

GOD, SO TO SPEAK

God, so to speak

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TAK

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CONTENTS

I. THE ISSUE OF THE STUDY: GOD AS A WORD IN QUESTION.	
A LITERARY READING OF <i>FEAR AND TREMBLING</i> AND <i>PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS</i>	v
Studies on the word God	ix
II. METHODOLOGY	xvii
1) A literary approach	xvii
2) An associative nexus of thematic threads	xx
3) A local and supplementary study	xxi
4) Levinas as an inspirational source	xxii
III. THE SELECTION OF WORKS	xxvii
IV. COMPOSITION OF THE STUDY. READER'S GUIDE INCLUDED	xxviii
The Prologues	xxviii
The Parts	xxviii
A Reader's Guide: <i>Fear and Trembling</i> – a reading	xxix
A Reader's Guide: <i>Philosophical Fragments</i> – a reading	xxxiii
Explanations of citations, abbreviations, etc.	xxxvi
PROLOGUE ONE: OPENING(S) OF A STORY	1
A READING OF FEAR AND TREMBLING – PART ONE	8
A thread of heroes	8
The tragic hero	9
Enters Abraham	16
To hinge on a paradox	21
Composed understanding	22
The dreadful responsibility of loneliness	24
There is no ground – to be out of reasons	26
The old man and a misunderstanding	30
The shudder of an idea and the earthquake of existence	37
How to become a father of faith	39
A plot otherwise than sacrifice	41
A shattering moment	45
Enters Levinas	48
How (not) to label a thinker – Kierkegaard and Levinas	51
A Levinasian hesitation	58
A concern of the ethical	61
Trust me! Promise!	66
Enters God	72
Hope and a mad passion to the point of non-sense	76
At the edge of an abyss – to love <i>in faith</i>	86
A concern <i>for</i> the ethical – whitewashing the violence?	92

Movements of God – God withdraws behind a contradiction	94
Movements of God – Eckhartian <i>Gelassenheit</i> and absolving	95
Relations otherwise than oppositional schemes	98
To revolve around nothing	101
Movements of irony	104
The weight of a body – differences of gravity	106
A movement of the gods – Nancy and spacing	110
A sense of opening	112
The pull of binary structures and the need of meaning	115
A question of progress – “going futher”	119
An oxymoronic relation – a flash of madness: <i>out of tune, out of line, out of place</i>	123
A word hard to track down	126
Taking place without taking up place	127
Entering without entering – the in-coming of a word	129
Secrets and signs	130
A word in question	133
The impossible paradox and the ambiguous openness of a word	137
Summary – part one	139
PROLOGUE TWO: P.S. – PERHAPS SO	149
A READING OF PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS	156
Opening questions	156
N.B. – on the movements of writing	159
A historical point of departure	161
The versatility of a homonym: the historical	167
To become a follower – or once again: the question of faith	170
Questioning the questions	183
Yet another Levinasian concern – about the ‘in-‘	186
N.B.	188
At the crossroads	188
A new idea and a new modality	192
The moment in time	199
In a wink	206
Rumours have it	209
Trans- <i>in</i> -scendence	215
Summary – part two	218
I. GENERAL REMARKS	229
II. OUTCOME OF THE STUDY	232

INTRODUCTION

I. THE ISSUE OF THE STUDY: GOD AS A WORD IN QUESTION.

A LITERARY READING OF *FEAR AND TREMBLING* AND *PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS*

The word God – understood as a notion, a name, or an idea – has been at issue in Western philosophy as well as theology for centuries. Both disciplines have been inquiring and discussing how we are (or are not) to understand this word, and what it might (or might not) mean in relation to the world. Throughout on-going negotiations on and of the borderline(s) between these two fields, the word God has been a point where traditions and thinkers have met up and/or parted ways.

The *history* of the word God – that is, the many and diverse suggestions as to how we are to understand it – indicates that it is a word both open to debate and opening for discussions.

Since the 19th century, a change in the course of the discussion could be noticed; a reframing of the negotiations¹ that became more prominent in the following century. In a simplified sketch, we might say that the age-old question, ‘how are we to understand the meaning of this word’, was now being supplemented and challenged by the query: whether this word is relevant, still or at all.²

Put otherwise, the word God was disputed *as* an issue (or, as a relevant issue). Yet, to dispute the relevance *of* an issue is still to put that issue *at* issue.³

¹ Some of the prominent 19th century thinkers raising doubts about Christian theism involve Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and we could also include Hegel, “the first and most important *modern* death of God theologian,” as he is described by Mark C. Taylor, 1993, 33.

² For example, as voiced by Critchley: “Of course, the proper name for this breakdown is *modernity*, and the task of *philosophical* modernity, at least in its speak experiences – Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger – is a thinking through the death of God in terms of the problem of finitude.” Critchley 1997, 2; or in the perspective of the ‘new atheism’ proposed in the works of [...] Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins, God continues to be ‘an unnecessary hypothesis’ in the light of progress in evolutionary theory (see Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2006; Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, 2007).” Simmons 2011, 1.

³ For example, as pointed to by Christopher Watkin with his term of ‘atheism’s parasitism’: “seeking to be rid of God in ways that assume of require God.” (Watkin 2011, 22-23.)

Though the word God to many is no longer a word of interest, it is still of main concern to the field(s) of theology, and it is still a word in play in the field(s) of philosophy. An old problem such as ‘how are we to talk about that word’ is still raised (in both fields) with the reservations that most scholars approach this word with nowadays, not least on the backdrop of the queries of 19th and 20th century thinkers. An old concern such as ‘how are we to understand the meaning of that word’ has become no less urgent or troubled in the shadows of the atrocities that took place in 20th century Europe.⁴

While still topical, then, even if not to everyone, the word God is today not only at issue but also in doubt.

Throughout the works of Kierkegaard,⁵ the word God can be found, spelled with a capital G, as was the custom of 19th century Denmark, and written in an unabashed manner, also in the pseudonymous works favoured by the field of philosophy.⁶

This relaxed yet not uncritical approach (to the word God) is reflected in the studies on Kierkegaard, where remarkably little controversy or even dispute concerning the word God can be found.⁷

Leaning either towards a theological or a philosophical reading, most studies that take up the word God as a topic, do so in a non-polemical manner, often

⁴ The perspective in relation to the theodice-problem seems to be mostly local in the studies from European scholars. However, atrocities have also taken place in no less cruel way in other parts of the world.

⁵ To whom I ascribe the authorship of both the pseudonymous works and the so-called edifying works, while I also recognize each pseudonymous writer as a distinct voice. I find the pseudonymous works to call the very notion of authorship into question, yet without rejecting the Kierkegaardian oeuvre as a body of work: complex, heterogeneous, polyphonic, and contradictory in its anatomy, but a body of work nevertheless. On the authorship of Kierkegaard as a problem, see Westfall 2007.

⁶ Despite Heidegger’s famous suggestion to the contrary – namely, that the ‘upbuilding’ works of Kierkegaard constitute his most significant philosophical contributions – few, however, have followed this apparent lead. See Heidegger 2001, 235.

⁷ This lack of dispute with regard to the word God is reflected in the following citation (concerning ‘the religious interest’ of Kierkegaard) that is taken from a collection of essays (*Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 1995) that all consider the relevance of Kierkegaard in relation to ‘modern philosophy’: “Some of the contributors to this volume are sympathetic in one way or another to Kierkegaard’s religious interests. Others are not. But all find at least some part of his corpus to be worthy of the closest attention, and none finds it necessary to pretend that he was not at one and the same time a religious and philosophical thinker.” Matustik and Westphal 1995, viii.

exploring the meaning of that word in relation to notions to which it is linked one way or the other in the works of Kierkegaard.⁸ Most studies that deals with the word God, then, examine that word as a matter of interest rather than a word in dispute. I shall follow this example.

Few studies, however, have approached the *word* God in the writings of Kierkegaard from the field of *literary* studies.

I will in this study trail the word God in a literary reading of the Kierkegaardian works *Fear and Trembling* (1843) by Johannes de silentio, and *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) by Johannes Climacus. I do not take the word God as proof or problem, but I do take it to be significant to the context of the works explored, well aware of the queries that have shaped the on-going conversations and negotiations regarding that word.

My reading is not a theological or philosophical study (nor is it isolated from these fields either), and I will not examine or define the word God as a doctrine or a concept; rather, I will approach it as the *word in question* of this study.

Approaching the word God from the field of literary studies, I wish to put the question about this word in another way than it is often done in academia where the history of the word God often seems to set up a framework within which this word is then considered; a framework that is made up of issues such as metaphysical attributes, supremacy of being, moral authority, ontological realism, and theodicies; issues in relation to which the word or supra-idea of God is discussed, disputed, defended, and/or dismissed. By exploring the sense of the word God in a literary reading, I do not naïvely think that the word can be cut off and removed from its history, nor do I wish to. The queries that put the relevance of this word in doubt in the 19th century may have toppled the word God as self-evident authority, but they also added to the remarkable history of it. My venture is

⁸ For example in C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 2013, and Simon D. Podmore, *Struggling with God. Kierkegaard and the Temptation of Spiritual Trial*, James Clarke & Co, 2013.

to approach the sense of this word, not so that the history of it is excluded, but so that the history of it does not define the framework of the inquiry. I will not discuss, defend, or reject the issues that the *history* of that word brings along; I will, rather experimentally, consider what the *word* God – as a word – brings along to a *story*, and, thus, put the word in question in another way.

The main question explored in this study is:

How does the word God *come about* in the writings of *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*?

I wish to show that the *way* a word comes about is significant to the *sense* of that word. To ask *how* a word comes about is also to indicate that the sense of this word might not be stated in an *obvious* way. I find both de silentio and Climacus to be excellent writers *and* mischievous storytellers. Whatever we are told in *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*, it is not told in a straightforward or simple manner, but through imagined voices or figures, a variety of tales, changes of pace or genre, puzzling forewords, and a teasing tonality that rings even in the most profound passages. I hope to show that taking this mischievous storytelling seriously (without losing one's sense of humour in the venture) can open for a sense that twinkles precisely in the *way* of the writing, what I also call the movements of a text. I also wish to show how the sense of a word or the issue of a topic comes about *along the way* of the writing. The pseudonymous writers of *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* have a way with questioning: they do not pose a straightforward question and then answer it, rather, they unfold *why* a question is to be raised (at all) *along the way* of the writing. This study tends to follow this manner of questioning in the readings to come; a manner or method which suits very well a reading that trails how the sense of a word *comes about*.

I do not approach the word God with any notional or doctrinal interest (which is not to say that such interests are irrelevant), and this study is not a philosophical, theological or historical interpretation, although it is written as an open invitation to readers from any field or discipline. My question is – with a nod

to my literary approach: What is the *story* (that is, what is going on) with this word?

To ask how the word God comes about in the writings of *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* is also to point to the texts into which the word comes about. That is a vital point in this study. To me, the word God does not stand on its own: I find it to come about in the *context* of a work.

In my readings I hope to bring out how the *way* a word comes about (or is told) has impact on the context of a work, so that the plots of old tales (of a father of faith, and a god coming into time) are displaced from a discourse on sacrifice and obedience to a story on adventure and responsibility (*Fear and Trembling*), and from a discourse on truth and learning to a plot of risk and resolution (*Philosophical Fragments*).

My suggestion is that the plot of both works turns on the tremendous moment of the coming about of the word God, or put otherwise: I suggest that both works revolve around the questions, the abyss, and the openness that the incoming of this word brought about.

Studies on the word God

As no word stands on its own, no writer stands on his or her own. In the following, I will refer to some of the works that take up the topic of God, and to which my study is related, even though it may differ in terms of aim, approach, interest, or conclusions.

In *Kierkegaard and the Self before God*, Simon D. Podmore examines the relation (or relating) between self and God in light of “Kierkegaard’s category”⁹: *before God*. To Podmore, the “self becomes itself *before God*”¹⁰, yet, this movement (of becoming) is profoundly complicated since the relation between self and God is one of

⁹ Podmore 2011, xv.

¹⁰ Podmore 2011, 184.

“infinite, radical, qualitative difference.”¹¹ An abyss, thus, opens in the relation, and Podmore’s book is also, as the subtitle indicates, an investigation of the “Anatomy of the Abyss.” In *Kierkegaard and the Self before God*, this investigation is worked out in relation to theological themes such as spiritual trial, sin, and forgiveness, yet, most significantly, as I read it, Podmore finds in the abysmal depth of the abyss: a dialectical figure.¹² The infinite difference (between self and God) is not glossed over or simply overcome in faith; rather, the difference is precisely what makes up the relation. By preserving the difference in the very overcoming, Podmore can also suggest the felicitous formulation of a transfiguration of the God as the *Wholly* Other to God as the *Holy* Other. In faith (or “when faith is present”), the infinite difference is confirmed so that the “true meaning” of it (namely, forgiveness) can be expressed (in accepting the forgiveness), yet, in Podmore’s nuanced interpretation, the confirmation of the difference is also a confirmation of the abyss, so that the possibility of despair, melancholy, and offence is not simply eliminated or “removed.”¹³ My study will also come to the edge of an abyss in which I, too, will find a twofold figure. However, in my readings, the drama of the word God will not be played out in a dialectical relation of sin and forgiveness, and the relating to that word is not found to be one of worship or prayer: “Prayer is thus the struggle of faith in which the abyss (Dn. *Afgrund*) of despair is overcome by the Holy ground (*ground*) on which one becomes a self, in selfsurrender and silence, intimately *before God*.”¹⁴ The difference in interpretation does not regard the theological mark of the terms (to which I do not object); rather, the difference lies in the interpretation of relations. I will in this study point toward a relation that is not played out in a figure of dialectics, and I will not find a ground on which one can stand before God; rather,

¹¹ Podmore 2011, 5.

¹² For example: “Perhaps it would be best to say that salvation signifies an end to the infinite abyssal severance or harrowing *distinction* between the self and God. At the same time, *difference* (the *mysterium*) is perpetually maintained – a difference which is itself asserted in the act of forgiveness. It is through forgiveness that the notion of contrast or opposition is overcome.” Podmore 2011, 173; or: “As the consciousness of sin cannot be truly grasped by the self without the relational consciousness of forgiveness before God, so the abyss of sin cannot be anatomized without this gulf between the human impossibility and divine possibility of forgiveness.” Podmore 2011, 176.

¹³ All terms in quotation marks in this sentence are taken from Podmore 2011, 176-177.

¹⁴ Podmore 2011, 150.

I will suggest a relating of risk, responsibility, and resolution. Still, the divergence in interpretation is, I think, not one of incompatibility.

In *God and the Other*, J. Aaron Simmons asks how or whether a “Continental God-talk contributes to or distracts from ethical, political, and philosophical practice.”¹⁵ Simmons can thus be said to take the critical queries regarding the relevance of the word God seriously. Bringing together ‘Continental philosophy of religion’, which in *God and the Other* are represented primarily by Kierkegaard and Levinas, ‘Anglo-American philosophy of religion’, and ‘contemporary post-Rawlsian political theory’, Simmons puts into action the conversation that he advocates as necessary in order to come up with viable and applicable models that respond to the epistemic and ethico-political challenges of our time.¹⁶ To Simmons, Rorty, Levinas and Kierkegaard share a “common, and robust, vision for the future of human social interaction,” a vision that takes its point of departure from Simmons’ proposal of an ontology of constitutive and bi-directional responsibility,¹⁷ that is, a responsibility to God *and* to the Other as constitutive of selfhood.

Although my study will not take up the topic of selfhood, I also bring out responsibility as a significant point, and I follow Simmons in insisting that Kierkegaard’s thinking is not ‘world-less’. There are many points of connection between the book of Simmons and my study: Kierkegaard, Levinas, a reading of *Fear and Trembling*, a suggestion of responsibility, and an exploration of the notions of hope and trust. When Simmons argues that Kierkegaard “advocates a dynamic notion of responsibility and obligation that is shaped by the particular sphere of

¹⁵ Simmons 2011, 9.

¹⁶ In *God and the Other*, this is also to respond to “Rorty’s critique that Levinasian ethics are not useful for the ethical and political life.” Simmons 2011, 14. Rorty made this claim in an exchange with Simon Critchley, “Response to Simon Critchley,” in Mouffe 1996, 41-46.

¹⁷ “By maintaining the tension between the relational polarities that constitute human subjectivity – God and the Other – I will argue that Levinas and Kierkegaard open productive spaces for making sense of the general trajectory of new phenomenology for revisioning human social life as well as contemporary philosophy of religion and political philosophy [...]. My claim is that when we really see Kierkegaard as Kierkegaard and Levinas as Levinas, we will begin to view them as moving forward together while constantly challenging each other on the best way toward the singularizing goal of faithfulness to God and justice for the other.” Simmons 2011, 68.

human existence in which an individual finds herself,”¹⁸ I find it to come close to my suggestion of a very human situation (Part one)¹⁹ and an undertaking in answering (Part two). However, there are also some significant points of disconnection. Whereas I suggest a subtle displacement of the plot in *Fear and Trembling* away from a discourse on sacrifice and obedience, Simmons build his interpretation of that work on this connection.²⁰ And whereas I find the openness of the very human situation (found in my readings of *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*) to involve a risk without guaranties or justifications, Simmons can assuredly state that: “trusting is always a risky gesture – but it is a risk that is *justifiably* worth taking.”²¹ Indeed, the confident way in which Simmons at times puts forward his proposals²² also indicates a difference in the way of reading (Kierkegaard). I will in Part two of this study point to a proposal of Levinas, namely, of a ‘new modality’ that is expressed in the gestures of politesse: the ‘perhaps’ and ‘if one likes’. My suggestion is that such gestures are not only expressions of diplomacy or modesty, but also a way of acknowledging the unjustifiable openness of all our statements. However, while I may disagree with Simmons regarding the way of reading Kierkegaard, I consider his project – of bringing together thinkers of different traditions and fields, and (re-)connecting the (disputed) field of philosophy of religion to social and political theories – to be thought-provoking and relevant. My study is a rather near-sighted reading of selected works of Kierkegaard through literary lenses, and, so, I find the scope and the conference of *God and the Other* to be inspiring, and Simmons’ resolve to listen to and take seriously the critical objections from other schools or disciplines (than

¹⁸ Simmons 2011, 91.

¹⁹ Though my point in this matter will accentuate how the human situation is one of relationality rather than of “an individual.”

²⁰ “Abraham’s love for Isaac is the condition for the possibility of his sacrifice: *devotion to the other person is the condition for the possibility of obeying God*. [...] Isaac is given to Abraham as an expression of God’s love for Abraham; that God demands Isaac back is a reminder of Abraham’s lack of self-sufficiency.” What Simmons calls “The Logic of Gift and Gratitude”. Simmons 2011, 62-63.

²¹ Simmons 2011, 256. Emphasis not added, but is employed by Simmons.

²² For example: “[I] assert that the situation in which Continental philosophy of religion and Continental political philosophy find themselves, or rather, *should* find themselves can be expressed thusly: *Religion must be considered as an ethico-political reality and ethics/politics must be understood as implicated in decidedly ‘religious’ issues*.” Simmons 2011, 7; “Kierkegaard’s understanding of religion is clearly not a movement of escapism, but of *investment*.” Simmons 2011, 214.

what Simmons terms: ‘Continental philosophy of religion’) to be exemplary, even if we do not agree on the way to approach a work or a question.

In *Kierkegaard and Levinas. The Subjunctive Mood*, Patrick Sheil presents a wide-ranging and comparative reading of Kierkegaard and Levinas through the linguistic perspective of the subjunctive mood. Opposed to the “solid work of the indicative,” Sheil’s book is “written with reference to the verb forms that some grammars keep for cases of uncertainty; phrases whose reference is possible, hypothetical, doubtful or desired. These forms are called the subjunctive.”²³ To Sheil, the subjunctive mood is precisely a perspective, or outlook, that has an eye for the subjunctive: “For though we may be looking, we do not see everything, The subjunctive mood arises when we cannot see everything, and it is when we cannot see everything that we hold out hope.”²⁴ Through *Kierkegaard and Levinas, The Subjunctive Mood*, Sheil reconsiders and challenges an extensive set of shared themes from the works of the these two thinkers (for example, desire, return, scepticism, negativity, insomnia, anxiety, death, future, gift, hope, alterity, to mention some of the themes from the first half of the book) in the light of the subjunctive outlook, exploring most of all the implications of this outlook for our understanding of the ethical in Kierkegaard and Levinas. Though Sheil does not neglect the problematic sides of the subjunctive mood (one could, for example, drown in doubt, or get lost in possibilities), he takes the uncertainty of the subjunctive mood to be a positive power that might breathe life into ethical thinking. One of the main proposals of Sheil builds on a formula found in the works of Levinas, namely: *as if*.²⁵ With a subjunctive outlook, we can look at the situation or the other person *as if* hope or love or goodness is possible, or *as if* it is there: “this quality of assuming love to be there in others, is what makes Kierkegaardian love subjunctive. For there may be no evidence to support the idea that Love is present in the Other, and indeed, it may be the case that the person has no kindness in them. That is to say, the person has no kindness in them *now*,

²³ Sheil 2010, 1.

²⁴ Sheil 2010, 174.

²⁵ Sheil 2010, 3.

but as everyone knows, now will soon be gone. Subjunctively speaking, if you treat a person *as if* kindness *were* there inside them then it may be the case that this person will then ‘rise to the occasion’ and make that faith in him or her ‘true’.²⁶ The subjunctive mood seems (in the above quotation) to have some transformative powers that go beyond its grammatical mode, yet, what I wish to point to here is the relation to time that *is* defining for the subjunctive mood as a grammatical form (according to Sheil). The subjunctive mood does, in terms of grammar, point to a ‘not-yet-there’; it expresses a situation that is not yet realized, but hoped for, imagined, or expected. And so, the subjunctive mood is, in the above citation, to look beyond the now, to look to the ‘not-yet-there’ as if it ‘were there’. With regard to Sheil’s venture into finding points in a grammatical mood, he is a kindred reader to my study, and although he takes a linguistic route, whereas I take a literary path, we are, I believe, both language investigators. I will in this study also take up the theme of hope as well as the possible, and I, too, am fond of the formula *as if*. However, whereas Sheil finds a potential opening in the time that changes: “After all, the situation is changing all the time,”²⁷ I will point to a situation of openness, that is to say, I will suggest that an ambiguous openness *is* the situation. In my reading (of *Philosophical Fragments*), it is not only so that the situation is changing all the time (the now is already gone in the moment it is indicated²⁸); my suggestion is that time is opened in the moment (*Oieblikket*), and, so, we might say that the situation is changing time (not least in the sense of ‘opening time’). While Sheil employs ‘cases of uncertainty’ and phrases ‘whose reference is possible, hypothetical’, I will accentuate paradoxical relations that move the possible beyond the hypothetical, beyond the desired or expected. I wish to bring out a plot that is not played out in the scheme of certainty/uncertainty, but is expressed by the formula ‘by virtue of the absurd’. On the last page of *Kierkegaard and Levinas, The Subjunctive Mood*, Sheil thanks the reader: “for coming all this way (especially since a book on the subjunctive is, in a sense, a book about

²⁶ Sheil 2010, 165.

