraham and one which I will use to propose an interpretation of what Silentio means by the phrase 'teleological suspension of the ethical.' He writes,

Faith is precisely the paradox that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, is justified before it, not as inferior to it but as superior - yet in such a way, please note, that it is the single individual who, after being subordinate as the single individual to the universal, now by means of the universal becomes the single individual who as the single individual is superior, that the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute. (pp. 55-6)

For the single individual who stands in absolute relation to the absolute (that is, the single individual who has faith), the universal (the ethical) can be suspended. I think this can be put another way, one in which the suspension of the ethical is looked at as the 'leap' between two life-views, the religious and the ethical. Silentio does not use the term 'life-view' in this exposition, but I think it is fair to describe the faith of Abraham as such. It is similar to the 'ways of looking at the world' that

are described as life-views in the Postscript because adopting it requires a fundamental change in the way Abraham relates to the world and the people around him. 'Having a different life-view' than another person might be described as finding a telos in an entirely different sphere than another person. These two people may have entirely different answers to the question of how human beings ought to live or from where they are going to draw their values.

In the case of Abraham, he is someone who can be said to have had an entirely different telos or end which guided his actions. As a single individual, he moved out of the universal (the realm of the ethical), and as the single individual was superior to it. The ethical was suspended as an end for him when he traveled to Mount Moriah, bound Isaac and raised the knife to sacrifice him. As Silentio writes, the absurdity comes in that the ethical expression for these actions is that Abraham meant to commit murder, but from the religious point-of-view these actions are ones that are pleasing to God.

One aspect of this part of the exposition about which I am unclear is Silentio's use of the terms 'higher' or 'superior to' as a means of describing the state of the individual who has moved out of the ethical and stands in an 'absolute relation to the absolute.' My question is whether or not Silentio (by the use of these phrases) means to say that the state of the knight of faith is somehow 'better' than the state of one who remains within the ethical (in the case of someone who has embraced the ethical as an

understanding of life). In the Eulogy on Abraham, Silentio does use the phrase 'greatest of all' to describe Abraham's status as a hero; Abraham was greater than the tragic hero in that he struggled not with the world or to achieve some finite end but struggled with God (the infinite, the absolute). This previous phrase can be taken as meaning that Abraham was the 'greatest of all' heroes only from the standpoint of the believer, and I am inclined to say that this turn of phrase does not necessarily imply Silentio's endorsement of the status of the believer as being 'better' or 'greater' than the status of someone who might hold an ethical understanding of life. If this is the case, then the term 'higher' can be taken as a way of describing the move away from the ethical and the term 'superior to' as meaning that the individual is no longer subordinate to the ethical, and not necessarily that the status of this individual is somehow 'superior' to the status of someone with an ethical life-view. In support of this interpretation, Silentio does use the phrase 'higher than the universal' to describe the status of the merman who as a single individual has moved outside the universal in the direction of the demonic. So presumably, unless Silentio were to be accused of endorsing both the status of the demoniac and that of the believer, the use of the phrase 'higher than' to refer to the status of someone who holds a particular life-view is not necessarily to be interpreted as an endorsement of that life-view. However, the question of how statements such as these should be interpreted remains in other cases. Later on I will examine his treatment of

the difference between the tragic hero and the knight of faith (Abraham) in greater detail, and it may turn out to be the case that Silentio does imply that the status of the knight of faith is somehow 'better' than that of the tragic hero.

The ethical realm is not one in which Abraham's actions can be justified. The religious is incommensurable with the ethical, whether the ethical be treated as a life-view or as a group of rules or standards which society dictates. Another way of stating this is outlined in Problema II, which asks the question: "Is there an Absolute Duty to God?" Silentio's answer is similar to that of Problema I. If ethical or universal duties are the only ones a man can have, then these obligations are the only concept of divinity there is. However, for someone with faith in the absurd or paradoxical, these duties are reduced to relativities. The single individual as the single individual (and not as an instance of the universal) can have an absolute duty to God, assuming he relates to the divine as his 'absolute telos.' This can also be put in the following manner: for someone with a religious 'life-view' (or in other words, someone who finds his guidance in the categories of the religious), the question 'Is God's command just?' would not be the proper one to ask. The category that grounds the religious sphere is not justice or injustice but the divine (the inexplicable), and it would be inappropriate to apply the categories of the ethical in the religious sphere.

The last Problema asks the question of whether or not it was morally defensible for Abraham to conceal his intentions from Sarah

and Isaac. If Abraham had been operating within the realm of the ethical, then it would have been appropriate (or at least possible) for him to justify himself before them. However, Abraham does not do this, and Silentio takes this as a sign that he is a true 'knight of faith.' Abraham was acting outside of the universal (ethical) and for this reason could not justify himself within this sphere. If the knight of faith does speak, he will only speak ironically, as Abraham did in reply to Isaac's question of where the lamb for the sacrifice was.