²⁷ Sheil 2010, 253.

²⁸ Agamben 2006, 11.

nothing).”²⁹ He, thus, stays faithful to the subjunctive mood to the very end, and does not make it into a solid indicative. I salute him on this point. Even so, I will throughout my study insist that a study about the word God is indeed not a study about nothing, and my intuitions about both Kierkegaard and Levinas, in particular with regard to the ambiguity and nuances of their works, differ from those of Sheil.

I wrote that few studies have approached the *word* God in the writings of Kierkegaard from the field of *literary* studies.

That is not to say, however, that the literary features of the Kierkegaardian authorship have been neglected in the reception.³⁰

Joakim Garff has throughout his works been attentive to the literary and narrative aspects of Kierkegaard’s authorship,³¹ and has in this examination also put the very notion of authorship in play. Whereas Garff explores the aesthetic dimensions, I will be a reader for the plots. In *At lege fremmed med det kendte. Kierkegaards gendigtninger af bibelske figurer* (2008), Iben Damgaard has examined biblical figures and the significance that may open in paraphrases, and that may anew our understanding of the bible and ourselves. Whereas Damgaard accentuates the wonder (*forundring*) of reading with Kierkegaard, I will point to the puzzles of his writing: the incongruities and the ambiguities and the madness of a paradox. In *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (2001), Steven Shakespeare has, in his investigation of language and communication³² as understood by Kierkegaard, pointed to the role of narratives in the works of the latter. Though I follow Shakespeare on many points with regard to narratives, his argumentation is played out in the framework of realism/anti-realism. With my literary study, I attempt to direct the discussion (on the word God) in other directions. The literary features of Kierkegaard’s writings are also examined by Eric Ziolkowski in *The Literary Kierkegaard* (2011), a thorough work that not least presents the many

²⁹ Sheil 2010, 256.

³⁰ For broad view, Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard’s literary figures and motifs* (2014).

³¹ See, for example, *Den Sovnløse* (1995), and *Kierkegaards æstetik* (1995).

³² Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (2001).

literary sources from which Kierkegaard drew inspiration. Whereas Ziolkowski *presents* Kierkegaard as a literary author and an extensive reader of literature, I will *read* Kierkegaard as a storyteller.

Recently, “interpretations of Kierkegaard as a narrative theorist”³³ have also emerged, discussing the notion of narrative subjectivity/selfhood.³⁴ As I am here trailing attention to literary features in the reception of Kierkegaard’s writings, I will not comment on the notion of subjectivity/selfhood, but I wish to make some remarks with regard to the noun *narrative*. A description of the narrative is offered by Anthony Rudd³⁵ in the compilation, *Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling – A Critical Guide* (2015): “a narrative [...] makes sense of an agent’s intentional activities by showing what they were intended to bring about, and why the agent could reasonably, given those circumstances, have formed those intentions.”³⁶ But we cannot understand an action without understanding the agent who performed it, and we can only understand an agent by understanding the narrative of that agent’s development through time.”³⁷ A narrative does in this understanding provide an explanatory scheme in relation to which the actions of the agent are made comprehensible. Put otherwise, it is in the light of the narrative that the actions of an agent (or the life or aim of an agent) can be made sense of, even if they are not transparent to the agent him- or herself. Thus, while Rudd does not fail to notice the many problems that a story like that of Abraham raises, he can still suggest that: “If anything can make sense of that, it can only be the narrative of his whole past history, his developed relationship with God, his ability to

³³ Rudd 2015, 188.

³⁴ See, for example, John Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From MacIntyre and Frankfurt to Kierkegaard* (2012), Anthony Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach* (2012), and John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes, *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self* (2015).

³⁵ I refer to Rudd and his essay from *Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling – A Critical Guide* (2015), because he in this essay presents an understanding of the narrative in relation to one of the selected works of my study, and because his interpretation of that work is so markedly different from mine. I do not take the above citation from Rudd’s essay to be representative for the understanding of the narrative in the wider discussion of narrative subjectivity/selfhood.

³⁶ A footnote here reads: “It is worth noticing that the intentions in question need not be conscious ones. As a number of both philosophers and psychoanalytic practitioners have argued, psychoanalytic explanations, appealing as they do to unconscious intentions, desires, and so on are still essentially narrative in form.” Rudd 2015, 189.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

recognize this demand as coming from God, and therefore as one that he can trust will have a good outcome.”³⁸ I do not object to this reading, although I do not agree with it either. However, I wish to bring out a difference between the notion of the narrative as a producer of intelligibility (that is, as an explanatory factor), and the perception of storytelling as it is suggested in this study. To me, stories do not necessarily offer up explanations or bring out clarity. There may be absurd or irrational elements in a story, and they may not be obscuring the sense of that story or make it unreadable thereby. These absurd or irrational moments might even have a point (that is not explicated or untangled), even if they signal in a different mode than the rational. This could be said about the stories of Kafka and the plays of Beckett, literary pieces that do not always make the actions of their agents intelligible in a reasoned sense; storylines that do not offer a framework from which the plot can be explained in a validating or logical way. As Rudd’s reading of *Fear and Trembling* is also a defence of Kierkegaard against irrationalist interpretations of the latter’s view on faith, the comprehensibility of de silentio’s work is underlined for a reason. Yet, my study will go on to ask: must a writing that is not altogether rational necessarily be classified as irrational? Or, must a work that is not irrational prove this by showing that it is solidly rational? Could not the sense of a story be played out in a mode otherwise than such (oppositional) schemes as rational/irrational? I hope to show that such a sense is indeed possible.

II. METHODOLOGY

1) A literary approach

This study takes its methodological point of departure from the field of literary studies, and can be said to be a *literary reading*.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., 199.

³⁹ There are no clear-cut classifications or indisputable criteria for what such features are: “But what does it mean to read the text as literature? To repeat: What is literature? Wherein lies this fugitive “literariness”? One does literary criticism when one postulates certain linguistic characteristics as literary and then analyses those characteristics as they are played out, structured,

A literary reading indicates (in this study) a reading attentive to the literary features of writing, or, as such attention is not exclusive to literary studies, a reading that approaches the texts at issue *as* literary writing(s).

I will not be examining the writing of the works for the sake of language (that is, with linguistic interests in mind), but for the opening of sense.

This study takes the ways of writing – the movements and disruptions, the rhythm and repetitions – to be significant. It finds that sense can open in the (grammatical) tense of a verbal noun and in the odd relations of a parataxis, in the movements of a storytelling and the twists of a plot. Such peculiarities are not whimsical features of artistry, as if style and modes were merely the chic or imaginative wrapping in which the heart of the matter was delivered, as if an inventive style was only the hallmark of an artist but not a thinker, or, as if such a distinction could be made at all or in the first place.

I have chosen a literary approach because I find it to be a constructive approach in relation to the issue of my study. Or, put otherwise, I have chosen a literary approach because

- it takes seriously the textuality, the style, and the tonality of a work,
- it has an eye for the winks of a text, and it pays attention to the telling gestures or the gestures of telling that are made *by way of* language,
- it is attentive to the way that a plot, a point, or a word *comes about* in a text, how it is told or expressed,
- it might tell another tale (about the works at issue) than readings from other disciplines.

developed, and so on, in various writings.” Bauerlein 2011, 87-88. In a way, we might say that literary studies revolve around this uncertainty, that is, it can be said to be a discipline concerned with ‘the literary’ as a question. As a discipline, it may not make any progress in terms of a strict determination of its own subject, but it can, even so, make some rich or striking points regarding the possible significance and pulse of that term (the literary). Although a literary study cannot – definitively or incontestably – state what a literary way of writing is *exactly*, it can nevertheless suggest that the *way* of a writing *matters*: “Literary theory, we must emphasize, can be thought in a number of different ways; and if, as we have already suggested, it cannot always defend the distinctiveness of its object, literature, this precariousness should be seen as a matter of intellectual adventure, not theoretical bankruptcy.” Jefferson and Robey 1986, 20.

This is not to say that it is *the* way to read a Kierkegaardian work. I do, however, hope to show that this approach brings out other perspectives with regard to the word God and the storylines into which it comes about.

My readings will be occupied very little with the stringency of definitions or the development of a notion. Rather, it will be drawn to the peculiar characters, the offbeat formulations, and the curious turns of a tale or a sentence in a work. I find sense to open in the ambiguity of a formulation and the versatility of a term *just as much as* in the coherency of a premise; I find narratives to be expressed just as much by patterns as by dissonance, and I find the mood of a passage or the jest of a line to be as significant as the meticulous unfolding of a concept. Just as significant. Note that a literary reading is not opposed to or separated from systematized conceptualizations or from expositions of the coherency of a concept within the framework of a theoretical context; yet, its interest – its regard and curiosity – lies elsewhere. I will in this study be in search of the possible sense – the themes and issues – that might be found in the *movements* of a writing, in the shifts and tensions of a text, in the plot turns and the displacements of concern, which is also to say that I will search for the sense of a word in the *context* of a writing.

To find sense to open in the way(s) of writing is not to retrieve some hidden meaning behind the text, or to decipher some obscure message between the lines. A literary reading regards the written text very seriously indeed, yet, without losing its sense of humour or its fondness for ambiguity. In this way, a literary reading may differ from a *literal* study, although each in their way stays loyal to the text. Whereas it can be said that a *literal* exposition takes every line on its word and seeks exactness, a literary reading tends to let the versatility of a term sparkle, the imagination of a storytelling thrill, and the mischievous equivocality of language vibrate. Contradictions or deviations in and of a text do not confuse a literary reading; rather, such discordance only deepens (or heightens) its curiosity.

I have also chosen a literary approach because I find it to resonate well with the way of the writing of both *de silentio* in *Fear and Trembling* and Climacus in the *Philosophical Fragments*; two works so abundant in stories and tales and poetical ventures, so vibrant with textual motions and manoeuvres, so ingenious in terms of genre and tonality, so keen on wordplay and wit. Two pseudonymous writers so adept at letting the complexity, the questioning, and the ambiguity of a text stay open that one may wonder whether a point is not signalled thereby. Might not this peculiar way of a *writing* also reflect or express – a peculiar way of a *thinking*?

2) An associative nexus of thematic threads

The writing of this study moves along by way of *association*. It will trail formulas that it came across in the search of a word, and it will follow clues that came up in the consideration of a topic; themes and hints that might seem to change the direction of the course or to lead to diversions from the route. The associative way may not follow a straightforward line of reasoning; even so, it will not be losing its thread. The study is made up of thematic threads that weave their ways in and out of passages and sections, of other text and other motifs; thematic threads that also associate the parts of this study: themes such as belief and verification, adventures and sidestepping, the possible and the impossible. As an example, the theme of adventure as the distinct direction of a movement will first appear in Part one, in relation to Agamemnon and Abraham, and it will surface shortly once more in Part one in relation to Eckhartian *Gelassenheit*, and, finally, it will help define the moment of resolution in Part two. I call it a thematic *thread* because it twists its way through the study, and also because it is entwined with (at least) one other theme, namely, the theme of sidestepping an abyss.

The thematic threads are all involved in and affected by the inquiry of this study, namely, *how does the word God come about in a (con)text?*

Following an associative flow, the study is kept on track through detours and shifts in an on-going movement that lets thematic currents run through the parts, linking thoughts at the borderlines of relations and difference, and bringing along points and formulations so that they may twinkle in other passages or other parts.

The thematic threads are not isolated strands, but interconnected (or associated) in a nexus of questions that are all related to the word God. A point of the study is to show how themes and terms of a text are moved or unsettled, opened or shaped, by the *coming about* of a peculiar word. Put otherwise, the signification of the thematic threads of this study are explored or reformulated in relation to the word in question.

3) A local and supplementary study

This study is *locally orientated* in its readings. It will zoom in on selected passages of *Fear and Trembling* and of the *Philosophical Fragments* in search of the sense of a peculiar word.

Rather than presenting an overview interpretation of a work, this study finds that a dire storyline may open in the course of a single sentence (as pointed to in Prologue one), and that the versatility of a word is hard to pin down and register in its entirety (as pointed to in reading of Part two).

A locally orientated study will not go far and wide in a work, it will pause and wonder at an odd formulation, it will meditate on a formula that caught its attention, and it will revolve around a single moment.

I will be looking for the complexity, the incongruity, the surprise, and the ambiguity that twinkle in subtle sentences that may not at first glance seem significant; understated hints that are overlooked in a globally orientated study understood as a sweeping expedition that goes far and wide and, thus, can return with the general overview that I will not be offering.

I will make no statements as to what the meaning of a work or a thinker is on the whole, and the suggestions of this study do not exemplify or represent any thinker or any work. At no point, then, do I claim to impart what Kierkegaard meant to say on a subject, or what a work conveys on a matter. My suggestions points – in a supplementary way – to the possible sense that might *also* be brought about in the writings of the selected works in relation to a peculiar word in question, or to be more on the point: how that word comes about in a writing.

I find sense to open on the borderlines of relation and difference, and so, I will trail the slight shifts of interest or inclination in passages or lines from other works in the hope that these negotiations might bring out significant distinctions or vital bonds – yet, without thereby drawing the conclusion that a selected passage or line convey the insights of an entire oeuvre, or that it could cover the complexity of a life work.

As this study finds sense to open (also) in the gaps of difference and in the subtle slides of a displacement, it does not take variance in positions within a work or an oeuvre to be a flaw.

There is always more to be said, other perspectives to find, and other ways to follow, as it is formulated in Prologue two. To me, the heterogeneity of readings reflects the complexity of a work and the vivacity of a field (in this case, what we might call Kierkegaardian studies), and so, it is not out of modesty that I call this study a supplement, a piece (only), as Climacus might have added.

4) Levinas as an inspirational source

Of all the authors that are visited in this study, one writer stands out, namely, Emmanuel Levinas whose writing is referred to in both parts as well as in some lengthy footnotes, particularly in part one.

The lengthy footnotes reflect the peculiar position that Levinas holds in the present study: 1) They are at times extensive which testifies to the profound influence his writings have had on my education, and yet, 2) they are (still) but footnotes, indicating that the works of Levinas are not the main subject of this study.

To connect a reading of Kierkegaard with the writing of Levinas is far from an original idea. Studies such as *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (2008),⁴⁰ *Despite Oneself. Subjectivity and its Secret in Kierkegaard and Levinas* (2008), *Kierkegaard and*

⁴⁰ Merold Westphal, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Levinas – Ethics, Politics, and Religion (2008),⁴¹ *Kierkegaard and Levinas – The Subjunctive Mood* (2010), and *God and the Other* (2011) have brought these two thinkers in dialogue, examining the shared thematic threads – on the difficult relation(s) between the religious and the ethical – of the two thinkers.⁴² Thematic threads that so remarkably relate a single man who spend almost his entire life in a nineteenth-century Copenhagen to a Lithuanian-Jewish emigrant who lived through two world wars and whose writings bear witness to the many places he for a while (or a longer period) called home (Kovno, Kharkov, Strasbourg, Freiburg, and Paris).

I have in this study chosen to connect to the writings of Levinas on three points, namely:

- 1) a difference in the interpretations of two events,
- 2) a reconsiderations of the ranks of fields, and
- 3) a shared mode of ambiguity and openness.

- 1) A difference in the interpretation of two events

The link between the Kierkegaard and Levinas is made, most significantly, by Levinas himself who in his writings alluded to the Dane on more than one occasion,⁴³ perhaps most pronounced in *Proper Names (Nom propres)*,⁴⁴ a collection

⁴¹ J. Aaron Simmons and David Woods (eds.), Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

⁴² Works such as David Kangas's *Kierkegaard's Instant – On Beginnings*, Indiana University Press 2007, and *Subjectivity and Transcendence*, eds. Arne Grøn, Iben Damgaard, and Søren Overgaard, Mohr Siebeck 2007, and Llewelyn's *Margins of Religion – Between Kierkegaard and Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2009) also attest to the shared themes of Kierkegaard and Levinas.

⁴³ For example in 'Hermeneutics and the Beyond' in *Entre nous, On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, London: The Athlone Press 1998, 74: "But when Kierkegaard recognizes in dissatisfaction an access to the supreme, despite Hegel's warnings, he does not relapse into romanticism. His point of departure is no longer experience, but transcendence. He is the first philosopher who thinks God without thinking Him in terms of the world"; and in 'Aimer la Thora plus que Dieu' in *Difficile liberté*, troisième édition, Éditions Albin Michel 1976, 221: "Dieu se voilant la face et reconnu comme présent et intime - est-il possible ? S'agit-il d'une construction métaphysique, d'un *salto mortale* paradoxal dans le goût de Kierkegaard ?"

⁴⁴ *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Stanford University Press 1996/*Nom propres* et *Sur Maurice Blanchot*, Éditions Fata Morgana, 1975, 1976.

of published essays of which two are on Kierkegaard,⁴⁵ and in the essay 'Enigma and Phenomenon' ('Énigme et phénomène').⁴⁶

I have chosen to accentuate the distinct connections (to Kierkegaard) made by Levinas in the above-mentioned essays from *Proper Names*, in the essay 'Enigma and Phenomenon', and in the paper 'A Man-God' in *Entre Nous*⁴⁷ because they relate to the two stories or events that are also at issue in this study, that is, 1) the call(s) to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (in the Jewish tradition(s) referred to as the binding of the son, or the *Akedah*), and 2) the god coming into time (in the tradition(s) of Christianity known as the doctrine of incarnation). Levinas offers a different interpretation of both storylines than Kierkegaard, and raises some significant questions with regard to both events. The concerned questions (voiced in the subsection 'A Levinasian hesitation' in Part One, and in the section 'Yet another Levinasian concern' in Part Two) move the study to 1) amplify the dread and the wonder of a paradox (in Part one), and 2) to reconsider the moment *in time* (in Part two).

The point of the passages involving Levinas is not made to evaluate which interpretation of the events is right or wrong. I find the remarks made by Levinas to be constructive and important also in relation to this study. I do, however, wish to show that *Fear and Trembling* does not put 'religion first, then, ethics' (as it is formulated by Westphal, 2008, 37), and, moreover, that *Philosophical Fragments* does not simply let (the) God come into manifestation,⁴⁸ and so, my suggestion is that Levinas might be closer to the selected works than it appears from the outset.

⁴⁵ 'Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics' (orig. published in German in *Schweizer Monatshefte* 43, 1963), and 'A Propos of 'Kierkegaard vivant'' (orig. published in *Kierkegaard vivant*, Paris: Gallimard, Collection 'Idées' no. 106, 1966, modified for publication in *Noms propres*).

⁴⁶ Published in translation both in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1998 (orig. published 1987), and in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996/orig. 'Énigme et phénomène', *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, troisième tirage, Paris, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1982 (orig. in *Esprit*, June, 1965).

⁴⁷ *Entre nous*, *On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, London: The Athlone Press 1998/'Un Dieu Homme?' in *Entre nous : essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, Paris: Bernard Grasset 1991 (orig. published as 'Qui est Jésus-Christ?', Éditions Desclée de Brouwer, 1968).

⁴⁸ Cf. "Phenomenon and Enigma" in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1998 (orig. published 1987), 71.

2) A reconsiderations of the ranks of field

The second point of connection between Kierkegaard and Levinas is made in the subsection ‘How (not) to label a thinker’ where I argue that the writings of these two thinkers cannot so easily or so obviously be designated to belong (exclusively) to a field due to the complexity of their works, and because of the subtle ways they reconsider terms such as ‘ethics’, ‘religiosity’, and ‘philosophy’.

A point of this subsection is also to redirect the focus from classifications (into the fields of ethics/religion/philosophy) as well as hierarchical orders towards a situation anterior to or anarchic to such categorizations.

3) A shared mode of ambiguity and openness

The third point of connection hinges on a shared mode of ambiguity.

I find a mode of ambiguity to be a distinctive feature in a great deal of the works of Kierkegaard and Levinas: as a way of transcendence (in the main, Levinas⁴⁹), and as a way of writing (in the main, Kierkegaard). I have chosen to highlight the gestures of ‘perhaps’ and ‘if one likes’ suggested by Levinas in the essay ‘Enigma and Phenomenon’ (‘Énigme et phénomène’) as a reflection of the mode of ambiguity as well as of openness. They are proposed as expressions of ‘a new modality’.⁵⁰ A plot (*intrigue*) that is not played out in presentation or immanence, and that cannot be “reduced to the possibility and necessity of formal

⁴⁹ For example in *Autrement* 149; 148; 232; and 238: “A la transcendance – à l’au-delà de l’essence qui est aussi *être-au-monde* – il faut l’ambiguïté [...]” In *Entre Nous*, 55-56: “Obviously such an opening can only be an ambiguity. But the appearing of an ambiguity in the seamless texture of the world is not a looseness in its weave or a failure of the intelligence that examines it, but precisely the proximity of God which can only occur in humility.” In ‘Language and Proximity’, *CCP*, 125: “The evanescence of proximity in truth is its ambiguity, its enigma, that is, the transcendence outside of intentionality.” In ‘God and Philosophy’, *BPW*, 148: “But in fact this ambiguity also is necessary to transcendence. Transcendence owes it to itself to interrupt its own demonstration and monstration, its phenomenality.” OB 161: “It is through its ambivalence which always remains an enigma that infinity or the transcendent does not let itself be assembled.” Ambiguity is also closely related to death in *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Stanford University Press 2000 (*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, Paris: Bernard Grasset 1993).

⁵⁰ Which is also the subtitle of the section in which it is suggested. In ‘Phenomenon and Enigma’, *CCP*, 71/*Une nouvelle modalité*, ‘Énigme et phénomène’, 209.

logic,”⁵¹ and, thus, it is a plot that is very close to the temporal plot of the moment in *Philosophical Fragments* as I read it.

Curious to this study, the new modality is suggested in relation to ‘the Kierkegaardian God’ (*le dieu kierkegaardien*), a God that to Levinas is ‘a way of truth’, a humble and persecuted truth that ‘is not determined by the present and contemporaneousness’.⁵² This point of connection – where the word *God*, the mode of *ambiguity*, and the gesture a ‘perhaps’ meet up – are made by Levinas reading Kierkegaard, and it is brought into this study to heighten (or deepen) the risks and the openness of the (existential) situation which the word God can be said to bring about.

Though the mode of ambiguity is a shared feature of both Kierkegaard and Levinas, I also find a difference in the form it takes and the matter of concern it seems to attend to. Whereas Levinas (in the essay at issue) intensifies the mode of ambiguity to a figure of *enigma*,⁵³ my readings intensify the mode of ambiguity to a formula of the *absurd*. And while the mode of ambiguity in the essay of Levinas tends to be a way of safeguarding the enigma from the betrayals of language, from manifestation, from being, and from the appearing of a phenomenon, I find the mode of ambiguity (in the selected works) to let the sense of a word defy the order(ing) of logic, not by overcoming or eluding it, but by not playing *entirely* by the rules of coherence and congruity.

I do not in this study present a reading of the works of Levinas, or an analysis of his oeuvre. Nor are the suggestions of this study dependent on the insights found

⁵¹ “The God ‘remaining with the contrite and humble’ (Isaiah LVII, 15) [...] is a node of a plot separate from the adventure of being which occurs in phenomena and in immanence, a new modality which is expressed by that ‘if one likes’ and that ‘perhaps’, which one must not reduce to the possibility, reality, and necessity of formal logic, to which skepticism itself refers.” Levinas 1998, 67.

⁵² The citation reads unshortened: “The Kierkegaardian God is not simply the bearer of certain attributes of humility; he is a way of truth which this time is not determined by a phenomenon, by the present and contemporaneousness, and is not measured by certainty.” ‘Phenomenon and Enigma’, *CPP*, 71/’Énigme et phénomène’, 209: “[L]e Dieu kierkegaardien n’est pas simplement porteur de certains attributs d’humilité, mais une façon de la vérité qui, cette fois-ci, ne se détermine pas par la phénomène, par le présent et la contemporanéité et qui ne se mesure par à la certitude.”

⁵³ “An enigma is not a simple ambiguity in which two significations have equal chances and the same light. In an enigma the exorbitant meaning is already effaced in its apparition.” *Ibid.*

in his works, even if they are indeed inspired by them. This study is not a comparative reading of Kierkegaard and Levinas, but a literary reading of two pseudonymous works from the Kierkegaardian oeuvre trailing the question: How does the word God come about in the writing of those two works.

III. THE SELECTION OF WORKS

This study consists of two parts, each a reading of a pseudonymous work from the Kierkegaardian oeuvre.

The two works, *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*, are selected because they both revolve around *a significant event* in what we might call *the narratives of God* in the tradition(s) of Christianity: the call to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and the God coming into time, respectively.⁵⁴ In both of the selected works, the word God can be said – with an expression from literary theory – to come to a point of no return in the events that are at issue: events that are momentous to the sense of the word God *and* to the situations into which it comes about.

Both of the selected works re-tell these events in a distinctively imaginative way that goes very well with the literary approach of this study. Also, both of the works can be said to re-consider the significance of these events in ways that in the same motion play up the drama of the happenings *and* call the sense of those happenings into question.

These features may not be *exclusive* to the selected works; they (these features) are, however, quite *distinctive* of both of them (the selected works).

In short, I have chosen the works *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* (hereafter mostly referred to as the *Fragments*) because of:

⁵⁴ The Abraham narrative re-told in *Fear and Trembling* is a storyline shared by all of the three so-called monotheistic religions, whereas the event of the God coming into time is a plot distinctive to the tradition(s) of Christianity.

their subject: the re-telling of a significant event in the narratives of God, and their style: the inventive storytelling and the mischievousness of the writing.

As it happens, both of the selected works also bring out the *passion of faith* and a *movement of becoming*, and both works associate the word in question of this study *with a decisive moment* and *the fullness of time*. Notions and terms that also in this study are closely related to as well as affected by the word God.

IV. COMPOSITION OF THE STUDY. READER'S GUIDE INCLUDED

This study is made up of two parts, each a reading of a work, and each introduced by a prologue.

The Prologues

The prologues are introductions to the readings, also in the sense of *introducing a way of reading*. They are, in other words, methodological manifestos in miniature. From different perspectives, the prologues point to the openness of a text, and they call result-orientated approaches into question, approaches that are after *the outcome* (Prologue one) or *the whole* (Prologue two) of a work.

The Parts

The parts of this study reflect the works of which they are a reading. Part one, a reading of *Fear and Trembling*, weaves it way in and out of texts, letting several voices be heard in passing, and, thus, in this bricolage of interrelated passages, it resembles the multitude of stories and tales, of figures and diversions, that animate the writing of de silentio. Part two, a reading of the *Fragments*, revolve around the issue 'the moment in time', which is also the point of departure for Climacus' piece of work.

My suggestion is that *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments* both deal with, or reconsider, the coming about of the word God. The plots of these two works turn on these momentous happenings, and both works are concerned with the

questions, the abyss, and the openness that these events bring about. Put otherwise, the selected works can be said to be *about* the taking place of the word God.

In Part one, I will explore the storyline into which the word God comes about, namely, the story of how Abraham became the father of faith.

In Part two, I will explore the moment in which the word God came into time.

A more expressive introduction to the parts is offered in the reader's guide hereunder.

A Reader's Guide: *Fear and Trembling* – a reading

Part one of the study takes as its point of departure the story of Abraham as it is re-told by de silentio in *Fear and Trembling*. The main share of Part one – which is also the main part of the study – follows in the path of Abraham on the journey of his life, exploring:

how the word God comes about in the narrative.

As the sense of this word is not easily tracked down, or, as the sense of this word may not give itself in any simple or straightforward way, the journey of Part one will not take a direct route to its conclusion(s). The reading of Part one will trail the sense of a word *through detours and digressions*, and along the way, other terms, themes, and questions will be taken up and brought along to other sections as well as into the reading of Part two. Although it may at times seem as if the reading of this part has lost its way, or, at least, lost track of the word in question, the reading is – through all its diversions – on its way in the search of a word that is explored in *con-text*, that is, in a reading that weaves its way in and out of (other) text passages (by other writers).

A vital manoeuvre and a tentative point of Part one is to search for the kind of sense that opens in the cracks of difference, however minimal; hints of difference that may be difficult to outline precisely, yet (and not despite thereof)

openings of divergence that might deepen (or heighten, if you like) the prolificacy of a sense.

Part one falls into 5 sections, as uneven as the study at large:

- 1) A thread of heroes
- 2) The old man and a misunderstanding
- 3) How to become a father of faith
- 4) Movements of God
- 5) A word hard to track down

At first, three old men are paid a visit: 1) *Agamemnon and a tragic situation* in ‘A thread of heroes’, 2) *the old man and a glinting blade* in ‘The old man and a misunderstanding’, and 3) Abraham and a dreadful responsibility in ‘How to become a father of faith’.

From the stops by these three fellows, and not least: from the moment where the word God enters the story of Abraham, the study will go on to trail some *movements of God* (in section 4) ‘Movements of God’), following a formula put forward by David Kangas in relation to *Fear and Trembling*: “God withdraws behind a contradiction.”

And at last, in the 5th section of Part one (‘A word hard to track down’), the reading will come to address *the word in question*, the sense of which sparkles and twists in relation to the plots and differences, the gaps and motions, that have been explored in the journey of Part one.

1) A thread of heroes

In the section ‘A thread of heroes’, the study unearths what might be called an existential situation, and what in Part one is also termed ‘*a very human situation*’, namely: a groundlessness under one’s feet, a dire lack of foundation. Following for a while a thread of heroes without losing sight of the main narrative of the part, the study finds a difference to open between Agamemnon the tragic hero and Abraham the father of faith; a difference not in the dread of their situation, but in their *way of relating* to it. To somewhat spoil the plot of the section, it can for now

be said that one does not become a father of faith by sidestepping an abyss of dreadful culpability.

2) The old man and a misunderstanding

In the section of ‘The old man and a misunderstanding’, the complex and equivocal sense of the term ‘*understanding*’ is considered; a versatility already noted in the former section, and one that will be revisited in Part two of the study. In relation to the old man, the reading also comes across *an odd paradox* without which the story of Abraham would (merely) be a tale of sacrifice and obedience. It is a paradox that (in this study) does not come into play through a dialectical interchange.

3) How to become a father of faith

In the section ‘How to become a father of faith’, the study explores the questions: *How* does one become a father of faith, and what is the passion called faith *about*? It turns out that to become a father of faith is not for the faint-hearted (even if it does not call for heroic bravery either). We are (back) at the very human situation found in the first section of the part as *an abyss of groundlessness opens on the way of becoming*. At the edge of this abyss, *an openness of madness and wonder*, a concern of Emmanuel Levinas (the inspirational pulse of the study) is raised. Unsurprising to a reader familiar with this voice, the Levinasian hesitation – concerning Kierkegaard’s re-telling of the Abraham narrative – is *a concern of the ethical*. A point of the passages in the company of Levinas is 1) to bring out the *anarchy of a very human situation*, and 2) to call attention to *an adventurous movement* otherwise than that of the Greek tales of return. An unsettling situation and a re-orientation of a motion that both goes across the disciplines of philosophy and theology. In relation to the Levinasian concern, other worried voices are raised (in ‘A concern of the ethical’ and ‘Trust me! Promise!’), all of which seems to be concerned with consistency and justifications: there is not *really* a contradiction. To this study, there is indeed an incongruity at play in *Fear and Trembling*. Part one finds in the writing of de silentio: an utterly *unresolved paradox* that opened an unconditional and unfounded situation that calls – not for heroism, but for a passion of a certain

kind. At the edge of the abyss of a dreadful openness, *a passion is called for* that looks the impossible in the eyes and takes the plunge – *into the absurd*. The dire openness of the situation and the madness of that plunge spur the study into a re-consideration of the terms *hope and faith* (in ‘Hope and a mad passion to the point of non-sense’ and ‘At the edge of an abyss – to love *in faith*’).

As a crucial plot turn of the story of Abraham as well as this study, the word God enters the narrative as a disastrous collision, *a shattering movement*, as Part one phrases it, or, as formulated by David Kangas: “God withdraws behind a contradiction.” It is with this plot turn that the adventurous journey of Abraham comes to a point of no return, and it is from this shattering moment that Abraham becomes a father of faith – without reasons and perhaps for nothing. But here we are on the verge of spoiling the plot altogether.

4) Movements of God

The section ‘Movements of God – God withdraws behind a contradiction’ is in a way a meditation on the formula of Kangas found in the former section. The first passages of the section follow different movements of retreat, searching out and bringing about formulations and points that find their way into other sections of the study. In trailing movements of retreat, the study finds slight openings of difference, infinitesimal intervals, we could say, that will affect the way or orientation of our search for a peculiar word.

In relation to the movement of absolving, the reading points to the tendency of a course, what the study terms: to revolve around – nothing. The study finds the latter movement to be different to the intrigue of involved movements (of *Fear and Trembling*) in terms of *gravity*. A difference in the way of relating, we might say; a possible distinction to which the study will return in Part two.

In the movement of spacing or absencing as suggested in a short essay by Nancy titled *Between story and truth* (orig. *Entre deux*), the study finds in the interval (ever)opening between story and truth – a line of spacing that will reappear in Part two. The movement of spacing also gives way for a direction otherwise than that of a retreat, and for a way of a movement that does not travel by a route of exchange or oscillation.

As a meditation on movements, this section is in search for motional plots otherwise than those of dialectical interchange and oppositional pairings. What is at stake in this exploration, then, is not only the *orientation* of a formula – God withdraws behind a contradiction – but also the sense of contradiction, or, in relation to *Fear and Trembling*, the sense of a paradox.

5) A word hard to track down

In the last section, ‘A word hard to track down’, the study closes in on the word in question, a word which sense may be hard to track down, but also a word that (to this study) is found *in* language, *in* the text, even if it is (also) defiantly *out of line*.

In this study, the word God is not about withdrawals or secrecy. Rather, it comes into a storyline as a prodigious paradox, in-ordinate and too much. The *in*-coming of this word *affects* the plot of the story, the life of Abraham, and the order of the all tremendously.

The closing in on the sense of the peculiar word God (as it comes about in *Fear and Trembling*) draws on the points and suggestions made along the writing of Part one. The detours and digressions of the reading were in their own tortuous manner, then, a way of getting closer to a word that does not play entirely by the rules of orderliness.

A Reader’s Guide: *Philosophical Fragments* – a reading

Whereas Part one follows the story of Abraham on the journey of his life, the reading of Part two will revolve around a peculiar point, namely the moment in time (*Øieblikket i Tiden*), since this very moment is significant as to:

how the word God comes about in the *Philosophical Fragments*.

Concerned with this peculiar point, the reading will move in unannounced loops, taking up (once again) thematic threads and favoured formulations from other passages, and returning over and over again to its point of departure, that is, the moment in time.

Part two falls into three sections:

- 1) Opening questions
- 2) Yet another Levinasian concern – about the ‘in-‘
- 3) The moment in time

First, the moment as *a historical point of departure* is considered (in ‘Opening questions’). Secondly, a matter of this point is brought into question, concerning the plot of a God coming into time (in ‘Yet another Levinasian concern: about the –in’). And lastly, the study return to the moment in time (in ‘The moment in time’), re-considering the movement of this point and trying to let some thematic threads of the study come together in some loosely knotted bows in the closing passages of the part.

1) Opening questions

In the first section, ‘Opening questions’, the reading will centre on the *temporal plot* written forth by Climacus in the *Fragments*, asking whether the moment in time can be a historical point of departure (*et historisk Udgangspunkt*).

To this study, no simple answers are given (in the *Fragments*) to this question; rather, the temporal plot of the work turns on the *complexity* of this moment. The reading of Part two finds – in the writing of Climacus – the term ‘the historical’ (*det Historiske*) to be a question of its own. The temporal plot is not disclosed as a hidden secret in an unuttered disposition of the work; it is found in the text: ‘what historical something?’ – the *Fragments* asks.

Addressed in a paragraph of its own (in the dense *Interlude* of the *Fragments*), the historical is described in a two-fold complexity: 1) as that which has come into existence (a factor of *Tilblivelse*), and 2) as the passed (*det Forbigangne*). The trickiness of the temporal plot is a main point of this section, and a vibrant factor in the nexus of questions and questioning that runs through the work of Climacus. The strange *complex* of the moment raises some puzzling questions concerning the *contemporaneity* to such a moment. The study will, for a while, follow the problematization of ‘the contemporary follower’ as it is developed in the *Fragments*. The odd suggestion of Climacus seems to be that the moment in time must become *an issue* (*et Spørgsmaal*) to the follower – for him or her to *become* a follower.

In a way, then, the study has once again come across *a movement of becoming* in the answering of a question.

The moment in time is, to this reading, a temporal plot pushed beyond the reasonable to the point of the absurd: as the impossible event of the God coming into time, or, as Climacus terms it: ‘this absurdity that the eternal is the historical’. Concerning this impossible moment, it is not a question of the truth of it, but of assenting to it. The moment in time is a question *by way of* its absurdity, and faith turns out to be passion that answers to such a moment.

2) Yet another Levinasian concern – about the ‘in-‘

The second section, an interlude of sorts, lets a hesitation be voiced concerning the idea of a god coming into time. To Levinas, whom the study pays yet another visit, the moment in time – as the in-coming of God into existence and time – is not a question to follow but a problem to consider. The problem, which Levinas addresses in a paper titled ‘A Man-God?’, is that an in-coming of the God into existence would also lead to an absorption of transcendence into immanence; an immanence that, in the words of Levinas, ‘always wins out over transcendence’.

Curiously to this study, Levinas finds in the writings of Kierkegaard an idea of transcendence that does not succumb to absorption, namely, the idea of a persecuted truth, so humble that it is a question whether it came by at all or in the first place. It is not, however, a question to Levinas whether the doctrinal notion of an incarnation is an idea to go along with. To Levinas, God does not come into being or into manifestation; there is no wavering or playful equivocality on this point seeing as such an incoming or such a disclosure would be a betrayal and loss of transcendence (and the sense of God, so to speak).

3) The moment in time

The third section returns to the moment in time with the concerns of Levinas in mind, reviewing whether the *in*-coming of the word God leads to an absorption of the sense of that word. And so, while Part two revolves around a *moment*, it is also an exploration of the ways of a *movement*.

In the last section of the last part, thematic threads of the study come together, and suggestions made along the way of both parts are revisited. Themes such as ‘story and truth’, ‘a movement passing in a wink’, ‘ambiguity and openness’, and ‘answering and gravity’ are spun together in this closing section where the word in question of the study is related to an involved intrigue of great concern to all of the implicated parts.

Explanations of citations, abbreviations, etc.

Quotations from Kierkegaard’s works will be cited from an English translation in the main body of the text, with the original quotes in footnotes. The translated quotations are employed in the text to ease the flow of the reading, while the Danish originals are mostly kept likewise, since a play on words – in their original and translated versions – is often set in motion in the study. The former are provided according to the standard Hong & Hong translation while the latter are provided according to the text critical edition *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, following the standard manners of referring to these, for example (PF 32/SKS 4, 238).

Quotations from other works are mainly cited in English in the main body of the text, again as to ease the flow of the reading. When the signification of a word or an operation of language in a text passage from works of Levinas are significant to the investigation, I will quote the French original in the footnotes. When a translated version of a French or a German text has not been available, quotations are given in their original form.

Introduction

PART ONE

HOW TO BECOME A FATHER OF FAITH

- MOVEMENTS OF (THE WORD) GOD -

PROLOGUE ONE: OPENING(S) OF A STORY

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham and of how Abraham withstood the temptation [*fristelsen*], kept the faith, and, contrary to expectation, got a son a second time.⁵⁵

Here my literary reading begins. With the retelling of an old story in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) by the pseudonymous author Johannes de silentio, a keen storyteller juggling several tales alongside the main storyline of Abraham and his son Isaac. The narrative traits of the book is highlighted by the subtitle “Dialectical Lyric” (*Dialektisk Lyrik*) and by de silentio himself proclaiming – and perhaps not only with modesty – to be nothing but an author, “by no means a philosopher” (*ingenlunde Philosoph*), “poetice et eleganter,” a “supplementary clerk” (*en Extra-Skriver*).⁵⁶

This reading is only one amongst many other readings of a work that seems to puzzle readers across both centuries and borders, being one of the most commented (on) works of the Kierkegaardian oeuvre and often among the first works to be translated into the native tongue of a country or a language area of the world when introduced to the thinking and writing of the Danish philosopher.

Already obliged by a long and wealthy tradition of readings of *Fear and Trembling*, my reading of the work is thus also a *re*-reading, that is, an interpretative study that approaches a work, thoroughly aware of the many other readings that have thus far elucidated and unravelled de silentio’s stubbornly invoking

⁵⁵ FT 9/SKS 4, 105: “Der var engang en Mand, han havde som Barn hørt hiin skjøne Fortælling om, hvorledes Gud fristede Abraham, og hvorledes han bestod i Fristelsen, bevarede Troen og anden Gang fik en Søn mod Forventning.”

⁵⁶ SKS 4, 103.

narrative;⁵⁷ readings which have inspired and enlightened my own way into the work, and which will most probably be accompanied by many other readings yet to come. As a literary reading, a tentative attempt at following odd paths and diminutive cracks in the writings, this part will not provide a wholesome exposition of *Fear and Trembling*. No suggestions will be given as to what the work is *really* about, some principal themes of the work will not be addressed with a single word, and questionable hints might be followed only to lead us astray. Given these shortcomings, this experimental reading is meant only as a supplement, complementing the scholarly works that have already thoroughly mapped out the main roads and must-see wonders of de silentio's *Fear and Trembling*.

So, to get back on track, my experimental reading begins with:

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham and of how Abraham withstood the temptation [*Fristelsen*], kept the faith, and, contrary to expectation, got a son a second time.⁵⁸

This is not how the *work* begins, however. *Fear and Trembling* may be said to begin with the front page,⁵⁹ or the title page where so much is already said in so few but poignant words, or it may be said to take off with the “Epigraph” (*Motto*) of the work where a story unfolds in two obscure lines.⁶⁰ It can also be said to begin with the “Preface” (*Forord*), the beginning before the beginning, letting the work go ahead before it thickens into the work (that is) announced in the pre-face. Yet, I begin this reading with the above quotation from the paragraph titled “Exordium” (*Stemming*)⁶¹ because this is the way de silentio lets the *story of Abraham* begin, a

⁵⁷ For example the following three collections of essays: Perkins 1981, Perkins 1993, and Conway 2015.

⁵⁸ FT 9/SKS 4, 105.

⁵⁹ “There are eight such sections [in the structure of *Fear and Trembling*], and as several commentators have noted, the first four of them look like different kinds of beginning.” Lippitt 2003, 15.

⁶⁰ “Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote.” SKS 4, 100.

⁶¹ Here the English translation marks only the plural beginnings, or introductory parts, of *Fear and Trembling*, but misses out on the original signification, denoting ‘atmosphere’ or ‘mood’, or ‘feel’.

narrative that itself could be said to commence long before the chosen beginning of the *Stemming*, as indicated in the paragraph that follows, that is, in “Eulogy on Abraham” (*Lovtale over Abraham*, SKS 4, 112), where *de silentio* lets the story of Abraham set about with the departure from “the land of his fathers” (*Fædrenes Land*), letting Abraham wander towards the promised yet unknown land (*Forjættede Land*).⁶²

To set the *Stemming* (the feel or mood of the text), *de silentio* launches *his* retelling of the old story with a classic beginning: “Once upon a time.” Once upon a time a man heard a beautiful story. A story in a story, and the air is already filled with expectation and the promise of a fairy tale. And yet, the story of Abraham is no fairy tale, and, in my reading, *de silentio* is not the sort of storyteller who goes for happy endings. But here we are ahead of ourselves, rushing toward conclusions, and that is against the very advice of the author who heats up the dramatization of his writing to the point of hyperbole when cautioning against the betrayal of an interest too keen on the outcome (*Udfaldet*):

We are curious about the result, just as we are curious about the way a book turns out. We do not want to know anything about the anxiety, the distress, the paradox. We carry on an esthetic flirtation with the result. It arrives just as unexpectedly but also as effortlessly as a prize in a lottery, and when we have heard the result we have built ourselves up. And yet no manacled robber of churches is so despicable a criminal as the one who plunders holiness in this way, and not even Judas, who sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver, is more contemptible than someone who peddles greatness in this way.⁶³

To chase the outcome (*Udfaldet*), to rush toward the conclusion and to settle “when having heard the result,” is a treachery of the highest – or lowest – degree. It is to believe that the lesson to be learned is given (finally) in the end, and thus, having one’s curiosity stirred but not shaken, to move on from the concluded

⁶² FT 17/SKS 4, 113.