Fear and Trembling is in large part a description of what it is like when someone embraces an idea or belief that constitutes a life-view or 'absolute telos' in which he finds guidance for all of his actions. This description of the categories of the religious and the ethical (and how they are similar and dissimilar to one another) strikes me as one that is objectively accurate and powerful. However, Silentio also seems at certain points to make a subjective assessment of the character of the passion with which someone embraces a life-view. It is this aspect of the exposition that I will discuss in the last part of the paper.

For Silentio, it is passion that distinguishes the tragic hero as well as the knight of faith from the ordinary person who simply indulges "in the brutish stupor that gawks at life and thinks it has seen something." (p. 38) The latter type of person will not be one who is capable of embracing a 'life-view' or dedicating himself to an absolute telos. While I feel clear about the description of what type of person is in a position to have faith, Silentio seems

to take an ambiguous approach to the way in which an adherent to a life-view relates to the idea on which he orients his existence. On the one hand, Silentio might be interpreted as saying that the person who makes the movement of faith (or dedicates himself to a telos in the religious sphere) has simply moved outside of the realm of the ethical and has not necessarily embraced a view of life with a passion that is quantitatively more intense than that of a person who embraces the ethical as his absolute telos. However, Silentio does seem at times to be implying that the passion of the person who embraces the religious (specifically, the notion of the religious that involves the absurd or the paradoxical) as his absolute telos is somehow more 'intense' than that of someone who finds his absolute telos in the ethical realm. This kind of ambiguity of interpretation can also be found in the writing of Climacus in the Postscript. At points in this book, Climacus seems to be evangelizing for the notion of the religious as paradox and saying that the passion of the person who embraces it is somehow 'more intense' than that of those who embrace other life-views. This tendency gives rise to the question of whether the types of passion associated with the embracing of different life-views are to be distinguished 'qualitatively' or 'quantitatively.' That is, one might ask whether there are 'degrees' of passion associated with a life-view (in which case one might relate to one life-view more intensely than another) or if the types of passion are qualitatively different from one another (the passion takes a different form but is not necessarily more or

less intense than that of another form). In Fear and Trembling, it is unclear which representation is being made, and Silentio does seem at certain points to be implying the former view.

This difficulty can be put another way: on the one hand, Silentio is giving a description of what it is like when someone embraces a life-view or makes the movement of faith. This description is objective and has to do with matters of fact; an objection to Silentio on these issues would probably be based on a challenge to the accuracy of his description. On the other hand, when Silentio implies that the passion of someone who embraces the religious (the paradoxical) as his life-view is more 'intense,' this would seem to be a subjective judgment from within the life-view itself and not a description of fact. The description of what it is like when someone embraces a life-view or 'absolute telos' is logically independent of the tenets of the life-view itself. However, if the claim is made that the passion of someone who embraces a particular life-view is more intense than that of someone who embraces a different life-view, this would be a subjective expression of acceptance of that life-view (speaking from within the life-view) and not a description of fact. At points in his exposition, Silentio seems to switch from a describing the movement of faith (objective) to making the judgment that the passion of the knight of faith is more intensely focused than that of others (subjective).

At any rate, passion is what is required to make the movement of faith; it is what separates the knight of faith from the rest,

including the author himself, who admits that he cannot muster the resolve to 'jump' into the absurd, reclaiming the finite after having given it up for the infinite. He writes, "This [the movement of faith] requires passion. Every movement of infinity is carried out through passion, and no reflection can produce a movement." (p. 42) The adoption of a life-view requires a decision by the individual. This decision is not made in the same way as that of the financier who decides where to invest his money. The financier weighs the possibilities and decides which investment will yield the greatest possible return. The knight of faith, on the other hand, "will have the power to concentrate the whole substance of his life and the meaning of actuality into one single desire." (p.43) Put another way, this means that the knight is someone who concentrates the whole of his passion on an idea which gives an answer to the question about the significance and purpose of human existence. For Silentio, it would be a mistake (and an individual would not be a true 'knight of faith') if a person were somehow to make the movement of faith based on an assessment of the 'probability' or 'improbability' of the particular life-view being the 'correct' one. The knight requires the focus to concentrate his thinking into one act, that of accepting the religious as his 'absolute telos.'

In the Epilogue, Silentio makes the claim that "the essentially human is passion." (p. 121) This is not something that one person can give to another or one generation can pass on to the next. Each generation begins primitively with respect to passion,

just as it would with love, which also could not be passed on from one generation to the next. Silentio goes further to say that "the highest passion in a person is faith." (p. 121) By this I think he means that when a person decides to adopt a particular life-view (faith), this decision is not based on reflection or deliberation. With this decision the life-view becomes the ultimate thing for him. It becomes that around which he orients his existence. The life-view would become that in terms of which the person can give a justification for anything at all, whether it be an action, decision or the adoption of a particular policy towards something.