⁶³ FT 63/SKS 4, 156.”Men Udfaldet er man nysgerrig efter, som efter Udfaldet paa en Bog; [Angsten, Nøden, Paradoxet vil man ikke vide Noget af.] Udfaldet lefler man æsthetisk med; det kommer ligesaa uventet men ogsaa ligesaa let som en Gevinst i Lotteriet; og naar man har hørt Udfaldet, da har man opbygget sig. Og dog er ingen Tempelraner, der arbejder i Bolt og Jern, saa nedrig en Forbryder, som den, der saaledes plyndrer det Hellige, og dog er Judas, der solgte sin Herre for 30 Secler, ikke foragteligere end den, der saaledes sælger det Store.”

story, uplifted and reassured. To de silentio, that is a despicable plunder, worse, even, than the betrayal by Judas.

Throughout this chapter we shall follow his lead: we will not be too concerned with edification (*Opbyggelse*), nor too curious about the outcome. So, for now, we will stay with the beginning:

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham and of how Abraham withstood the temptation [*fristelsen*], kept the faith, and, contrary to expectation, got a son a second time.

Yet, does not our beginning end with an uplifting outcome: “[...] how Abraham withstood the temptation [*fristelsen*], kept the faith, and, contrary to expectation, got a son a second time.”

Did not the triumphant close come around a bit swiftly, a little too effortlessly? Somewhat “as unexpectedly but also as effortlessly as a prize in a lottery.” To begin with the beginning, then, we will stick to the first lines:

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham.

But here a chasm opens in the text.

Without the comforting closure, the beginning of the story turns out to be less straightforward (or, it turns out it never was straightforward). An abyss opens between the light-hearted statement of *the beautiful story* (*biin skjønnne Fortelling*) and the terrifying passage: “*God tempted Abraham.*” The latter utterance being one of the simplest forms of a sentence: subject-verb-object. But – it was God who tested him! (*det var Gud, der prøvede ham*), as it is repeated twice⁶⁴ in the *Eulogy on Abraham*, accentuating the horror of a situation that makes de silentio re-tell the story of Abraham and his son Isaac under the significant title *Fear and Trembling*.

At the heart of the three monotheistic religions, the figure of Abraham has been revered for centuries, and along the way, the story of his journey to Mount

⁶⁴ SKS 4, 116, italics added.

Moriah – read and reread over and over again – has lost its sting, its terror: a man takes his beloved son, the treasure of his life and the promise of his future, to accompany him on a journey. This, however, is not a picnic trip to the park. The plot is: A man takes his son to accompany him on a journey with the sole purpose of sacrificing him on a mountain to honour the demands of a god. This man, determined on slaughtering his own son, is to be hailed as the father of faith and the epitome of greatness. How can we not be horrified when hearing this story? How can we not be appalled by a religion that demands human offerings? How is a story like this to be regarded as beautiful (*skjønn*)?

The point of this study is not that we should no longer, or not at all, consider the story to be beautiful. My suggestion is only that the greatness⁶⁵ of the narrative comes about in the abyss that opens with the disquieting remark: *God tempted Abraham*. We may, for now, say that the tale of Abraham is beautiful in so far as it is dreadful; it is great in so far as it is disturbing. However, it is, perhaps, not beautiful for the *obvious* reasons.

Still not looking towards a conclusion, the proposal here is that de silentio takes pains in showing throughout *Fear and Trembling* how we too often and too hastily rush past the incongruence of a sentence such as “that beautiful story of how God tempted Abraham“ that we tend to regard the story of Abraham as *solely* beautiful, or, that we tend to perceive the story of Abraham to be regarded as straightforwardly beautiful by the religious traditions which include that narrative in their scriptures. However, to go through the story of Abraham (– eyes already on the outcome –) without losing one’s footing when a chasm of fear and trembling opens in the midst of it, is, according to de silentio, to miss out on a profound dimension of the plot. It may only be a small rift, seemingly negligible, in the text; a narrow opening that one can easily cross over and then comfortably move on (or, move further), and yet, it could also be a rupture of the whole story,

⁶⁵ This is a suggestion that follows de silentio’s complex consideration of the greatness of Abraham, a reflection attentive to the questions that arises with a demand for human offering. Thus, I am not regarding the greatness of Abraham to be self-evident, nor indisputable.

or, of the story as (a) whole. To hesitate at a chasm may lead to *another* plot, otherwise and yet not dissociated from the well-known storyline of a man willing to offer his son on the demand of a god.

A storyteller, and, as the numerous and at times slightly altered stories of *Fear and Trembling* show, a quite prolific one, de silentio knows how to frame a story and set up a scene. In *Stemming*, Johannes de silentio evokes an *unheimlich* feeling that reverberates strongly in the four concise re-tellings of Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah (SKS 4, 107-111), but already shivers, however faintly, in the first line of the paragraph: "that beautiful story of how God tempted Abraham." Somehow, an odd inkling is awakened; an eerie feeling that something is not quite right.

The familiarity of the narrative – sure enough, God "tested Abraham," and "Abraham withstood the temptation" and "got back Isaac" – gives de silentio a chance to play a trick on his readers. He begins his telling⁶⁶ – of an old man and an old story – with the set phrase "Once upon a time," and lets the narrative unfold deceitfully smooth, flowing from punctuation mark to punctuation mark to the concluding period. In this way, the reader is seduced into becoming one of those "despicable criminals" (*nedrige forbrydere*) that rushes past the dread, unaware or unmoved by the unease that trembles in the disruptive passage that has taken hold of this introductory paragraph: "that beautiful story, [punctuation mark]⁶⁷ of how God tempted Abraham." We, the readers, already know the outcome of that test, and thus, we move on somewhat carelessly from the summary of the well-known and beautiful tale, curious as to what the book *Fear and Trembling* is about. And yet, we are told – even if not explicitly – from the very beginning what the fear and trembling (in this case) is about. Subtly, de silentio – *poetice et eleganter* – lets the storyline implode in the midst of it all: *God tempted Abraham* – a short story of horror in three words.

Now that is how to set a "*Stemming*." That is how to *open* a story.

⁶⁶ In "Stemming," SKS 4, 105.

⁶⁷ In Danish: "hiiin skjønnne Fortælling om, hvorledes Gud fristede Abraham." SKS 4, 105.

Far from merely reproducing a storyline, de silentio opens the narrative, that is, he lets the *openness* of the story come forth so that we are (once again) confronted with an unsettled, perplexing, and difficult portrait of one of the grand figures of religious chronicles. This way of opening a text, or, more to the point, this way of letting an openness come forth, is, I suggest, otherwise than the repetitive beginnings of this opening section, and otherwise than the obsessive repetitions of the old man in the *Stemming*, recurringly rereading the story of Abraham with increasing enthusiasm. We shall pay that old man a visit in a forthcoming section, so for now we will let him be. My suggestion here is that there is a difference between restarting a story over and over again in a compulsive corkscrew movement and retelling a story that is opened by an abyss of *Angest* from which one, in a certain way, may never proceed.⁶⁸ Or, to put it otherwise: a main wager of this study is the suggestion of a difference – however minimal – between 1) a pulsing rift that keeps reopening (in) the text, and 2) an ambiguous openness that interrupts the text *from-who-knows-where*. But here we are ahead of ourselves once more.

In this meditation on *Fear and Trembling* I will try to stay attentive to the question marks that break up – and break open – the writing of de silentio. It may be the printed punctuation marks, black on white, in the text, and it may be the less evident ones that linger in the air following a tension, openness, or contradiction in the book. Johannes de silentio may be a jester but not a fraud, a joker, but his wit is heavy with concern, and we will follow his tortuous lead, not rushing toward the end, trying to stay *paa Spidsen*,⁶⁹ letting the story of his stay open for as long as possible.

⁶⁸ "Naar da den prøvede Olding nærmede sig sit Endeligt, havde stridt den gode Strid og bevaret Troen, da var hans Hjerter ungt nok til ikke at have glemte hiin Angst og Bævelse, der tugtede Ynglingen, som Manden vel beherskede, *men som intet Menneske ganske vokser fra* – uden forsaavidt det skulde lykkes ved saa tidlig som muligt at gaae videre." SKS 4, 103, italics added/FT 7: "When the tried and tested oldster approached his end, had fought the good fight and kept the faith, his heart is still young enough not to have forgotten the anxiety and trembling that disciplined the youth, that the adult learned to control, but that no man outgrows – except to the extent that he succeeds in going further."

⁶⁹ FT 62/SKS 4, 155; FT 37/SKS 132: "Paa denne Spidse staaer Abraham."

A READING OF FEAR AND TREMBLING – PART ONE

A thread of heroes

I begin my reading with a tragic hero, a figure that may not seem to have any direct link to the main question of this study, namely: how does the word God come about in a (con)text. The tragic hero, Agamemnon, will be traced for a while in order to explore a *difference* between the father of a daughter (Iphigenia) to be sacrificed and the father of a son (Isaac) to be sacrificed. The latter, namely Abraham, will be the male lead in this part, and the story of *his* life has a lot to do with the *word in question* of this study. Indeed, a vital point of my reading is that the storyline of Abraham (as told by de silentio) hinges on the coming about of this word. *Fear and Trembling* can be said to (re-)consider the issues, the dread, and the wonder that are opened by the coming about of the word God. This is, however, a point that is made *along the way* of my reading which will *close in* on the word God only in the final section of the part ('A word hard to track down'). Hence, patience is called for. By way of association, I will get closer to an answer in relation to the word in question. Yet, my reading of *Fear and Trembling* is not all about the result (*Udfaldet*) but just as much about the exploration made *along* the way. I will take detours and follow movements that may seem to deviate from the main question, and the word God will not be present at every page to come. However, the themes and issues trailed on this indirect route will all be *about* that word.

Already off track, I shall return to the starting point, and repeat:

I begin my reading with a tragic hero.

A thread of heroes winds its way through *Fear and Trembling*. From the *heltemodigen* "Agamemnon, Jephtah, [and] Brutus" (FT 58/SKS 4, 152), to "our hero" the marked bridegroom in Delphi (FT 91/SKS 4, 179), to the somewhat flawed heroic act (*Heltedaa*d) of Queen Elisabeth (FT 93/SKS 4, 183), to the improbable-yet-

possible hero that is the merman⁷⁰, to the heroic courage (*Heltemod*) of Tobias (SKS 4, 192/103), to the (proper) heroic character, Sara (SKS 4, 193/104), and, finally, to Socrates the intellectual tragic hero (SKS 4, 204/117).

It is a thread that is consistently entwined with the main story of Abraham, and yet, strangely disparate. In a more direct manner, we are made aware of the difference between two main figures of the work, namely the tragic hero and the knight of faith. Thus, we are told that "even the most tried of tragic heroes dances along in comparison with the knight of faith, who only creeps along slowly."⁷¹ Furthermore, the tragic hero is "soon finished," but the knight of faith "is kept in a state of sleeplessness" (FT 78/SKS 4, 169). The tragic hero does not know of the "distress and anxiety" of facing a paradox (FT 113/SKS 4, 201), he is a stranger to "the dreadful responsibility of loneliness" (*Ensombedens forfærdelige Ansvar*) (FT 114/SKS 4, 202), and, contrary to Abraham, the tragic hero "comes to the end of the story" (FT 115/SKS 4, 203).

Though a mere accumulation of data rarely counts as a weighty argument in the Kierkegaardian line of thinking, the insistence on a theme or a particular word may express a sense that is worth investigating. In the following sections I will follow the thread of heroes in the hope that it will shed some light on the story of Abraham as it is told by de silentio.

The tragic hero

The figure of hero in *Fear and Trembling* is more than anything the *tragic* hero, a figure that de silentio finds and retells in a variety of genres, taking his departure from the Greek mythologies with Agamemnon, the King of Mycenae or Argos, and one of the main parts in Greek tragedies such as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the latter depicting the sacrificial drama that is (in

⁷⁰ FT 94/SKS 4, 185; "[In] my opinion a grandiose tragic hero," FT 97/SKS 4, 186: "[I] mine Tanker en grandios tragisk Helt."

⁷¹ FT, 77/SKS 4, 168: "[S]elv den mest forsøgte tragiske Helt han gaaer som i en Dands i Sammenligning med Troens Ridder, der kun kommer langsomt og krybende frem."

passing) taken up in *Fear and Trembling*.⁷² To de silentio, the Greek tragedies are blind (SKS 4, 174/FT 84), bound as they are by a fatal fate, “in which the dramatic action vanishes and in which it has its dark, mysterious source.”⁷³ To Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum, both exploring the ethical sense of Greek literature,⁷⁴ fate may be blind, but the *figures* of the Greek tragedies are far from being still marble statues.⁷⁵ While the fatality of the tragic heroes is often highlighted, Williams and Nussbaum find a richness of *re-actions* to the situations which these tormented figures encounter: “the characters are displayed as having responsibilities, or pride, or obsessions, or needs, on a scale which lays them open to disaster in corresponding measure, and [...] they encounter those disasters in full consciousness.”⁷⁶ It can still be said that the characters of the Greek tragedies “are subject to the coercive force of destiny, like Sophocles, Oedipus and Euripides’ Iphigenia, oblivious with regard to the real significance of their deeds,”⁷⁷ the ‘hidden significance’ of their deeds adding to the tragedy, yet, it can also be argued that the tragic heroes are not *altogether* blind subjects to the “coercive force of destiny.” Some – and, indeed, crucial – information is withheld from their sight, but they remain responsive (if not always responsible) agents, open to guilt and blame, a vulnerability that is closely linked to their capability of commitment (as suggested by Nussbaum). Though their destiny seems determined, they meet (their) fate with open eyes and a wide range of emotions.

⁷² The Greek tragedy referred to in *Fear and Trembling*, SKS 4, 176: “Jeg vil et Øieblik betragte Euripides’s Iphigenia i Aulis.” Irina 2010, 238: “Kierkegaard had either read or was going to read Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* as Scopetea argues, however, even if he did in fact read it, he did not consistently refer to it [...]”. My references to Agamemnon will henceforth be guided by Euripides’ depiction in *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

⁷³ FT 84/SKS 4, 174: “[I] hvilket den dramatiske Handling forsvinder, hvorfra den har sit dunkle gaadefulde Udspring.”

⁷⁴ The depiction of human emotions in the Greek tragedies is at the heart of Martha Nussbaum’s *The Fragility of Goodness* (2001), while Bernard Williams has explored the ethical insights of the ancient Greek literature and philosophy – and its relevance to modern time – in several works, among them Williams 1985 and Williams 1993. Though the main points of both thinkers differ significantly from the works of Kierkegaard and Levinas, it is of concern to this inquiry, I believe, that the above-mentioned studies find the literary intuitions of human life – be it of a bygone world – to disrupt what I will call ‘the order of ethics’.

⁷⁵ A resemblance between the “effect” of a tragic play and a sightless sculpture is suggested by de silentio, FT 84/SKS 4, 174.

⁷⁶ Williams 1993. Citing from Nussbaum 2001, 18.

⁷⁷ Irina 2010, 241.

Martha Nussbaum finds in the reading of literary works a richness and a complexity of human (emotional) life that challenges an ethical understanding ruled by abstract intellectuality.⁷⁸ Somehow, following Nussbaum, the intellectual accounts of ethics tends to vacate the earthy grounds it was meant to guard, leaving behind the soiled and messy life to rule in a theoretical sphere somewhat detached from, or at the least lifted above, the turbulent life of senses.⁷⁹ Though this separation of intellect and senses is itself a theoretical one, and the scheme a simplification of the project of Nussbaum, I find in her attention to the involved life that disturbs the orderliness of ‘intellectual ethics’, a point not far from some intuitions of *de silentio*.⁸⁰ An insight from *Fragility of Goodness* (1986/2001) is that ethics⁸¹ may instruct life, but life also teaches ethics.

The project of Nussbaum, though, remains a thoroughly rational project, letting (what could be called) the cognitive information of emotions instruct ethical thinking. Ethical understanding is being taught some valuable lessons from emotions as depicted in literary forms but this is in order to enlighten and sharpen understanding. Ethical understanding is, to use an expression from the opening section of this part, stirred but not shaken; it is, rather, improved.

A point, however, that might be lost in reading *The Fragility of Goodness* – and its persistent belief in ethical understanding to find (still better) ways for human flourishing – is that the concern regarding the relation between ethical thinking and the messiness of life may not be one of degree. Perhaps the (main) concern is not whether an ethical thinking is more or less ‘intellectual’, nor whether the insights of, say, Aristotle comes closer to the pulsating life of senses and emotion

⁷⁸ Nussbaum 2001.

⁷⁹ In her critical stance towards ‘intellectual accounts’ of ethical understanding, Nussbaum finds in Plato a philosopher who develops “a view of ethical understanding that separates intellect as much as possible from the disturbing influences of sense and emotion.” Nussbaum 2001, xv.

⁸⁰ In *Fear and Trembling* we are also met with a complexity of life that cannot quite be encapsulated into the order of ethics. There is a sense to human existence that is *incommensurable* (SKS 4, 149; 161; 173) to orders of any kind, to totalities such as ethics as the *Al-mene* as well as programs such as philosophical systems. On “totalities such as ethics as the *Al-mene*”: ”Det Ethiske er som saadant det Almene, og som det Almene Det, der er gjeldende for Enhver, hvilket fra en anden Side lader sig udtrykke saaledes, at det er gjeldende i ethvert Øieblik. Det hviler immanent i sig selv, har Intet uden for sig, der er dets *τελος*, men er selv *τελος* for Alt, hvad det har udenfor sig, og naar det Ethiske har optaget dette i sig, da kommer det ikke videre.” SKS 4, 148.

⁸¹ Ethics – as a field of philosophy – is in this study considered a project of thinking, regardless of the differences of schools, traditions, or branches that make up the wide-ranging field of ethics.

than the ideas of Plato, in short, maybe the matter in question is not the degree of distance or level of abstraction, but the very difference, that is, the difference and relation between thinking (the mode of ethics) and existence (or, existing). I do not wish to isolate ethics from life as if ethical thinking were a department separate from existence; ethics (understood as a discipline of philosophy) may not only concern itself with matters and situations of life, it is – precisely as thinking – a vital part of life. Yet, however enmeshed it is in the world, however deeply involved in the matters and messiness of existence, it remains thinking nevertheless. This relational difference – between thinking and existence – is one of incommensurability and yet also one of inescapability. A problematic relation that also had the attention of Kierkegaard.

Both Williams and Nussbaum read forth an involved drama of otherwise ‘thin’ stories, not unlike the manoeuvre of de silentio with regard to the Abraham narrative, a story that in its scriptural form is as short on explanations as it is of length.⁸² All three of them, Williams, Nussbaum, and de silentio, find in literary storylines a sense that relates to life beyond the written accounts, as does Gredal Jensen in his essay on the Greek tragedies in relation to Kierkegaard: “The tragic concerns something *fundamentally existential*: that human beings through suffering should relate to what it means to be human, or as the words of the Delphi say, “Know thyself,” that is, know one’s natural place in the world order.”⁸³ The significations and traditions of the Greek tragedies are multiple and complex, and my short detour in the footsteps of the tragic hero is, if anything, a simplification and no elucidation of that dramatic genre. I shall extract only a few points – leaning on the insights of Williams and Nussbaum - that are announced in the above quotation of Gredal Jensen: The Greek tragedy lays bare an *existential*

⁸² In a comparative reading of the Homeric poem *Odysseus* and the Old Testament rendering of the Abraham and Isaac narrative, Erich Auerbach regards the opaqueness of the biblical story to add a depth dimension that the externalized plot of *Odysseus* falls short of. The lack of elucidation, parts left obscure and motives unexpressed in the biblical story call(s) for interpretation, whereas the narrative of *Odysseus* is unfolded in the “foreground,” everything illuminated. The Abraham story is, according to Auerbach, more complex in the sense of “multi-layered.” From the first essay, “Odysseus’ Scar,” of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, a classic in literary theory.

⁸³ Jensen 2010, 219, italics added.

situation of human life that the spectator or reader or listener relates to in *sympathy*, and thus, suffering with the characters, learns something essential about his or hers “place in the world order.”

An existential situation (a rather anachronistic term in relation to the Greek tragedies that I shall nevertheless hold on to) depicted in a play such as Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* is the “tragic situation” of a King and a father who is confronted with a (moral) conflict where there is no way of escaping culpability, one way or the other, and yet, a decision is to be made. A situation like this is, following Nussbaum, an essential part of human life, not (only) because human beings seem to be hit by tragic conflicts in life, but (also) because commitments are a vital part of being human. Commitments are what make human beings vulnerable to the sort of moral conflicts that make a situation like that of Agamemnon tragic,⁸⁴ that is, without the commitments to both the daughter and to the role as a king, there would be no drama or struggle. Or, put otherwise, in the case of Agamemnon, his commitment to a people and his commitment as a father clash fatally. Reading the Greek tragedies, we are presented with a life of complicated conflicts, intense passions, and heartfelt despair; an *emotional complexity* that may be lost in *intellectual accounts* of ethical problems.⁸⁵

I have – borrowing an expression of Williams – stated that the tragic hero meets the disastrous situation “in full consciousness.” However, a decisive facet of Greek tragedies is the necessity of fate, and a classic scheme of the dramatic plot is to withhold crucial – and crushing – information from the characters, who then act “oblivious with regard to the real significance of their deeds.” A possible contradiction seems to arise here between ‘meeting situations in full consciousness’ and ‘being oblivious’. Yet, perhaps we should not – here as elsewhere – abide by the rule of a simple either/or as it, for example, is presented in a question such as: Is the tragic hero subject to a “coercive force of destiny” *or* is he a capable agent? The suggestion of this study is that Agamemnon, the tragic

⁸⁴ Nussbaum 2001, 25.

⁸⁵ To the Nussbaum of *Fragility of Goodness*, Aristotle would be linked to what we have called “emotional complexity,” while Plato would represent the “intellectual accounts of ethical problems.” I shall not in this study discuss this suggested distinction between *existential complexity* and *intellectual accounts*.

hero we are here engaged with, remains a conscious agent (even) in the dire trajectory of his destiny. To repeat, the significations and traditions of Greek tragedies are many and complex. I am not offering an analysis of the genre nor of a specific play. The hope is that this detour in the steps of Agamemnon will highlight a difference between the tragic hero and Abraham, a distinction (already) proposed by de silentio. To this study, Agamemnon does not (re)act in blind obedience to the commands of the gods,⁸⁶ nor is he swept along as a helpless victim of fate. The demand of sacrificing Iphigenia throws him into a crisis of anguish, lament, self-pity, and second thoughts – the messy distress of a committed life – and yet, throughout the suffering, he is hatching up cunning plans, arguing his case, regretting his plotting, and (perhaps) executing his grim task.⁸⁷ He is, I suggest, going through a *process of rationalizing* that is neither resolute nor courageous, but still makes him declare: “For it is right and holy [*themis*] that I should desire with exceedingly impassioned passion (*orgai periorgōs epithumein*) the sacrifice staying the winds, the maiden’s blood. May all turn out well (214-17).”⁸⁸ Plunged into a tragic situation, he does not drown, but clings on to reasoning in order to find his decision to be justified after all.⁸⁹ Even though “both courses involve him in guilt,”⁹⁰ he still claims one course to be “right,” and, to quote Nussbaum once more: “Indeed, it is hard to imagine that Agamemnon could *rationally* have chosen any other way.”⁹¹ Since Agamemnon could not, *reasonably*, have done otherwise, his actions are *justifiable* in the sense of being *understandable*.

By making his actions rationally accessible, he is somewhat exonerated. Arguing and pleading with his fellow characters (and the spectator/reader), Agamemnon makes his case: he is no heartless madman taking joy in human sacrifices, he is only a (suffering) human being put in a dreadful position, making

⁸⁶ In the case under consideration, that is, the Agamemnon of Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the command would be the condition required by Artemis.

⁸⁷ Euripides lets the story end in an open equivocality: Clytemnestra is told by a messenger that, at the very moment of the execution of the sacrifice, Iphigenia mysteriously disappears (353). From Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis, Ten Plays*, trans. M. Hadas and J. McLean, NY: Bantam, 1981.

⁸⁸ Cited from Nussbaum, 2001, 35.

⁸⁹ He also (defensively) explains to Iphigenia and Clytemnestra that if he refrains from slaying Iphigenia, the whole family will be murdered (345). From Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis, Ten Plays*, trans. M. Hadas and J. McLean, NY: Bantam, 1981, 313-354.

⁹⁰ Nussbaum, 2001, 34.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

up his mind on a course that he, “rationally,” could not have chosen “any other way.” Along with the vulnerability of human life – and, to speak with Nussbaum, the fragility of goodness and ‘life-flourishing’ – comes, I believe, a vision of human *capability* that underlies the condition of susceptibility.⁹² The title character of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* is caught up in a no less tragic (even if morally less problematic) situation than her father, the king, and yet, she also manages to conform to her fate. After turning things over (in her mind), she heroically consents to sacrifice herself,⁹³ convinced that she will be remembered with honour (348-349), and, in this way, she makes (a) sense of her unfortunate destiny. Both daughter and father give themselves and their surroundings reasons for their actions. Though caught up in a tragic situation and hit by fatal disaster, they still take great effort in vindicating their undertakings.

To push my interpretation even further, I will suggest that the *process of rationalizing* could be read as significant in relation to the words of the Delphi (as it was deciphered by Gredal Jensen): “Know thyself; that is, know one’s natural place in the world order.” In a world where, perceived from a point of reverse anachronism, the wills and desires of the gods seem rather foolish, or, as messy as those of humans, and where calamity can strike at any moment, and where the order of the world is thus challenged, it can be said that it is through *human reasoning* – that of the hero and of the storyteller – that one (the characters, the spectator/reader, and the storyteller) is coming to terms with the uncertainty and tumult of life, and, *thus*, re-instating order (though seldom peace) in the world. Stated differently: it is through a process of rationalizing (Know thyself!) that one finds one’s place in the world *order*. Words from Delphi are rarely unambiguous.

But here, finding ourselves at the gates of Delphi, have I strayed too far? Have I lost sight of our main figure while considering a drama of a bygone time? I will answer in the words of de silentio:

⁹² This suggestion is faithfully in line, I believe, with the argumentation of Nussbaum 2001.

⁹³ FT 115/SKS 4, 203: ”Iphigenia bøier sig under Faderens Beslutning, hun gjør selv Resignationens uendelige Bevægelse og de ere nu i Forstaaelse med hinanden. Hun kan forstaae Agamemnon, fordi hans Foretagende udtrykker det Almene.”

But now to Abraham – how did he act? For I have not forgotten, and the reader will please remember, that I got involved in the previous discussion to make that subject an obstacle, not as if Abraham could thereby become more comprehensible, but in order that the incomprehensibility could become more salient, for, as I said before, I cannot understand Abraham – I can only admire him.⁹⁴

Enters Abraham

The detour into the turmoil of a Greek tragedy was made to explore the distinction(s) between a tragic hero and Abraham. By drawing a profile of Agamemnon as a conscious and rationalizing agent, my hope was to highlight a dimension of his standing as a tragic hero that is not limited to the act of slaughtering Iphigenia but allows for the complexity of his situation, and *the way he handles it*, to stand out. Now taking de silentio's Abraham into account, I will go on to investigate the gap separating a tragic hero and a father of faith. Put shortly, this part of the reading is a comparative meditation on different ways of facing a tragic situation, a main point being to find out why, as stated by de silentio, Abraham is in no need of tears or admiration.⁹⁵ Bearing the odd comments from the above quotation in mind, this study may not lead to a “more understandable” Abraham, but will – following de silentio – attempt to keep “*Uforstaaeligheden*” as salient (*desultorisk*) as possible, in the sense of interruptive and shaky. So now: enters Abraham.

As the main figure – and main problem – of *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham is introduced at the very first page and invoked at the very last page of the central⁹⁶ body of the book. In alignment with the tradition of the monotheistic religions,

⁹⁴ FT, 112/SKS 4, 200: ”Men nu Abraham, hvorledes handlede han? thi jeg har ikke glemt, og Læseren vil nu maaske behage at erindre, at det var for at støde an derpaa, jeg indlod mig i hele den foregaaende Undersøgelse, ikke som om Abraham derved blev mere forstaaelig, men for at Uforstaaeligheden kunde blive mere desultorisk; thi, som sagt, Abraham kan jeg ikke forstaae, ham kan jeg kun beundre.”

⁹⁵ FT 120. Quoting here from the last page of the main body of *Fear and Trembling*, the ‘Problemas’: ”[Abraham] behøver ikke Taarer, ikke Beundring.” SKS 4, 207.

⁹⁶ ‘Central’ here signifying the in-between part of *Fear and Trembling*, enclosed by a *Forord* and an *Epilog*.

Johannes de silentio terms Abraham to be a father of faith,⁹⁷ one of the principal figures of the religious narratives, and, in the *Eulogy on Abraham*, superlatives are even brought into play: “There was one who was great by virtue of his power, and one who was great by the virtue of his wisdom, and one who was great by virtue of his hope, and one who was great by the virtue of his love, but Abraham was the greatest of all [...]” (FT 16/SKS 4, 113). And, yet: Abraham is no hero!⁹⁸ Though Abraham is in a no less tragic situation⁹⁹ than Agamemnon, de silentio suggests that the tragic heroes are *relatable* in a different way than the father of faith:

When in the crucial moment Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus heroically have overcome the agony, heroically have lost the beloved, and only have to complete the task externally, there will never be a noble soul in the world without tears of compassion for their agony, of admiration for their deed.¹⁰⁰

Our relating to the tragic heroes is (according to de silentio) one of *sym-pathy*. We empathize and suffer *with* Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus, shedding tears “for their agony,” admiring them in their anguish and sacrifices, whereas our relation to Abraham is born out of fear and trembling.¹⁰¹ The latter has no (accessible) reasons for his acts: “It is not to save a nation, nor to uphold the idea of the state that Abraham does it; it is not to appease the angry gods” (FT 59/SKS 4, 153). Contrary to Agamemnon who made his actions reasonable, Abraham cannot account for his decision. He is unable to justify his actions¹⁰² to Isaac or Sarah or

⁹⁷ SKS 4, 119; 149; 159; 161; 205.

⁹⁸ Such is also the case of Maria: ”Hun behøver ingen verdslig Beundring, ligesaa lidet som Abraham behøver Taarer, thi hun var ikke Heltinde, og han ikke Helt, men begge bleve de ingenlunde større end disse, ved at være fritagne for Nøden og Qvalen og Paradoxet, men bleve det ved disse.” SKS 4, 158/ FT 65.

⁹⁹ As it is also suggested by Lippitt, 2003, 145 ff.

¹⁰⁰ FT 58/SKS 4, 152: “Naar Agamemnon, Jephthah, Brutus i det afgjørende Øieblik heltemodigen overvinder Smerten, heltemodigen har tabt det Elskede og blot skal fuldkomne Gjærningen i det Ydre, da skal der aldrig være en adelig Sjæl i Verden, uden at han har Medlidenhedens Taarer for deres Smerte, Beundringen for deres Daad.”

¹⁰¹ FT 61/SKS 4, 154: “Abraham kan man ikke græde over. Man nærmer sig ham med en horror religiosus, som Israel nærmede sig Sinai-Bjerget”.

¹⁰² I am not arguing whether or not the actions of Abraham can be justified; I am, however, suggesting that the Abraham of *Fear and Trembling* cannot justify (in the sense of *prove*) his course to be reasonable or right.

Elieser or himself because his undertaking (and life) turns on a paradox that somehow is beyond the realm of reason and the grace of *Medlidenhedens Taarer*.

We cannot suffer *with* (*med-lide*) Abraham because we cannot follow him, that is, we cannot *understand* him. He offers us no accessible reasons and whereas Agamemnon could be said to go through a process of rationalizing, making sense of his situation, the journey of Abraham (as depicted by de silentio¹⁰³) is one of increasing absurdity. From his taking leave of the “land of his fathers” to the moment of horror when he is told to sacrifice his beloved son, Abraham’s course is unreasonable (*urimelig*) through and through:

It takes him [Abraham] seventy years to get what others get in a hurry and enjoy for a long time. Why? Because he is being tested and tempted [*fristes*]. Is it not madness! [...] That Roman commander widely known by his nickname Cunctator stopped the enemy by his delaying tactics – in comparison with him, what a procrastinator Abraham is – but he does not save the state. This is the content of 130 years. Who can endure It? Would not his contemporaries [...] have said, ‘What an everlasting procrastination this is; Abraham finally received a son, it took him long enough, and now he wants to sacrifice him – is he not mad? If he at least could explain why he wants to do it, but always it is always an ordeal [*Prøvelse*]. Nor could Abraham explain further [...].’¹⁰⁴

In the eyes of contemporaries, “if such may be assumed,”¹⁰⁵ Abraham would fall outside of understanding and sympathy, unable as he is to explain himself. This is the burden of a man¹⁰⁶ of faith: “the dreadful responsibility of loneliness” (SKS 4, 202/FT 114), having to deal not only with the decision but also the sort of isolation that he is caught up in. Note, however, that a doorway is somewhat opened (in the above quotation) for Abraham to save himself from being regarded

¹⁰³ In the *Eulogy on Abraham*, FT 15-23/”*Lovtale over Abraham*,” SKS 4, 112-119.

¹⁰⁴ FT 77/ SKS 4, 168: “[Abraham] bruger 70 Aar for at faae en Alderdoms Søn. Hvad Andre faae hurtigt nok og længe have Glæde af, det bruger han 70 Aar til; og hvorfor? fordi han prøves og fristes. Er det ikke Afsindighed? [...] Hiin romerske Feldtherre, der er berømt ved sit Tilnavn Cunctator, han standsede Fjenden ved sin Nølen – men hvad er dog Abraham ikke for en Nøler i Sammenligning med ham – men han frelser ikke Staten. Dette er Indholdet af 130 Aar. Hvo kan holde det ud, skulde ikke hans Samtid [...] sige: “det er en evig Nølen med Abraham, endelig fik han en Søn, det varede længe nok, saa vil han offre ham – er han ikke sindssvag? Og kunde han endda forklare, hvorfor han vil det, men altid er det en Prøvelse.” Mere kunde Abraham heller ikke forklare [...].”

¹⁰⁵ FT 77/SKS 4, 168: “hvis der kunde være Tale om en saadan [...].”

¹⁰⁶ Or woman, youngster, and, perhaps, even a child.

a horrendous madman altogether; not by refraining from the sacrifice of Isaac, but by offering an accessible account of his seemingly nonsensical life. If only he could *explain* his actions, but “it is always an ordeal,” or, so he (Abraham) claims. We find, I believe, in *Fear and Trembling* a subtle critique of the *rational(izing) order* of ethics that Euripides’ Agamemnon pleaded with or for. From the point of view of what we could call *Almenheden*, the tragic hero can be justified since his actions are (made) reasonable even if those actions include the slaughtering of a son or a daughter.¹⁰⁷ This point of view would not be blind to the dread and anguish of a father having to sacrifice his child in order to save a people, but it would nevertheless grant him a mitigation of the deed since he could not, *rationally* considered, have done otherwise. He had to do what he had to do, *Almenheden* gathers. Although a horrific act had to be committed, he did *on the whole* chose the better solution. Moreover, he did it for the common good, ethics¹⁰⁸ might add approvingly even if slightly concerned, and while Agamemnon may be tragic, even culpable, and far from flawless, he is still the hero with whom we may¹⁰⁹ sympathise: “The person who denies himself and sacrifices himself because of duty gives up the finite in order to grasp the infinite and is adequately assured; the tragic hero gives up the certain for the even more certain, and the observer’s eye view him with confidence [hviler trygt paa ham].”¹¹⁰ In short, the tragic hero is safe, whereas Abraham is not:

¹⁰⁷ FB 77: ”He [Abraham] knew that it is glorious to express the universal, glorious to live with Isaac. But this is not the task. He knew that it is kingly to sacrifice a son like this to the universal; he himself would have found rest therein, and everybody would have rested approvingly in his deed, as the vowel rests in its quiescent letter. But that is not the task – he is being tested.”/SKS 4, 168: ”[Abraham] vidste, det er herligt at udtrykke det Almene, herligt at leve med Isaak. Men det er ikke Opgaven. Han faaer Isaak – da skal han atter prøves. Han vidste, det er kongeligt at offre en saadan Søn for det Almene, han selv skulde have fundet Hvile deri, og Alle skulde have hvilet berømmende i hans Daad, som Vokalen hviler i sit Hvilebogstav; men det er ikke Opgaven – han prøves.”

¹⁰⁸ Though ‘ethics’ rarely speaks in one voice, the multiple schools and/or traditions of ethics in Western philosophy considered.

¹⁰⁹ The point here being that we *can* sympathise with Agamemnon, that such a connection is available, despite or perhaps because of his very human features and limitations. That is not to say that we should or ought to sympathise with him, however.

¹¹⁰ FT 60/SKS 4, 153-154: “Den, der fornægter sig selv og opoffer sig for Pligten, han opgiver det Endelige for at gribe det Uendelige, han er sikker nok; den Tragiske Helt opgiver det Visse for the endnu Vissere, og Betragterens Øie hviler trygt paa ham.”

But the person who gives up the universal in order to grasp something even higher that is not universal – what does he do ? Is it possible that this can be anything other than a spiritual trial ? And if it is possible, but the individual makes a mistake, *what salvation is there for him ?*

[...] The observer cannot understand him at all; neither can his eye rest upon him with confidence.

Perhaps the believer's intention cannot be carried out at all, because it is inconceivable. Or if it could be done but the individual has misunderstood the deity – *what salvation would there be for him ?*¹¹¹

Abraham does not give up (*opgiver*) the "certain for the even more certain." On the contrary, he gives up on the *Visse* (what he is given) for the thoroughly *Uvisse* (what is inconceivable). He can give no reasons for his actions, he has no grounds for his decisions, and he is given no guarantees for the calling. Even if the inconceivable (*det Utænkelige*) was possible – it might all be a terrible mistake ("*hvis den Enkelte havde misforstaaet Guddommen*"). He could have misheard the command; it could be a mad delusion of his mind. The multiple question marks of the above quotation leave us with an eerie openness that *de silentio* carefully refrains from shutting off. Abraham is left hanging in the air, kept *paa Spidsen* (SKS 4, 155/FT 62): "This is the paradox by which he remains at the apex," over an *Afgrund* (SKS 4, 154/FT 61). Otherwise we might comfortably follow Abraham in sympathy and ease, it is suggested, and let him wander towards Mount Moriah, knowing that it is the right decision, *all things considered*, not least the happy ending. Yet, the point of *de silentio* is that the sense of Abraham opens in *Uforstaaeligheden*. To repeat, the tragic hero is safe, whereas Abraham is not.

¹¹¹ FT 60-61, italics added; SKS 4, 154: "Men den, der opgiver det Almene for at gribe noget endnu Høiere, der ikke er det Almene, hvad gjør han? Er det muligt, at dette kan være andet end en Anfægtelse? Og hvis det er muligt, men den Enkelte da greb feil, *hvad Frelse er der for ham?* [...] Ham kan Betragteren slet ikke forstaae, ei heller trygt lade sit Øie hvile paa ham. Maaske lader det sig slet ikke gjøre, hvad den Troende intenderer, da det jo er utænkeligt. Eller om det lod sig gjøre, hvis den Enkelte havde misforstaaet Guddommen, *hvad Frelse var da for ham?*"

To hinge on a paradox

We are now closer to the issue in matter (of this section), namely the difference between the tragic hero and the father of faith, which is also an inquiry into why Abraham is no hero, and why he is in no need of tears or admiration (SKS 4, 207/FT 120). We can cry for and with Agamemnon insofar as we can follow his pain and suffering, his act and reason(ing)s. He is "adequately assured", "the observer's eye views him with confidence,"¹¹² and the plotline leads both him and the observer through sorrow and tears towards an end of relief¹¹³ and closure,¹¹⁴ towards a finale of *catharsis*. Abraham, on the other hand, we cannot follow, "[the] observer cannot understand him at all; neither can his eye rest upon him with confidence" (SKS 4, 154/ FT 60-61); rather, the eye widens in horror. Abraham is far more audacious in his commitment and far more unwavering in his venture than the self-pitying and vacillating Agamemnon of Euripides, but this only adds to the disturbing story, making it a misled aberration (FT 61/SKS 4, 154) to cry with Abraham in sympathy, or, for that matter, out of sentimental admiration. The tragic hero is (somewhat) justified because he stays "within the ethical."¹¹⁵ After all, ethically we can follow him because he still confirms the order of ethics. Thus, the hero of the ancient play returns from the tragic situation – even if a bit scarred and slightly stained – into the welcoming arms of ethics. Abraham also returns home from the land of Moriah but to a life of radical uncertainty. Leaving the grounds of reason and ethics,¹¹⁶ there is no safety to cling on to, no system of principles to find ease in. This, I believe, is the profound sense of the dreadful responsibility of loneliness ("Eensombedens forfærdelige Ansvar," SKS 4, 202/FT 114), the solitary

¹¹² FT 60/SKS 4, 154: "Betragterens Øie hviler trygt paa ham."

¹¹³ FT 115/SKS 4, 203: "Den tragiske Helt han faaer dog Ende paa Historien. Iphigenia bøier sig under Faderens Beslutning, hun gjør selv Resignationens uendelige Bevægelse og de ere nu i Forstaaelse med hinanden. Hun kan forstaae Agamemnon, fordi hans Foretagende udtrykker det Almene."

¹¹⁴ As already referred, Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* remains a work that causes discussion among scholars for its disputable ending and the unclear if not downright dubious motivations of the main figures, not least of Agamemnon. Our brief involvement in this section with the play of Euripides underlines the complexity of the drama (though we are far from unfolding it), and attempts to highlight the process of reasoning, that is, the efforts made by the characters to explain, convince, and justify themselves and the others, that in more than one sense take place in the plotline.

¹¹⁵ FT 59/SKS 4, 152: "Forskjellen mellem den tragiske Helt og Abraham er let iøinefaldende. Den tragiske Helt bliver indenfor det Ethiske."

¹¹⁶ The *grounds* of ethics, but perhaps not the question(s) of ethics.

undertaking not only of taking on responsibility for your decisions on your own, that is, as “*hinn Enkelte*” as a repeated formula in the Kierkegaardian works and reception might state it, but (also) to face a thorough *openness* that un-settles or destabilizes every decision made. It is not that Abraham does not *want* to give any reasons for his deed; it is that Abraham *cannot* give any reasons. There is no *ground* upon which Abraham can build his defence. His acts – his life or the sense of his life – hinge on a paradox.

Composed understanding

Though *Fear and Trembling* may not be easily accessible, it is, nonetheless, still understandable. Johannes de silentio keeps a dialectical, or perhaps ambiguous, motion at play in *Fear and Trembling* when it comes to the word ‘understanding’ (*Forstaaelse*). The inventive, sharp-witted, and well-read (pseudonymous) author insists that he cannot understand Abraham while he nevertheless lets a distinct understanding of Abraham come into words. To claim that one has understood or comprehended¹¹⁷ Abraham is, according to de silentio, to say that one has not understood the sense of Abraham. To say that one cannot understand or comprehend Abraham is, according to de silentio, a testimony of one who has understood the sense of Abraham as far as understanding goes. It is not, I suggest, *simply so* that Abraham is outside of understanding even though the sense of his life is not available to thinking.¹¹⁸ In other, but no less complicating, words we may say that it is not so that understanding does *not at all* comprehend the life of Abraham, the point is that understanding does not comprehend the sense of his life *altogether*.¹¹⁹ Somehow, a sense seems ever to escape the grasp of comprehension; understanding cannot wholly get a hold on Abraham since the sense of his life is *beyond* thinking even if not *outside* of thinking. There is a sort of openness – or an

¹¹⁷ In this paragraph, 1) the verb/noun ‘understanding’ is employed as a broad term for understanding, open to connotations such as intuition, feeling, and sympathy, (2) the verb/noun ‘comprehend/comprehension’ is more narrowly linked with its etymological sense of ‘grasping (al)together’, and 3) the verb/noun ‘thinking’ is applied in relation to a rational or reasoning mind.

¹¹⁸ “Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off.” FT 82/SKS 4, 147: “[...] fordi Troen netop begynder der, hvor Tænkningen hører op.”