With this in mind, I will turn to Silentio's discussion of the difference between the tragic hero and the knight of faith (Abraham). The tragic hero is one who has decisively concentrated the whole of his existence on the ethical. The ethical is his absolute telos. This type of person is contrasted with someone who conforms to ethical norms but for whom this conformity merely involves the attaining of relative ends. For example, this person might refrain from violating the ethical (for example by not getting involved in the armed robbery of a convenience store) out of fear of the sanctions or punishment society has in place to discourage these sorts of actions. Silentio writes, "Most men live in adherence to an ethical obligation in such a way that they let each day have its cares, but then they never attain this passionate concentration, this intense consciousness." (pp. 78-9) This type of 'adherence' to the ethical norm would be analogous to the person who professed to be religious, attended church, etc. but did not

orient the whole of his existence around his professed religion. Unlike these types of people, the tragic hero has a concentrated passion, but it differs from that of the knight of faith in that he can somehow find 'rest' or 'comfort' in the ethical (the universal). Silentio uses the example of Agamemnon to explain this; Agamemnon can find rest in the universal by giving up his daughter Iphigenia and proceeding to sacrifice her. However, he would not have been a tragic hero if he had rationalized his decision and noted that he had several daughters and that at any rate, Iphigenia might by some extraordinary means be rescued in the end.

Abraham is a different case. He has the same concentration of passion as the tragic hero, but,

it is far more difficult for him, since he has no stronghold at all in the universal, but he makes one movement more, whereby he gathers his soul back to the marvel. If Abraham had not done this, he would have been only an Agamemnon, insofar as it can be otherwise explained how wanting to sacrifice Isaac can be justified when the universal is not thereby benefitted. (p. 79)

In this passage, Silentio seems to be implying that adopting the object of Abraham's passion is somehow 'riskier.' Abraham cannot find rest in the universal; his passion is concentrated in an entirely different sphere. The question that arises here is whether this means that Abraham has a more intense relationship to the object of his passion (God, the paradoxical, the absurd). Put another way, if Agamemnon can find rest in his decision, then is his passion for it somehow lessened? If it is lessened, then one might generalize from this and say that passion as attached to the

universal is somehow less intense than that which is attached to the paradoxical. This gives rise to the question of what the difference is between the passion of two individuals who have oriented themselves around different life-views. Silentio seems to be implying that there is a quantitative difference; that is, there are 'levels' of passion, the highest of which would be devotion to the notion of the religious as paradox.

The Postscript also seems to evidence this kind of ambiguous stance towards the way in which different types of passion are to be distinguished. In this work, Climacus gives a definition for truth (the same as that of faith) which is akin to the treatment of faith in Fear and Trembling. According to this definition, truth is "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness, the highest truth attainable for the existing individual." (p. 182) This kind of truth or faith can be understood as the possession of a particular set of values and the orientation of one's life so that it is centered or fixed on those values. This is an orientation on a particular life-view. Only a decisive subjectivity (an autonomous individual, a tragic hero, a knight of faith or someone analogous to these types) is in a position to have this kind of relationship to a particular belief or set of beliefs. These beliefs are an 'objective uncertainty'; that is, they are not ones that can be shown to be probable or improbable by scientific experimentation or scholarly research (objective inquiry, reason or man's capacity for rational thought). The issue raised by the life-view involves a decision by an

individual. This decision would not be one which could be shown to be the 'right' or 'wrong' decision in the sense of being 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable.' In addition, a decision about such an issue is 'held fast in an appropriation process.' That is, when a subject embraces a particular life-view, he involves himself in a process which is not completed in his lifetime. The process is ongoing and involves constant reaffirmation of the decision made and orientation of the individual's life on the life-view chosen. Lastly, such a decision is one that is made with 'the most passionate inwardness.' The idea on which the person is then focused becomes the ultimate conception for him; it is the thing about which he is most passionate, and it is this type of passion which would be possessed by the knight of faith as well as the tragic hero.

With the above definition of truth, it seems there might be a number of different beliefs or sets of beliefs which would qualify as an object on which an individual could focus his 'most passionate inwardness.' However, there remains the question about the character of the inwardness which focuses on one of these beliefs. Climacus seems to confuse the issue when he writes, "For the objective situation is repellent; and the expression for the objective repulsion constitutes the tension and the measure of the corresponding inwardness." (p.183) I think Climacus is referring to the situation which served as the catalyst for the individual's decision to embrace a life-view; that is, the person cannot find the truth in the objective realm (the realm of calculation and

rational deliberation) and is therefore driven to make a subjective decision. The expression that this decision takes constitutes 'the tension and measure of the corresponding inwardness.' The use of this phrase seems to imply quantitative 'levels' of inwardness which might vary depending on which expression of inwardness was made.