¹¹⁹ A point that goes well with the verb *comprehend* in its Latin origin (*com-* ‘together + *prehendere* ‘grasp’).

abyss – *in* thinking that does not abide by the rule of thinking. My hope here is to accentuate the complex play of understandings of (the term) understanding¹²⁰ that de silentio cleverly constructs in *Fear and Trembling*, almost a plot in the plot, an intrigue of its own. Far from a simple and set dichotomy¹²¹ between understanding and the sense of a paradox, those two terms are somewhat entangled and yet separate, causing misunderstandings; a form of mis-taking that precisely reflects a possible case of understanding *and yet* not understanding. My suggestion, to frame it in a simplifying sentence, is that understanding and the sense of a paradox do not stand on each side of a fissure, rather, the sense of a paradox (that is, in *Fear and Trembling*) comes about in or perhaps as a breach or abyss *in* understanding.¹²²

When de silentio claims that he cannot understand Abraham, he is indeed still writing from the position of understanding. It is not a defeated understanding speaking, but a poised understanding capable of self-critique that lets the reader understand that the sense of Abraham (and the sense of a paradox) is beyond reason, a courteous gesture of a composed comprehension that understands what it does not understand. It cannot reach the sense or get hold of whatever escapes it; it can only point towards it, that is, towards the abyss or openness that in all senses of the words is *out of place*. Never quite *there*, a happening rather than a position, the suggested sense beyond understanding (*Tænking*) is, nevertheless, not quite outside of understanding either. I shall return to this thread of ‘understanding’ in Part two in the subsection ‘The versality of a homonym: the historical’.

In relation to the question of understanding, the study will (as promised) pay an old man – and a possible *mis*understanding – a visit. But, before we stop by the old man overcome with admiration, some supplementary remarks on Abraham and

¹²⁰ On this subject, see Grøn 2010.

¹²¹ The point here is not to associate “simple” and “dichotomy,” but – once again – to call attention to the complexity of *Fear and Trembling*, to point out that it seldom is “simply so” with regard to the works investigated in this study.

¹²² This ambiguous relation – suggesting a sense beyond or otherwise than thinking – is also at play in this teasing sentence: SKS 4, 207: ”Det viser sig da atter her, at man vel kan forstaae Abraham, men kun forstaae ham saaledes, som man forstaaer Paradoxet.”/FT 119: “Here again it is apparent that one perhaps can understand Abraham, but only in the way one understands the paradox.”

the dreadful responsibility of loneliness (*Eensomhedens forfærdelige Ansvar*, FT 114/SKS 4, 202) shall be made.

I left Abraham “in the air, kept in tension (*paa Spidsen*)” (FT 62/SKS 4, 155), over an *Afgrund* (FT 61/SKS 4, 154), stating that there is no safety for the one who departs from the grounds of ethics. I also indicated that a “subtle critique of the rational order of ethics” is to be found in *Fear and Trembling*. These are suggestions that we are going to explore for a while, finding ourselves once again on the verge of an abyss.

The dreadful responsibility of loneliness

Once again, we are taking a detour. Though we are on our way to visit the old man, a deviation will be made to comment on Abraham and the dreadful responsibility of loneliness (*Eensomhedens forfærdelige Ansvar*, FT 114/ SKS 4, 202). Perhaps detours and diversions are inescapable on a route so full of fissures. Returning to Abraham – whom I left in the air, in tension – I will return also to difference already hinted at, namely, the difference between Agamemnon and Abraham with regard to responsibility.

In the difference between Agamemnon and Abraham, between the tragic hero and the father of faith, *one* of them “finishes his task at a specific moment in time” (FT 61/SKS 4, 154) and is “soon finished, [...] his struggles are soon over” (FT 78/SKS 4, 169) and the *other* is kept in tension;¹²³ *one* of them is safe (FT 76/SKS 4, 167) and the *other* caught up in “the anxiety, the distress, the paradox” (FT 65; 66/SKS 4, 158); *one* of them stays “within the ethical” (FT 59)¹²⁴ and the *other* must bear a “dreadful responsibility” (FT 80; 114/SKS 4, 171; 202). In this difference, a strange suggestion appears. It seems that one can stay within the bounds of ethics without necessarily taking up the dreadful responsibility of loneliness. The slick manoeuvre of trading reasons of vindication for a position (still) within the ethical (FT 59/SKS 4, 152) while escaping the *dreadful* responsibility, or the dread of responsibility, is also remarked by Ian Duckles in

¹²³ SKS 4, 155: “paa Spidsen”; SKS 4, 170: “bestandig i Spænding”.

¹²⁴ SKS 4, 152: “Den tragiske Helt bliver endnu indenfor det Ethiske.”

Kierkegaard and Death: “But notice now, by providing a reason that is accessible to others, Agamemnon in an important sense can deny his own agency. He might be expected to say something like, “I didn’t want to sacrifice my daughter, but as a King of Greece I have a responsibility to my subjects that transcends my obligation as a father.”¹²⁵ In this rationale, Agamemnon can (in the sense: this argument can be made) reason away (some of) the blame of the *dreadful* part of his heroic offering – sacrificing also his fatherly attachments to the altar of a kingdom – arguing that a *lesser* duty must yield for a *superior* duty. This is Agamemnon saying: “I don’t make the rules,” and it connects to the evaluation scheme that de silentio ascribes to the tragic hero who “gives up the certain for the even more certain” (FT 60).¹²⁶ By putting forward an accessible reason – superior duty beats lesser duty – Agamemnon would then be abstracting a tragic and impossible choice into a rational necessity, yet, and this is my point, *without taking responsibility for the evaluation itself*. While the pipe-smoking contemplator (yet another figure in the diverse gallery of *Fear and Trembling*, FT 28/SKS 4, 124) glosses over the horror of the Abraham-narrative by neatly paraphrasing “the sacrificing of Isaac” to “the offering of ‘the best’ (*det Bedste*)”, and thus, muting the anxiety, the King-before-Father-pleading Agamemnon explains away his *own* decision, thus, covering up the culpability.

To take on the dreadful responsibility of loneliness (*Eensomhedens forfærdelige Ansvar*) in *Fear and Trembling* is a movement without reasons: there is a call, *perhaps*, although it might be a mishearing or a terrible mistake or just the delusion of an already sorely tried immigrant on alien land. In the case of Abraham, we are offered no sound causes or comforting justification. Nor is he. This is what an earlier formulation of this study expressed: it is not that Abraham does not *want* to give any reasons for his deeds; it is that Abraham *cannot* give any reasons. There is no *ground* upon which Abraham can build his defence. It is this ground-less openness – to be (or: to exist) without justification (*Berettigelse*) or admissible and well-founded reasons – that Abraham must take upon him(self). A profound point

¹²⁵ Duckles 2011, 221-222.

¹²⁶ SKS 4, 154: “opgiver det Visse for det endnu Vissere.”

in *Fear and Trembling*, I believe, is the accentuation of a difficult sort of responsibility – what I have called a dreadful responsibility or the dread of responsibility – that is written forth in *Fear and Trembling* even if not exactly written out. Not that this is an invention of de silentio. Already the ancient tragedies perceived this depth and weight of responsibility: the utterly grim position of Agamemnon is precisely that he is caught up in an impossible – a tragic – situation from which one cannot escape culpability. Yet it is this culpability that Agamemnon so desperately attempts to disclaim responsibility for, trying to rationalize his way out of the blame and into the more honourable, more admirable, path of the righteous. To be responsible, however, is always (also) to be culpable. Responsibility in this sense is not (only) to be answerable for the possible wrongs that may come with the decisions made, it is already to take on culpability, to take on the non-justice and lack of justification,¹²⁷ the lack of (a) ground. In this way, and that is the way I suggest in this study, Abraham can be blamed (already) for answering: “here I am,”¹²⁸ for taking on a task that he has no reasons for, no right to, no apology for, that may or may not be a delusion, that may even be but a perverted temptation. To answer: here I am – is to answer also for answering.

There is no ground – to be out of reasons

In the difference between Agamemnon and Abraham – a difference set up by de silentio – we found a possible gap between the position of “staying within the bounds of ethics” and the motion of “taking up a dreadful responsibility.” This is a gap in the sense of a break-in-continuity rather than a dichotomous divide: a relation-of-difference between ‘the ethical’ and ‘the dread of responsibility’. Investigating only a ‘possible gap’, the point here is not to set apart the field of ethics from the movement of responsibility, as though Agamemnon would be within the bounds of ethics and – so – without the weight of responsibility. Even if the trajectory of his life is determined by fate, he can (still) be said to be

¹²⁷ Here I am in line with the reading of *Fear and Trembling* and the Abraham narrative as it is put forward by Derrida in his work *Donner la mort*. I will return to this work in a later passage.

¹²⁸ FT 21/SKS 4, 117: ”Vi læse i hine hellige Skrifter: ’og Gud fristede Abraham, og sagde: Abraham, Abraham hvor er du? men Abraham svarede: her er jeg.’” In Gen 22:1: ”Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied.”

responsible for his decisions and deeds in the course of that life. My suggestion is *not* that ethics and responsibility are to be separated; on the contrary, I am exploring the complex *relation* of ethics and responsibility in a case, put forward by de silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, where one must take upon him- or herself a dreadful responsibility and – in so doing – not being (or being no longer) “within the ethical”: “The difference between the tragic hero and Abraham is very obvious. The tragic hero is still within the ethical (FT 59).” In other words, I am considering *another* kind of responsibility than that of Agamemnon, a way of responsibility that may not stay “within the ethical,” but in another sense might not be outside of the ethical either, that is, I am questioning a conception of the ethical that is without a certain kind of responsibility. I have – following the lead of de silentio – called this other sort of responsibility: the *dreadful* responsibility or the dread of responsibility.

To give a hint at what this divergence might signify, a proposal as to how this difference could be imagined will be ventured. It is by no means a normative description or an attempt at a conceptual definition; it is only a figure of speech to illustrate the sense of a possible gap. Now, when or if discussions, studies, considerations, or questionings of ethics bring about conceptions, ideas, notions, principles, or, theories,¹²⁹ these could be likened with different sets of compasses to navigate our way in the world. Maybe not covering the same sort of landscapes or made for the same sort of journeys, these *human set* compasses would be guidelines that reflect our ideas, beliefs and assessments of the world we inhabit and our ways in it. The point being that they *reflect* our ideas, beliefs and assessments of the world we inhabit as much as they may guide our ways in that world. Ethical thinking does not ground the world; rather, it explores life from different points of departure. Agamemnon, following this figure of speech, could then be said to reach out for a compass that evaluates the duty of a King (and the protection of many lives) to be above the duty of a father (and the life of one daughter). Following the direction of this compass of evaluation, he might think

¹²⁹ Conceptions, ideas, notions, principles, and/or theories that would not necessarily entail normative standards.

himself to stand on the firm ground of ethics. Yet, my suggestion was that ethical thinking does not ground the world; it explores it and in some sense also maps it. A chosen compass – as rational or logically consistent as the considerations that lead to its setting may be – is itself groundless in the sense that the ‘fundament’ of its setting is unstable: it finds itself on preconditions that are (ultimately) unfounded.¹³⁰ Put otherwise, the settings of an ethical compass draw on preconditions necessary for the setting; whether more or less logically stringent, the rationale of its guidelines must (already) assume its own premises. A compass is, in this way, without ground even if not without reason(s). Or, in short: there is no firm foundation of the ethical.

In this way of reading, the dreadful responsibility of Abraham is not particularly connected to a religious journey (nor is it isolated from such a venture), but rather, *de silentio* suggests a certain mode of responsibility that is inescapably involved with dread, culpability, and a thorough situation of being (already and insuperably) unwarranted and unjustified. My suggestion here is that a radical openness is an unconditioned and unconditional condition of responsibility as a part of human life. This goes against the point of view that is detectable in a quotation such as the following of Clare Carlisle: “Be this as it may, within *Fear and Trembling* Abraham is used to convey a message to nineteenth-century Christians about the difficulty of faith, and a warning against the tendency – formalized in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel – to assimilate the religious life into a merely-human ethical sphere.”¹³¹

To this study, Abraham may very well “convey a message” about the “difficulty of faith.” However, I find that this difficulty is related to an understanding of a *very-human-sphere* (otherwise than a “merely-human ethical sphere” as that suggested by Carlisle) where the uncertainty and culpability of a groundless responsibility must be taken up. The difficulty of faith answers to a complex situation of openness that calls for any sphere to question its own

¹³⁰ To put it in other words, here, those of Wittgenstein in his *On Certainty*, we may say that the framework principles of a given system of belief are – in the end – groundless: “Of course there is justification [*within* a system]; but justification comes to an end.” Anscombe 1969, paragraph 192, brackets added.

¹³¹ Carlisle 2010, 27-28.

(groundless) grounds. My point is by no means to separate the human life from the ethical or the religious (be it categories or spheres), but to propose that the paradoxical sense (that is the life) of Abraham conveys a message that may not be confined to apply exclusively to any so-called sphere, nor to a particular group of people such as the so-called “nineteenth-century Christians.” And so, the sort of responsibility that I am trailing is an unconditioned condition of the very-human-sphere in which the lives of both Abraham and Agamemnon unfold. A sort of responsibility that is somehow other-than-but-not-unrelated-to a mode of responsibility that is ‘within the ethical’, or for that sake, ‘within the religious’. The dreadful responsibility is in an a way *anterior* to ‘the ethical’, and, for that matter, ‘the religious’. It is a responsibility for responsibility (an answering for answering); yet, we may – as the Agamemnon of my reading – attempt to evade this responsibility while taking on the duty of the ethical order, or, to speak with *de silentio*: we may never get to the dreadful responsibility, or we may have hastily moved past it.

The gap I am trying to chart here, then, is not a difference between thinking and doing,¹³² but a distinction between the ethical (understood as a branch of knowledge, or a set of principles) and dreadful responsibility; that is, employing my experimental figure of speech: it is the difference (and the entangled relation) between holding on to a compass and taking up responsibility. A responsibility not only for letting a compass guide the course of one’s actions, but (also) the culpability of having taken this particular compass in the first place, and, furthermore and perhaps more profoundly, a responsibility that answers even for the disturbing groundlessness of every compass that no argumentation, however consistent or multifaceted it might be, can cover (up). The gap between the ethical and a dreadful responsibility would, in this interpretation, be one of risk, of blame, of fear and trembling, of radical culpability, because it is – in the ‘end’ (that is, an end that is precisely called into question) – an abyss that opens ‘beneath’ both:

¹³² An intertwined relation that cannot be separated entirely; a relation at once incommensurable and perhaps inescapable, and a problem recurrently addressed in the pseudonymous works of the Kierkegaardian oeuvre.

there is no ground. *Fear and Trembling* offers no comfortable bridge between the ethical and the dreadful sort of responsibility, rather, *de silentio* leaves Abraham at an abyss: take the leap, you're on your own, you're out of reason(s). Agamemnon, facing this gap, is sidestepping the dread, seeking understanding and vindication, trying to use a compass as a cover up. Ethical thinking may call for responsibility; even so, it does not deliver us from taking upon us the *dread* of responsibility, or the responsibility for the ethical, we might say.

A shade of cowardice can be found in the shadow of the rationalizing Agamemnon, striving to be “a trim, clean, and, as far as possible, faultless edition of himself, readable by all” – the one who Ian Duckles imagines saying, “I didn't want to sacrifice my daughter, but I had my justifiable reasons, so don't blame me.” The need of being understood and of being defensible, and the concern with reputation and acclaim, makes Agamemnon – sidestepping the dread of responsibility – a *tragic* hero in more than one sense.

The old man and a misunderstanding

Having found an *existential situation of groundlessness* as well as a *dreadful answerability for answering*, I will now take leave of the Greek tragedies and the thematic of heroes. A motif that is otherwise close to the heart of the old man on whose doorstep we have finally arrived. Having heard the beautiful story of Abraham as a child, his fervent admiration has only increased with time (SKS 4, 105), and as an old man, he is so consumed by the narrative that he quite obsessively replays it over and over again. As the poet of the *Eulogy*, he lovingly keeps the story alive, continually repeating the journey to Moriah in his mind (SKS 4, 111). In this repetitive meditation, it can be said that he, indeed, does not go further (“*gaae videre*,” SKS 4, 102; 105); in a certain sense, it can be said that he (himself) – though overcome with enthusiasm (*Begeistring*), longing (*Længsel*), and exhaustion – is not even moved, at least not in a radical way, or, perhaps better, at least not in a *tremendous* way. Relating to Abraham with admiration, or, relating to him as to a hero, proves a laborious task for the old man who – perplexed yet pious – collapses at the end of each imagined journey (SKS 4, 111), exclaiming:

“No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?”¹³³ Understanding, however, as we have already remarked, has a complexity of its own in *Fear and Trembling*. Attentive to this complexity, we might then ask: what does the old man *not* understand concerning Abraham?

Relating to this reading, we may begin by noticing what the old man *does* understand, or, to be less straightforward, what he seems to understand regarding the father of faith as the latter is portrayed in *Fear and Trembling*. In his meditations on the journey of Abraham, the old man does not omit the anxiety (FT 28/SKS 4, 124), nor does he hastily jump to any triumphant conclusion. The four retellings of *Stemming* open with a particular fragment of the narrative, namely the opening part (an opening in more than one sense as suggested in the Prologue of this part): “*And God tempted [fristede] Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I shall show you.*”¹³⁴ Following this harsh call, a programmatic outset – “It was early in the morning” (*Det var en aarle Morgen*) – gives way to four alternative versions of a ride to a mountain. I will – for once – not trail the difference but go with the feel of it, the unsettling tonality reverberating in all four retellings. Rather than investigating the variations and the different sets of outcome of the imagined tales, I will let the eerie atmosphere (*Stemming*) be the clue. The unsettling feeling that all four retellings add to is that somehow something (or someone) is lost in the process; as though Abraham does not quite have the good luck¹³⁵ that is called for in the tender fables of separation and motherhood linked to each retelling by an allegorical bond. My suggestion as to what is lost will involve a thundering pastor hit by a sudden inspiration (FT 29/SKS 4, 124-125), and will have nothing to do with luck but a lot to do with separation.

¹³³ FT 14/SKS 4, 111: “Ingen var dog saa stor som Abraham, hvo er istand til at forstaae ham?”

¹³⁴ FT 10/SKS 4, 107: “Og Gud fristede Abraham og sagde til ham, tag Isaak, Din eneste Søn, som Du elsker, og gaæ ben i det Land Morija og offer ham der til et Brændoffer paa et Bjerg, som jeg vil vise Dig.”

¹³⁵ The formula “How fortunate he who...” (“Held den, der...”) is repeated in relation to all four of the retellings of the *Stemming* in *Fear and Trembling*.

My wager – a suggestion and not a solution – is that a *paradoxical* motion is at play in a relation of the dreadful (*det Forfærdelige*) and the wondrous (*det Vidunderlige*). In short, we may say that the dreadful comes from the abyss that opens with the line: “And God tempted,” while the wondrous relates to the openness of the line: “for God all things are possible.”¹³⁶

It is a horror to take a son on a journey with the sole purpose of sacrificing him, and it is dreadful to do so without any reason. It is a wonder to win (back) finitude¹³⁷ and to receive Isaac by faith¹³⁸ against, or, perhaps better, beyond all reason. Both are motions of risk, *but only the latter is a movement of faith* (SKS 4, 143/49):

If Abraham had doubted [...], if irresolute he had looked around, if he had happened to spot the ram before drawing the knife, if God had allowed him to sacrifice it instead of Isaac – then he would have gone home, everything would have been the same, we would have had Sarah, he would have kept Isaac, and yet how changed! [...] Then he would have witnessed neither to his faith not to God’s grace but would have witnessed to how appalling it is to go to Mount Moriah.¹³⁹

Had Abraham hesitated (had he walked as if all is *not* possible for God), his journey to the mountain would have testified only to the horror; we would have been left with a story *only* on the dreadful (*det Forfærdelige*), it would have been a story only of sacrifice. But Abraham did not hesitate (SKS 4, 117), at least not according to the *Enlogy*. He related to the abyss of dread in a movement of trust (*Tillid*) and joy and sheer courage (SKS 4, 129), a wonder that in *Fear and Trembling* is called faith (SKS 4, 159). However, and this is my point, though the story of Abraham is indeed a tale of (the wonder of) faith, it is *also* a story on the dreadful,

¹³⁶ FT 46/SKS 4, 141, “at for Gud er Alting muligt.”

¹³⁷ FT 36/SKS 4, 131, “vinde Endeligheden.”

¹³⁸ FT 49/SKS 4, 143: “ved tro at faa Isaak.”

¹³⁹ FT 22/SKS 4, 118: ”Hvis Abraham [...] havde tvivlet, hvis han raadvild havde skuert omkring sig, hvis han, inden han drog Kniven, ved et Tilfælde havde opdaget Væderen, hvis Gud havde tilladt ham at ofre den istedenfor Isaak – da var han dragen hjem, Alt var det Samme, han havde Sara, han beholdt Isaak, og dog hvor forandret! [...] Da havde han hverken vidnet om sin Tro eller om Guds Naade, men vidnet om, hvor forfærdeligt det er, at drage op til Morija Bjerget.”

or, I might even venture: the dread of faith.¹⁴⁰ The abyss of dread is the very depth of the wondrous narrative. The wonder of faith does not cover the chasm; to take the path of faith is to walk as if the unfathomable abyss is (also) an incomprehensibly wondrous openness (that “for God all things are possible”). What *Fear and Trembling* suggests without saying is that Abraham would not have become the father of faith, had he not taken Isaac to a mountain in order to sacrifice him, but he became the father of faith only because of a movement of absurd trust (*Tillid*), namely the faith in the impossibility of *simultaneously* sacrificing Isaac and yet not sacrificing Isaac.¹⁴¹ It is as if the movement of faith was called for from the abyss of dread, from the horror of “*God tempted*.”