In his discussion of Socrates, Climacus makes a further remark which seems to imply that there is a 'quantitative' difference between expressions of an individual's passion or inwardness. He writes, "The Socratic inwardness in existing is an analogue to faith; only that the inwardness of faith, corresponding as it does, not to the repulsion of the Socratic ignorance, but to the repulsion exerted by the absurd, is infinitely more profound." (p. 184) Climacus seems to imply here that the level of inwardness in relation to the paradox is somehow deeper or more profound than the level of inwardness in the Socratic. If this is actually the case, then it seems that Climacus may have failed to make the distinction between the 'form of inwardness' and the 'degree of inwardness'. The 'degree' or 'level' of inwardness would seem to refer more properly to the difference between people who are not in a position to passionately focus their existence on a life-view or faith at all (shallow people) and those of 'decisive subjectivity,' such as the tragic hero or knight of faith. The 'form' of inwardness would seem to refer more properly to the difference between life-views or expressions of inwardness. One view of life would not necessarily be embraced with a passion which is more or less intense than that

with which another view of life is embraced. Different life-views might simply have different types of passion associated with them. When Climacus claims that inwardness that relates to the paradox is more intense, it seems that this claim would more properly belong to the subjective realm (speaking from within the life-view and expressing acceptance of that life-view). This is different from describing what it is like to adopt a life-view; this description is an objective evaluation and description of a situation while the former claim is not.

With this in mind, I will return to the implied difference in the passion of the knight of faith and that of the tragic hero. Silentio seems to be saying that the knight of faith would somehow 'go further' or be 'more intense' in his relationship to the object of passion than the tragic hero. However, the difficulty with this implication is (if it is indeed a fair way of interpreting Silentio) that it seems to ignore the distinction between the 'level' of passion and the 'form' that the passion takes. Those who simply adhere to the ethical norm without any concentration of passion might properly be said to have a less intense passion than the knight of faith. In this case, there would be a quantitative difference between the type of passion possessed by the knight of faith and that of the shallow adherents to societal standards. However, it is questionable whether the difference between the knight of faith and the tragic hero is also one in which the level of passion in one case would be higher than the other. These two types of individuals might more properly be said to differ in the

'form' their passion takes. This would imply a qualitative difference between these types of concentrated passion. Although the tragic hero might somehow find 'rest' in the universal, I do not think this necessarily implies that his passion is any less intense than that of the knight of faith. I think it would be a mistake to say that the knight of faith has gone 'further' than the tragic hero, if by saying this, Silentio means that the knight has somehow reached a higher 'pitch' or 'level' on which his passion is expressed. This claim would not be an objective description but a subjective assessment from within the realm of the religious (the paradoxical) itself.

Reason is not a faculty which can decide the question of faith (whether or not to embrace a belief or set of beliefs which constitute a life-view) essentially. This does not mean that reason has no role whatsoever in the question of faith. When reason attempts to look at faith, it encounters the absurd or the paradoxical. At this point reason must stop; it can only identify a paradox as a paradox and cannot make an objective assessment of the 'probability' or 'improbability' of its being the case. Generally, this means that reason will not be able to help in a final decision (if such a decision is ever made) of what the significance and purpose of life is or where a person should find his ultimate guidance. This requires a decision by the individual, and not everyone is in a position to make such a decision. However, reason can give a clearer representation of the concept of God and the category of faith (and how faith would be applied in an

individual's life). This is Silentio's accomplishment in Fear and Trembling. However, I think Silentio is misleading insofar as he does not distinguish between the objective outline of the category of faith (and how someone might apply it in life) and the subjective assessment (from within the sphere of the religious itself) of the intensification of passion that occurs when someone embraces the inexplicable or the paradoxical. Here Silentio (and Climacus as well) could only properly say that he believes that the paradox gives the greatest possible intensification of passion. This expression of belief is a subjective judgment and should properly be distinguished from an objective description of the category of 'faith' or 'life-view.' If I have been fair in my interpretation of the exposition, then this is not something that Silentio does. However, this does not detract from what in my opinion is an insightful and sound characterization of the category of faith and what it is like to apply that category. As long as one keeps the objective description of faith separate from the subjective judgment (I believe) that the passion with which someone embraces the paradox is more intense, Fear and Trembling provides a powerful answer to the questions that arise when one asks about the relationship between faith and reason.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gardiner, Patrick. Kierkegaard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Kierkegaard, Soren. Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

_____. Fear and Trembling. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

_____. "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle." In The Present Age, 87-108. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962.

_____. Philosophical Fragments. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

Lowrie, Walter. A Short Life of Kierkegaard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

Mackey, Louis. "The View From Pisgah: A Reading of Fear and Trembling." In Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Josiah Thompson, 394-428. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Company, Inc., 1972.