Perhaps the sense of this paradoxical relation (the dreadful/the wondrous) is most significant when it is lost or forgotten. We meet, in *Fear and Trembling*, twice an insomniac man and an offended preacher (SKS 4, 124-125; 146), the latter giving his Sunday-friendly account of the story of Abraham:

We glorify Abraham, but how? We recite the whole story in clichés [...]. Mentally and orally we homologize Isaac and the best, and the contemplator can very well smoke his pipe while cogitating, and the listener may very well stretch out his legs comfortably.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ I am aware of the dialectic of faith, the so-called double-movement of resignation and reception, but I wish to point towards an(other) *paradoxical* relation of abyss and openness, of without-reason and beyond-reason, of *det Forfærdelige* and *det Vidunderlige*. I find it to be an ambiguous movement that keeps both Abraham and de silentio's writing in tension (*i Spænding*). Significant and yet somewhat elusive as it is not as explicated as the double-movement. A textual passage that indicates the proposed relation is found in *Problema II* (SKS 4, 168): ”Dette er Indholdet af 130 Aar. Hvo kan holde det ud, skulde ikke hans Samtid [...] sige: ’[...] er han ikke sindssvag? Og kunde han endda forklare, hvorfor han vil det, men altid er det en Prøvelse.’ Mere kunde Abraham heller ikke forklare; thi hans Liv er som en Bog, der er lagt under guddommeligt Beslag, og som ikke bliver publici juris. Dette er det Forfærdelige. Den, som ikke seer dette, han kan altid være sikker paa, at han ikke er nogen Troens Ridder, men den, som seer det, han skal ikke ville negte, at selv den mest forsøgte tragiske Helt han gaaer som i en Dands i Sammenligning med Troens Ridder, der kun kommer langsomt og krybende frem. Og naar han har indset dette og forvisset sig om, at han ikke har Mod til at forstaae det, da skal han vel ane den vidunderlige Herlighed, som hiin Ridder opnaaer, at han bliver Guds Fortrolige [...]”

¹⁴¹ And not just: first sacrifice Isaac, and then, after another call, not sacrifice Isaac.

¹⁴² FT 28/SKS 4, 124: ”Man taler til Abrahams Ære, men hvorledes? Man giver det Hele et ganske almindeligt Udtryk [...]. Man identificerer i Tankens og Mundens Løb ganske trygt Isaak og det Bedste, og den Mediterende kan godt ryge sin Pibe under Meditationen, og den Hørende kan godt strække Benene mageligt ud fra sig.”

The preacher glosses over the dreadful (*det Forfærdelige*), presenting the story as *simply* beautiful (*skjøn*), the glory of Abraham as *simply* great. He recognizes only the horror of the story when reflected in the simple-minded¹⁴³ recounting by the insomniac listener who is led (by the preacher) to follow Abraham in the great offering to God of “the best”:

If the preacher found out about it, he perhaps would go to the man, he would muster all his ecclesiastical dignity and shout, ‘You despicable man, you scum of society’ [...]. If the same speaker had a little superfluity of understanding to spare, I am sure he would have lost it if the sinner had calmly and with dignity answered: ‘But, after all, that was what you yourself preached about on Sunday’.¹⁴⁴

Dignity (*geistlige Værdighed*, SKS 4, 124/FT 28) and dignity (*hvis Synderen roligt og værdigt*, SKS 4, 125/ FT 29), a word is in the writings of Kierkegaard seldom locked up in a simple signification. The dignity of one of these men – quite bloated in all its ecclesiasticism – is effectively deflated in the mocking writings of *de silentio*. Yet, the preacher may be ridiculous and somewhat effete (*blødagtig*), selling out the dread and the horror of a story to serve it as a simple tale of mercy and serenity (SKS 4, 145-146), quite the *Ausverkauf* (FT 5/SKS 4, 101), but in the zesty satire, a genuine punch is delivered: the preacher, sadly oblivious to the dread and the paradox, does not get to the wonder of the story, he fails to understand – as far as understanding goes – the absurdity of Abraham’s greatness; in short, he is a stranger to faith, or, to follow my reading, he is ignorant of the pulsation of ambiguity.

Missing out on the paradoxical motion at play – the odd¹⁴⁵ relation of the dreadful and the wondrous – the preacher is quite unaffected by the sheer terror as well as the utter surprise of the Abraham narrative. He does not understand that at the heart of Abraham’s life, as the very pulse of the story, is a thumbing contradiction: the impossibility of simultaneously sacrificing Isaac, and yet, not

¹⁴³ Meaning here: having no sense of double-movements and/or paradoxical relations.

¹⁴⁴ FT 28-29/SKS 4, 124.

¹⁴⁵ Odd, precisely also because incongruous.

sacrificing Isaac. One may, as does the preacher and the old man, fail to understand the utter paradox, the radical *incongruity*, of this situation. It is not impossible to sacrifice Isaac, though it is a horrific, almost unthinkable action, nor is it impossible not to sacrifice Isaac, that would indeed make the journey to Mount Moriah quite painless; the difficulty is, concurrently yet non-coincidentally, to sacrifice Isaac *and* yet not to sacrifice Isaac.

The repeated portrait of the ecclesiastical speaker is delivered with an unequivocal scorn, and he can be seen as the non-authorized anti-hero of de silentio's diverse gallery of characters; even so, a wicked villain, he is not. It might be sad with a preacher without faith, but despite all the damage done, he is more ridiculous than malicious, more a fraud than a monster. He is a petty salesman of a sort, making a living of some old scriptures, selling out, making the feel of the sermon and the story of Abraham comfortable for all: "everything goes along splendidly without any trouble."¹⁴⁶ I find a darker tone in the storytelling of the old man, a more ominous feel than that of the hypocrite of a preacher at whom we more easily can point our fingers, and, at least, have a laugh.

Contrary to the preacher, the old man *does* indeed understand that the story of Abraham is also a story of dread. There is no glossing over the dreadful in his eerie retellings; if anything, the dreadful (the "God tempted", the knife, and the sacrifice) is the very clue of his imagination. In this way, we may say that the old man understands more of the story than does the mindless preacher. But, considering the tricky play on understanding in *Fear and Trembling*, to understand more might very well turn out to be to understand less and vice versa. In the case of the old man, the problem of understanding (*Forstaaelse*) is an obstacle in a quite particular sense.

Of this man who grows old with "that beautiful story," we are told that the more he visits the story, the less he understands: "The older he became, the more often his thoughts turned to that story; his enthusiasm for it became greater and greater, and yet he could understand the story less and less" (FT 9/SKS 4, 105).

¹⁴⁶ FT 52/SKS 4, 146: "Alt gaaer nemt nok, uden Uleilighed."

Furthermore, at the end of each of his imagined rides to the mountains of Moriah, “the man of whom we speak” faints and utters: “No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?” (FT 14/SKS 4, 111). This exclamation, however, is not necessarily a dismissal of understanding, but can be heard as a longing sigh of and for understanding. The repetitive retellings could in this sense be seen as a continual attempt at understanding, trying longingly to get a hold on the story. Remember that it is his mind/thoughts (*Tanke*) that returns incessantly to the story. The mind of the old man may collapse exhausted at the end of each visualized journey, still, it tirelessly rises for yet another ride, trying, wishing, wanting to understand. However, the more he tries to understand it, the less he understands it. Here we arrive at the question that opened our visit to the old man, namely, what it is that he does not understand. It may seem a simple matter to resolve, seeing that de silentio himself avows that he does not understand Abraham, and seeing that ‘not understanding Abraham’ is a point made more than once in *Fear and Trembling*. My suggestion to bring forth the equivocality of the term ‘understanding’ was the following formulation: it is not so that understanding does *not at all* comprehend the life of Abraham, the point is that understanding does not comprehend the sense of his life *altogether*. To this formula, a somewhat tortuous suggestion will here be added: While understanding that you cannot understand the story of Abraham altogether, it is not without import what you *do* (and do *not*) understand.

Anticipating points yet to be made, my suggestions, put shortly, are: The old man *does* understand the dreadful (*det Forfærdelige*) of the story, however, this is an understanding that – without the paradoxical relation – leads to a grave *mis*-understanding. The old man does *not* understand the wondrous openness of the story, and he does not understand the *paradoxical* heartbeat of the story, and here another *mis*-understanding looms since he – caught up in understanding – does not understand *what* it is that cannot be understood. Or otherwise put: the old man does not understand that the greatness of the story is not about the sacrifice and losses (as he imagines in the retellings) but about a tremendous paradox and the mad wonder of joy.

So, to unfold: Once upon a time there was a man overcome with admiration. Having heard the beautiful (*skjønne*) story of Abraham as a child, he is

completely taken by the narrative to which he returns incessantly; the older he grows, the more often he revisits it (SKS 4, 105). In his mind, he repeatedly follows Abraham on the ride to the mountain, and in the passage of *Stemming*, we are invited along (to) four of these rides. In the varied retellings, Abraham is depicted as an early riser, a man of obedience, of bravery, of doubt, of self-sacrifice, of worry, of piety, but not as a man of faith (in the paradoxical sense it gets in *Fear and Trembling*). The imagined journeys testify to how terrible, how devastating, how dreadful it is to walk to the mountain of Moriah (SKS 4, 118); they are all four of them tales of *sacrifice*. Somehow, the old man seems to be paralyzed by the horror of a man who is willing to slaughter a son, and, thus, fails to understand the wondrous impossibility of simultaneously sacrificing Isaac and yet not sacrificing Isaac, the impossible relation that is at the heart of the movement of faith. Whereas the preacher glossed over the dreadful and presented the story as simply beautiful, the disturbing import of the old man's imagination is the *confusion* of the dreadful and the beautiful (*skjønne*), as if the dreadful were the wonder of the story, as if the wondrous and the dreadful were congruous, as if it were a relation of correlation or coherence. Muddling up the dreadful and the beautiful, the old man's obsessive admiration of Abraham becomes a troubling fixation: all the longing, the wishing, the admiration, and the enthusiasm become an idolization of a man with a knife.

With the preacher, we had a religious *fool*, a petty salesman, glossing over the dreadful, and carelessly praising (and preaching) the wondrous. With the old man, we have a religious *fanatic*, a single-mindedly obsessed sentimentalist, lost for ambiguity.

The shudder of an idea and the earthquake of existence

Johannes de silentio may not understand Abraham (altogether), but he *does* understand that faith is a wonder of the absurd:

I am not unfamiliar with the terrifying [...], and I do not flee from it in horror, but I know very well that even though I advance toward it courageously, my courage is still not the courage of faith [...]. I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd [...]. I am

happy and satisfies, but my joy is not the joy of faith, and by comparison with that, it is unhappy.¹⁴⁷

In a well-defined understanding (“I know very well”), *de silentio* states that he is quite familiar with the dreadful, and aware of there being a courage otherwise than that of facing danger (the bravery of the hero) and a joy otherwise than that of being merry and content. He does not mix up things, venerating the sacrifice ‘as though the dreadful *is* the wonder of the story’; on the contrary, he understands the *difference* between bravery of heroes and the courage of faith, between the dread and the joy of faith. He understands – even if he claims he cannot live it (*det Vidunderlige kan jeg ikke gøre*, SKS 4, 131) – the *wonder* of joy, a wondrous joy otherwise than a simple jolliness, and otherwise than the sort of joy that clings on to a hope of what could and could not be. The joy of faith is that unreasonable, absurd, and verging-heavily-on-the-offensive joy that relates to an openness in and of the impossible, an impossible ‘possible’ where the latter term does not negate the former, an *oxymoronic* relation, what we could call an *in-possible*, denoting a ‘possible’ that comes about in the impossible and – as the possible – remains impossible.

It is this absurdity, this mad wonder, and this exorbitant joy that is lost in the retellings of the *Stemming*; this is what the old man does not understand, and along with the failed attentiveness to the wondrous, he also mis-understands what it is that challenges understanding (namely the paradox and the absurd relation of the dreadful and the wondrous). He understands less and less as he sinks deeper and deeper into a confusion that he nevertheless cannot let go off: how can this dreadful story be beautiful? How can God tempt? How can Abraham be willing to sacrifice his son? “*Hvo er i stand til at forstå det?*”

The invention of *Fear and Trembling* is to find in Abraham a paradoxical relation that makes an otherwise straightforward – and straightforwardly horrible – plotline

¹⁴⁷ FT 33-34/SKS 4, 129: ”Jeg er ikke ufortrolig med det Forfærdelige [...], jeg flyer det ikke ræd, men jeg veed meget vel, at, om jeg end gaaer det modig imøde, mit Mod dog ikke er Troens Mod [...]. Jeg kan ikke gøre Troens Bevægelse, jeg kan ikke lukke Øinene og styrte mig tillidsfuld i det Absurde [...]. [Jeg] er glad og tilfreds, men min Glæde er ikke Troens og er dog i Sammenligning med denne ulykkelig.”

into a story of (paradoxical) faith. In the retellings of the old man, we are shown that there are many ways of losing a child. We are not told, however, the way to become a father of faith. A misunderstanding underlies the imagination of the old man who never quite reaches faith (*kommer til Troen*)¹⁴⁸ although he stays unswervingly devoted to the beautiful story. Attentive to the dreadfulness of the story, the old man stands at the chasm without taking the step forward, looking mesmerized into the abyss, but unable or unwilling to take the leap, to close his eyes and throw himself into the absurd (SKS 4, 129). To him, the reading and the re-imaginings of the story are a kind of mind-game; it is as if he almost relishes in the thrill and chills of the horror: “for what occupied him was [...] the shudder of the idea (Tankens Gysen)” (FT 9/SKS 4, 105). In this way, he is not moved *existentially* but is caught up in an endless and somewhat pleasurable replay. Stirred but not shaken, to repeat a formula of this reading. There is a difference between “the shudder of the idea” (*Tankens Gysen*, FT, 9/SKS 4, 105) and an earthquake of existence (*Tilvarelsens Rystelse*, SKS 4, 156/FT 63), between admiration and trauma, between following the hero in one’s mind and taking up the dreadful responsibility of existence.

The old man – a bard of misunderstandings, a fanatic religious, mesmerized by the glint of a blade.

How to become a father of faith

Whereas the old man took the sense of Abraham’s life to gleam in the edge of a knife, I found the sense of his life to hinge on a paradox. But what does that

¹⁴⁸ ”Faith is the highest passion in a person. There perhaps are many in every generation who do not come to faith, but no one goes further [...] But the person who come to faith (whether he is extraordinarily gifted or plain and simple does not matter) does not come to a standstill in faith. Indeed, he would be indignant if anyone said this to him, just as the lover would resent it if someone said that he came to a standstill in love; for, he would answer, I am by no means standing still. I have my whole life in it.” FT 122-123/SKS 4, 209-210: ”Troen er den høieste Lidenskab i et Menneske. Der er maaske i enhver Slægt Mange, der end ikke komme til den, men Ingen kommer videre. [...] [D]en, der kom til Troen, (han være den udmærket Begavede eller den/Eenfoldige, dette gjør Intet til Sagen) han bliver ikke staaende ved Troen, ja han vilde oprøres, hvis nogen sagde det til ham, ligesom den Elskende vilde harmes, naar man sagde, han blev staaende ved Kjærligheden; thi, vilde han svare, jeg bliver ingenlunde staaende, da jeg har mit Liv deri.” Cf. FT 37: “He [Abraham] actually goes further and comes to faith.”/SKS 4, 132: ”Han gaaer virkelig videre og kommer til Troen.”

mean? I will now let the trials of Abraham take center stage, and with this exploration, the tracing of a peculiar word will also come into the picture.

The questions we are going to follow in the passages to come will be: *how* does one become a father of faith; and, tailing this inquiry: what is this passion (faith) *about*, or, *where* does it come from?

Once again, some patience is called for as the way ahead is not an obviously straightforward one. So, we will begin – a detour.

Keeping to the literarily reading, I will stay with the story of Abraham, a narrative that also in the scriptural source¹⁴⁹ is depicting how one man *becomes* Abraham, that is, how Abram the émigré becomes Abraham the father of (promised) nations. The biblical storyline follows the journey of the tried man in a progressive way that does not necessarily convey the unsettling turn of the plot. A critical turn in the story – that is both a *peak* and a *devastation* of a life-time of ever increasing preposterousness (*Urimelighed*)¹⁵⁰ and trials – is found in a devastating moment as depicted in the *Eulogy*: “Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment.”¹⁵¹ Parenthood of a certain kind seems, indeed, to be closely linked with hardship in *Fear and Trembling*:

Has any woman been as infringed upon as was Mary, and is it not true here also that the one whom God blesses he curses in the same breath? [...] When despite this, she said: Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord – then she is great, and I believe it should not be difficult to explain why she became the mother of God. She needs worldly admiration as little as Abraham needs tears, for she was no heroine and he was no hero, but both of them became greater

¹⁴⁹ I am here – with *de silentio* – referring first and foremost to the biblical text of Christianity, i.e., Genesis, shared with the Jewish tradition(s).

¹⁵⁰ FT 17/SKS 4, 113: “Ved Troen vandrede Abraham ud fra Fædrenes Land og blev Fremmed i Forjættelsens. Han lod [...] sin jordiske Forstand tilbage, og tog Troen med sig; ellers var han vel ikke vandret ud, men havde tænkt, det er jo urimeligt”; FT 17/SKS 4, 114: “Ved Troen modtog Abraham Forjættelsen, at i hans Sæd skulde alle jordens Slægter velsignes. Tiden gik hen, Muligheden var der, Abraham troede; Tiden gik hen, det blev urimeligt, Abraham troede”; FT 19/SKS 4, 115: “Saa drev da Herren kun sin Spot med Abraham! Vidunderligt gjorde han det Urimelige virkelig, nu vilde han atter see det tilintetgjort. Alt var forspildt!”; FT 20/SKS 4, 117: “Men Abraham troede og tvivlede ikke, han troede det Urimelige.”

¹⁵¹ FT 19/SKS 4, 115: “Nu blev al Stridens Forførdelse samlet i eet Øieblik.”

than these, not by being exempted in any way from the distress and the agony and the paradox, but became greater by means of these.¹⁵²

The paradox of Abraham (the paradox that is the very sense of his life¹⁵³) remains unresolved, and, in a certain sense, that is ‘where’ the distress and agony come from.¹⁵⁴

A plot otherwise than sacrifice

Abram the immigrant’s way of becoming Abraham the father of faith cannot “in any way” be exempted “from the distress and the agony and the paradox,” or, from the distress and the agony of the paradox. The path of becoming – a motion of peculiar import in the writing(s) of Kierkegaard – is, in the case of Abraham, inextricably linked with uneasiness (although, one does not become a father of faith by way of sacrifice):

The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he meant to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he meant to sacrifice Isaac – but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that can make a person sleepless, and yet without the anxiety Abraham is not who he is.¹⁵⁵

Without the anxiety and the paradox, there is no Abraham the father of faith; Abraham would then simply have been the father of Isaac – precisely without the

¹⁵² FT 65/SKS 4, 158: “Hvilken Qvinde blev dog krænkert som Maria, og er det ikke ogsaa her sandt, at den, hvem Gud velsigner, forbander han i samme Aandedrag? [...] Naar hun da desuagtet sagde: see jeg er en Herrens Tjenerinde, saa er hun stor, og jeg tænker, det skal ikke falde vanskeligt at forklare, hvorfor hun bev Guds Moder. Hun behøver ingen verdslig Beundring, ligesaa lidet som Abraham behøver Taarer, thi hun var ikke Heltinde, og han ikke Helt, men begge bleve de ingenlunde større end disse, ved at være fritagne for Nøden og Qvalen og Paradoxet, men begge bleve det ved disse.”

¹⁵³ FT 33: “Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham’s life [...]”/SKS 4, 128: “Naar jeg derimod skal til at tænke over Abraham, da er jeg som tilintgjort. Jeg faaer i ethvert Moment Øie paa *hint uhyre Paradox, der er Indboldet af Abrahams Liv* [...]” (italics added).

¹⁵⁴ FT 75: ”Let us consider in somewhat more detail the distress and anxiety in the paradox of faith.”/SKS 4, 167: ”Lad os lidt nærmere overveie Nøden og Angesten i Troens Paradox” (italics added).

¹⁵⁵ FT 30/SKS 4, 126: “Det ethiske Udtryk for hvad Abraham gjorde er, at han vilde myrde Isaak, det religieuse er, at han vilde offre Isaak; men i denne Modsigelse ligger netop Angesten, der vel kan gjøre et Menneske søvnløst, og dog er Abraham ikke den, han er, uden denne Angst.”

distress and the agony and the paradox.¹⁵⁶ A profound dimension of the story is lost, when the unsettling anxiety is left out.¹⁵⁷ As I have earlier put it: The abyss of dread is the very depth of the wondrous narrative.

Returning to the above quotation, we read that the anxiety (which “can make a man sleepless”) comes about in a collision between the ethical and the religious, or between “to murder Isaac” (*at vilde myrde Isaak*) and “to sacrifice Isaac” (*at vilde offre Isaak*). Or as it is formulated by de silentio: “*in this contradiction is the anxiety*” (italics added). The anxiety ‘is’ in the *tension* of the clash, that is, in a contradiction (*Modsigelse*) between the ethical and the religious, between “*at vilde myrde Isaak*” and “*at vilde offre Isaak*”; or, to put it otherwise, the anxiety I am here tracing is found in the unresolvedness of a collision. A dreadful point of becoming a father of faith is that the *disquietude* of the situation cannot entirely or finally be escaped:

The tragic hero is soon finished, and his struggles are soon over; he makes the infinite movement and is now secure in the universal. The knight of faith, however, is kept in a state of sleeplessness, for he is constantly being tested [*prøves*], and at every moment there is the possibility [*en Mulighed*] of his returning penitently to the universal, and this possibility may be a spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] as well as the truth. He cannot get any information on that from any man, for in that case he is outside the paradox.¹⁵⁸

The religious expression – *at vilde offre Isaak* – cannot be justified, made accessible, or become vindicated; it cannot completely reject the anxious horror that rings in the ethical expression – *at vilde myrde Isaak*; it cannot escape the impossible connection of the expressions. The ethical expression is the persistent outcry that

¹⁵⁶ FT 18: “If Abraham had wavered, he would have given it up. [...] He would not have been forgotten, he would have saved many by his example, but he still would not have become the father of faith, for it is great to give up one’s desire, but it is greater to hold fast to it after having given it up [...]”/SKS 4, 114-115: “[Havde Abraham] vaklet [...] Han skulde ikke være glemt, han skulde have frelst Mange ved sit Exempel, men dog ikke være bleven Troens Fader; thi det er stort at opgive sit Ønske, men det er større at fastholde det, efter at have opgivet det [...]”

¹⁵⁷ FT 28: “What is omitted from Abraham’s story is the anxiety.”/SKS 4, 124: “Det man udelader af Abrahams Historie er Angesten [...]”

¹⁵⁸ FT 78/SKS 4, 169: “Den tragiske Helt er snart færdig, og har snart udstridt, han gjør den uendelige Bevægelse og er nu betrygget i det Almene. Troens Ridder derimod holdes søvnløs; thi han prøves bestandig, og i ethvert Øieblik er der en Mulighed af at kunne vende angrende tilbage til det Almene, og denne Mulighed kan ligesaa godt være en Anfægtelse som Sandhed. Oplysning derom kan han ikke hente hos noget Menneske; thi saa er han udenfor Paradoxet.”

follows the ethical expression: How can the sacrifice of a child ever become “a holy act” (FT 30/SKS 4, 126: “*en bellig Handling*”)?

A suggestion of this study is that de silentio subtly and carefully refrains from resolving difficult questions into solid solutions; that he desist the lure of turning the paradoxes of *Fear and Trembling* into unequivocal knowledge, a portable “*Leve-Viisdom*” to grasp and to-go,¹⁵⁹ or a proper and undemanding outcome.¹⁶⁰ To this study, de silentio does not present the reader with a defence of Abraham, but puts forward the complexity of a narrative. The troubled question – how is “to sacrifice Isaac’ not *still* “to murder Isaac”? – remains a question throughout and beyond the plotline. Somehow the latter expression follows [*efter-følger*] the former as a persistent disturbance, keeping the question mark quivering. A troubling possibility is kept in play: the *possibility* of an intended murder. There *is* no murder. For some, all we have is a pious man binding a boy and lifting a knife, a religious man willing to sacrifice his son, yet, de silentio lets a worrying *possibility* of a murder tremble in his retelling, a possibility – impossible to eliminate altogether – that opens (in) an unresolved tension. The anxiety of the collision between the ethical and the religious is linked to this possibility, “*at han vilde myrde Isaak.*” In the Kierkegaardian works, this link is not unexplored. Another pseudonymous writer, Vigilius Haufniensis (*Begrebet Angest*, 1844), has pointed towards a relation between the possible (*Det Mulige*) and anxiety (*Angest*),¹⁶¹ linking anxiety to the possible as a sort of openness that *is* not *quite* there and yet is not *not* there *at all*. It (the possible) is *in* the present (only) *as* the possible (i.e., as “*det Mulige/det Tilkommende*”). For now, and to sum up: the anxiety that can make a man sleepless is caught up in a disturbing possibility that trembles in an unresolved tension.

¹⁵⁹ FT 37: “to suck worldly wisdom out of the paradox.”/SKS 4, 132: ”man vil suge Leve-Viisdom ud af Paradoxet.”

¹⁶⁰ FT 63: ”But we are curious about the result, just as we are curious about the way a book turns out. We do not want to know anything about the anxiety, the distress, the paradox.”/ SKS 4, 156: ”Men Udfaldet er man nysgjerrig efter, som efter Udfaldet paa en Bog; Angsten, Nøden, Paradoxet vil man ikke vide Noget af.”

¹⁶¹ CA 91: “The possible corresponds exactly to the future. For freedom, the possible is the future, and the future is for time the possible. To both these corresponds anxiety in the individual life.”/ SKS 4, 394: ”Det Mulige svarer aldeles til det Tilkommende. Det Mulige er for Friheden det Tilkommende, og det Tilkommende for Tiden det Mulige. Til begge svarer i det individuelle Liv Angest.” Cf. SKS 4, 413: ”[...] Angesten blev bestemt som Frihedens Visen sig for sig selv i Muligheden.”

There *is* no murder; the alleged claim – “*at han vilde myrde Isaak*” – *is* not *quite* there (as an action that is fulfilled) and yet it is not *not* there *at all* (since it is there as a possibility), or, we may say: it ‘is’ only as (a) disquiting possibility (*Mulighed*).¹⁶²

Without this possibility, Abraham is not who he became. However, he is not who he became *because* of it. In the *Preliminary Expectoration (Forelobig Expectoration)* we are told that it is “only by faith that one achieves any resemblance to Abraham, not by murder.”¹⁶³ This distinction – which both the underselling preacher and the fanatic old man for different reasons seem(ed) to neglect – is quite vital to the inquiry of this section: how one becomes a father of faith. One does not become a father of faith because of the binding of a child and the drawing of a knife, “and yet without [this] anxiety Abraham is not who he is “(FT 30).¹⁶⁴ Put otherwise, one does not become the father of faith *because* of a sacrifice but one does not (either) become a father of faith *without* the anxiety that opens in and with a dreadful possibility. A plot otherwise than that of sacrifices and obedience opens in an abyss of *Angest*.

As to the questions of this sectin (that is, *how* does one become a father of faith, or, *where* does this passion come from), we have come across an anxiety, a possibility, *without* which Abraham is not who he is. However, to get closer to the *how* and the *where*, we will now look into contradiction of a moment.

¹⁶² A point of the suggestion that I am circling here is that the tension is unresolved, and that the possibility thus remains – a possibility. It is neither eliminated nor confirmed; it is not converted into a brutal fact [*raae Factum*]: FT 30: ”In other words, if faith is taken away by becoming *Nul* and *Nichts*, all that remains is the brutal fact that Abraham meant to murder Isaac, which is easy for anyone to imitate if he does not have faith – that is, the faith that makes it difficult for him.”/SKS 4, 126: ”Naar Troen nemlig ved at blive til Nul og Nichts tages bort, saa bliver kun det raae Factum tilbage, at Abraham vilde myrde Isaak, hvilket er nemt nog at eftergjøre for Enhver, der ikke har Troen, det vil sige den Tro, der gjør ham det svært.”

¹⁶³ FT 31/SKS 4, 126: ”[Det] er kun ved Troen man faaer Lighed med Abraham, ikke ved Mordet.”

¹⁶⁴ SKS 4, 126: “[...] *og dog* er Abraham ikke den, han er, *uden* denne Angst” (italics added).

A shattering moment

I found an abyss of *Angest* in and as the opening of the story of Abraham as well as this part (in Prologue one), namely the moment where: “God tempted” (FT 9/SKS 105). In this short sentence (a horror story in two words), a clash takes place, an eerie contradiction arises in which the dreadful opens: ““The terrifying thing in the collision is this – that it is not a collision between God’s command and man’s command but between God’s command and God’s command” (“Det Forfærdelige i Collisionen er nemlig, at det ikke er et Sammenstød mell. Guds Bud og Msk.-Bud, men mell. Guds Bud og Guds Bud”).¹⁶⁵ Commenting on this remark, made by Kierkegaard in a note of preliminary work sheets¹⁶⁶ to *Fear and Trembling*, David Kangas points in his work *Kierkegaard’s Instant – On Beginnings* both to a plausible rejection of the “divine command”-interpretations of de silentio’s dialectical lyric, and to “the pain of the ordeal” that arises with the words “God tempted”:

This sentence alone should have put an end to “divine command morality” interpretations of *Fear and Trembling*: the conflict is not between autonomously derived moral maxims and heteronomously laid down, divine ones; it is not a question of Abraham respecting a maxim that, as laid down by the absolute, would “trump” every other. The pain of the ordeal is that God withdraws behind a contradiction: a duty is imposed that explodes the very idea of duty.¹⁶⁷

I am not going to pursue the discussion of duty and morality that Kangas addresses in this quotation but will go – for a while – with his formulation of a clash: “God withdraws behind a contradiction.”

The story of how to become a father of faith is, in the words of de silentio, a tale of unreasonableness rather than of fairness, a narrative of the pointless rather than

¹⁶⁵ FTR 248; *Pap. IV B 67*, the translation cited from Kangas 2007, 135; *Pap. B 67 (U.D.)*, *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer, Fjerde Bind. Søren Kierkegaards Optegnelser fra 1843, 20. November til 1844 Marts*, P. A. Heiberg og V. Kuhr (udgivere), København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1912.

¹⁶⁶ S.K.s Optegnelser af Gruppe B: Til: ”Frygt og Bæven” 1843, Foreløbige Udarbejdelser. Published/printed in *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer, Fjerde Bind. Søren Kierkegaards Optegnelser fra 1843 20. November til 1844 Marts*, P. A. Heiberg og V. Kuhr (udgivere), København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1912.

¹⁶⁷ Kangas 2007, 135-136.

the meaningful, or, perhaps better, it is a story of the wonder – of madness. In the eulogy of *Fear and Trembling*, the journey of Abraham becomes ever more absurd:

By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers [...]. He 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. [...] And yet he was God's chosen one [...]! As a matter of fact, if he had been an exile, banished from God's grace, he could have better understood it – but now it was as if and his faith were being mocked.¹⁶⁸

By faith Abraham received the promise that in his seed all the generations of the earth would be blessed. Time passed, the possibility was there, Abraham had faith; time passed, it became unreasonable, Abraham had faith.¹⁶⁹

The promises of his life become increasingly more unreasonable, and (yet) Abraham had faith. Why so? – no reasons are given. It is a wonder – of madness. Patiently waiting, Abraham is still in for the apex of the deal, a catastrophic blow to his existence:

Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment. '*And God tempted Abraham [...]*'.

So everything was lost, even more appallingly than if it had never happened! So the Lord was only mocking Abraham!¹⁷⁰

In one moment, "everything is lost." Meaningfulness is shattered. The ground(s) disintegrate(s). *God withdraws behind a contradiction*. Abraham is left to the absurd, and in this dreadful trial – in this utter openness – he becomes a father of faith by faith, that is, by virtue of the absurd.¹⁷¹ The wonder of madness is to relate to the

¹⁶⁸ FT 17/SKS 4, 113-114: "Ved Troen vandrede Abraham ud fra Fædrenes Land og blev Fremmed i Forjættelsens. Han [...] lod sin jordiske Forstand tilbage, og tog Troen med sig; ellers var han vel ikke vandret ud, men tænkt, det er jo urimeligt. [...] Og dog var hans Guds Udvalgte [...]! Ja havde han været en Forskudt, forstødt fra Guds Naade, da kunde han bedre have fattet det, nu var det jo som en Spot over ham og over hans Tro."

¹⁶⁹ FT 17/SKS 4, 114: "Ved Troen modtog Abraham Forjættelsen, at i hans Sød skulde alle Jordens Slægter velsignes. Tiden gik hen, Muligheden var der, Abraham troede; Tiden gik hen, det blev urimeligt, Abraham troede."

¹⁷⁰ FT 19. Italics added in the translation./SKS 4, 115: "Nu blev al Stridens Forfærdelse samlet i eet Øieblik. 'Og Gud fristede Abraham [...]' [...] Saa var da Alt forspildt, forfærdeligere end om det aldrig var skeet! Saa drev Herren da kun sin Spot med Abraham!"

¹⁷¹ SKS 4, 131: "i Kraft af det Absurde." The formula is repeated four times on this single page.

absurd (to the abyss of dread that opens when God tempted Abraham) *as if* sense is *possible* – after all. That is, after the *all* has lost its claim of totality. When meaningfulness is shattered, when God withdraws behind a contradiction, what is lost is: everything, or, the *fullness* of meaning-fulness, the fundament of the *all*. This shattering does not leave us in meaninglessness, though, which would only be a resort to another *all* (of the negative), another totality. To the mad wonder of faith, sense *is* possible, or, sense is (as) the *possible*: “Nevertheless I have faith [...] – that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible.”¹⁷² The Hong-translation here adds: “of the fact” – which, to this study, somewhat punctures the risk and, in a certain sense, impossibility of the absurd. To relate, or to receive, by virtue of the absurd, is (I suggest) to relate or receive against or beyond any fact. The formula “for God all things are possible” could precisely be read as a resistance to a thinking too tied up with that which is *in fact*.

In the moment of disaster, when certainty is shattered, when God withdraws behind a contradiction, Abraham becomes a father of faith in his wondrous relating to the absurd: in a leap of passion into the abyss, a “plunge into the absurd” (FT 34/SKS 4, 129). A life of faith is, in this sense, to stay with the contradiction, the unresolved paradox, the openness: “How did Abraham exist? He had faith. This is the paradox by which he remains at the apex [...]”¹⁷³ The openness of an existence where the grounds have disintegrated, where the *all* has been shattered, where God has withdrawn behind a contradiction, is not a life lived in utter meaninglessness. The abyss of openness is not to be mistaken for a void of nothingness (yet, another *all*), nor is it a place or situation of hopelessness. Hope is still possible in such groundless openness, only it is not *based* on

¹⁷² FT 46/SKS 4, 141: “[Jeg] troer dog [...] i Kraft af det Absurde, i Kraft af, at for Gud er Alting muligt.”

¹⁷³ FT 62/SKS 4, 155: “Hvorledes eksisterede da Abraham? Han troede. Dette er det Paradox, ved hvilket han bliver paa Spidsen [...]” The translated version somewhat betrays the verbal vibration of the short Danish term “Han troede” – a verblatity that is less distinct in the English phrasing where the passion called faith is turned into the (grammatical) object of the sentence. This investigation attempts to keep the verbal vibration in play, and, in line with this suggestion, I am pushing for a connotation of the expression “to remain at the apex” (“at blive paa Spidsen”) that does not only follow the invocation of a (metaphorical) extreme, a sense that is conveyed in the commentary to a similar phrase (“paa sin Spids”) in *The Concept of Anxiety* (SKS 4, 349), but also an allusion to staying in tension.

something. Perhaps, and in a certain sense, hope is at its most frail and at its most bold, in its most *passionate* way, when called forth (or called for) in this openness; a hope ungrounded and against or beyond all reason. I will address the notion of hope later in this reading as well as in Part two, and so I will leave the term here in the sense of '(still) possible'. To sum up the paragraph, we may say: To live by virtue of faith is (in the *Fear and Trembling* of my reading) to desist from the temptation of moving beyond (or further than) the paradox; it is to resist the lure of *meaningfulness*, certitude, and justification(s).

Enters Levinas

Levinas, an inspirational pulse of this study, who approaches the story of Abraham from a different tradition and a different project, has some reservations concerning the enterprise and gamble of *Fear and Trembling*,¹⁷⁴ in which he finds 'an original mode of truth' (persecuted/humiliated) and a suggested point on the subject of revelation (incarnation and/or incognito). I will return to these suggestions in the following part (in the section 'Yet another Levinasian concern – about the 'in-' of Part two).

An underlying reservation of Levinas regarding the project of Kierkegaard (as it is regarded by Levinas), and not exclusively connected to the story of Abraham, revolves around the concerns of subjectivity and the need of salvation, or what might be termed the self-interest of the Kierkegaardian subject/self-relation. To Levinas, the preoccupation with salvation in the Christian tradition as it is expressed in theological works such as the treatises of Martin Luther (1483-1546) reflects a need – or, one might say hope – for recovery and vindication: "In belief, existence seeks recognition, as does consciousness in Hegel. It struggles for that recognition by begging for forgiveness and salvation."¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, as a

¹⁷⁴ Levinas regards *Fear and Trembling* a book of Kierkegaard, and lets the pseudonymous authorship of the work go unnoticed. I will in the following passages go with Levinas, and refer to 'Kierkegaard' in relation to Levinas's reading as well as the other works mentioned that comment on Kierkegaard without making references to the pseudonymous voices.

¹⁷⁵ Levinas 1996, 70.

“Christian thinker”¹⁷⁶ (a label provided by Levinas in the essay entitled “Phenomenon and Enigma,” CPP, 1998), is caught up in what Levinas coins as the “salvation drama” of Christianity, a crucial plot of a religious tradition, a sort of divine master-plan for the redemption of the world (at the end of times¹⁷⁷). The shortcomings of the salvation drama – as it is rendered by Levinas – is that although it makes of Christ a paramount protagonist on whom the whole plot line relies, it does not avert the existent in maintaining a (too) keen interest in his or her *own* life (and not least, *afterlife*), a concern that in its elliptical¹⁷⁸ care may resemble that of the *Da-sein* (of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*): an “existence existing in such a way that its Being has this very Being as an issue.”¹⁷⁹ Only, the preoccupation of the Kierkegaardian existent might be a *self*-interest in a more circular orbit than that of the Heideggerian *Sorge*. Given the complexity of (the relation of) *Da-sein*, we may ask whether a slight displacement makes of Being (*Sein*) the fundamental project of care, even if it is “this very Being” *of* this “being.”¹⁸⁰

Though Levinas does not write from a tradition that centers on a salvation drama, his main critique relates to the *concerns* of the self in need of salvation rather than the overall plot of the drama or the concept of salvation: “A need is return to itself, the anxiety of the for itself, egoism, the original form of identification.”¹⁸¹ The concern of salvation is (in this sense) an *egological* movement, a self-centered worry; or, an “inner drama”¹⁸² that “does not open man to other men but to God – in solitude.”¹⁸³ In other words, the concern of a self in need of salvation is – itself.¹⁸⁴ In an essay, shortly but far from simply titled “Judaïsme,” Levinas points

¹⁷⁶ Levinas 1998, 61-73; 67.

¹⁷⁷ Levinas 1990b, 84: “Judaism does not therefore carry with it a doctrine of an end to History which dominates individual destiny.”

¹⁷⁸ That is, in its centripetal concern in an ecstatic motion of project.

¹⁷⁹ Levinas 1996, 71.

¹⁸⁰ “[D]as Sein des *Daseins*, dem es in seinem Sein wesentlich *um* dieses Sein selbst geht.” Heidegger 2001, 84.

¹⁸¹ Levinas 1998, 94.

¹⁸² Levinas 1996, 70.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ The tendency towards a self-interest in Kierkegaard (in a seemingly contrast to Levinas) is also pointed to by Llewelyn: “With Kierkegaard, however, the self chooses itself. It remains egological,

towards a different plot of liberation, towards the possibility of: “[une] conception d’une creature qui a la chance de se sauver sans tomber dans l’égoïsme du salut [...]”¹⁸⁵ To save the self from getting lost in the egoism of (the need/concern of) salvation, another movement than the centripetal return-to-itself must be opened: “The *conatus essendi* of our egoistic self-assertion must be inverted or converted until we become ‘the one for the others’ that forgets itself in ‘fear and trembling’ for the other [...]. Prayer means that, instead of seeking one’s own salvation, one secures that of the other.”¹⁸⁶ In a manoeuvre characteristic of Levinas, a movement from the *for-itself* to a *for-the-others* is suggested, a movement of opening that liberates the (for-it)self from the egological circling of an inner drama and releases it into a genuine adventure, the latter being a venture which to Levinas is otherwise than the voyages of homecoming of some classical mythologies: “Greek thought is characterized as a voyage that concludes with return and reunion and thus a “return to the same [...]”¹⁸⁷ Whereas Odysseus [Ulysses] gets to go home, the in-verted subject of the Levinasian thought – turned inside out – goes into the unknown.¹⁸⁸ There is liberation in self-forgetting, in the motion beyond the solitude of a self – encumbered with it-self, but this is also a move of exile. Prayer is, in the above phrasing of Levinas, a work (of love) for-the-other; prayer means, in this sense, precisely *not* to piously fold one’s hands, but to engage in the struggle for the hope and safety of the others, to get one’s hand full *and* to hand all that one has to the others. Classic Levinas when read in view of ethics.¹⁸⁹ To this study it might be worth noting that the work of securing the others does not guarantee

if not egoistic. [...] Kierkegaard’s stress on subjectivity and inwardness makes it difficult to see how for him the center of gravity could be other than oneself.” Llewelyn 2009, 27-28.

¹⁸⁵ Levinas 1963, 43-46. This would be a plot otherwise than that of a *for-itself*: “As an orientation toward the other, [...] a work is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for an agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering into the Promised Land. [...] To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one’s work is to envisage this triumph in a *time without me*, [...] in an eschatology without hope for oneself [...]”. Levinas 1998, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Levinas 1989, 231.

¹⁸⁷ Cited from Hammerschlag 2008, 78.

¹⁸⁸ “To the myth of Odysseus returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for an yet unknown land [...]” Levinas 1986, 348.

¹⁸⁹ Though this out-going movement to-the-others would also, in a seemingly religious term, be liturgical: “We could fix its concept with a term from Greek, *liturgy*, which in its primary meaning designates the exercise of a function which is not only totally gratuitous but requires on the part of him who exercises it a putting out of funds at a loss.” Levinas 1996b, note, 50.

safety for the self. To go towards the unknown is an adventure full of risks. Otherwise than the drama of salvation - and with this plot, a need for absolution, certainty, eternal happiness, and manifestations (such as an incarnated God) – Levinas points towards an adventure without safety,¹⁹⁰ without certainty, without verification, or, in other words: a plot or *intrigue* for grown-ups: “The adult’s God is revealed precisely through the void of the child’s heaven.”¹⁹¹

How (not) to label a thinker – Kierkegaard and Levinas

But now I have once again strolled down a path that may seem one of diversion. The question of this section was related to the fathering (or mothering) of faith. To follow this inquiry we may ask with the words of de silentio: “But now to Abraham – how did he act?” I have not forgotten the father of faith, the main figure, also of this chapter.

Whereas the underlying unease of Levinas regarding Kierkegaard concerned the structure of subjectivity,¹⁹² the worry relating to the retelling of the Abraham narrative in *Fear and Trembling* deals with a different though not unrelated question. In a bid to resist the violence¹⁹³ of Kierkegaard’s evocation of Abraham, Levinas has a different take on the story:

But one could think the opposite: Abraham's attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order, in forbidding him to perform a human sacrifice, is the highest point in the drama. That he obeyed the first voice is astonishing; that he had sufficient distance with respect to that obedience to hear the second voice - that is the essential.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ The point here is not to highlight a difference between religious traditions, between Christianity and Judaism, but to suggest a difference between 1) adventures into the unknown, and 2) journeys that aims at getting home (safely), whether in this life or after.

¹⁹¹ Levinas 1990b, 143, “Loving the Torah More Than God.”/Levinas 1963, 220: “Un Dieu d'adulte se manifeste précisément par la vide du ciel enfantin.”

¹⁹² “What disturbs me in Kierkegaard may be reduced to two points. The first point. Kierkegaard rehabilitated subjectivity – the unicum the singular – with incomparable strength. But in protesting against the absorption of subjectivity by Hegel’s universality, he bequeathed to the history of philosophy an exhibitionistic, immodest subjectivity.” Levinas 1996, 76.

¹⁹³ “The second point. It is Kierkegaard’s violence that shocks me.” (*Ibid.*)

¹⁹⁴ Levinas 1996, 77.

The “essential” objection of Levinas to the storytelling of *Fear and Trembling* is what we could call *a concern of the ethical*. To Levinas, the violent suggestion of *Fear and Trembling* is the “point where subjectivity rises to the level of the religious, that is to say, above ethics.”¹⁹⁵ This subordination could indeed be said to be a point of de silentio’s lyrical dialectics, not least when one reads *Fear and Trembling* in a conscientiously *literal* manner. We *do* find textual evidence – solid and verifiable – of this point, for example in *Problema I* where we read: “The story of Abraham contains, then, a teleological suspension of the ethical. As the single individual he became higher than the universal. This is the paradox, which cannot be mediated.”¹⁹⁶ So it is written. This study, however, wishes to highlight the possible ambiguous sense that comes about when the point considered is an apex (*Spidsse*), an extreme point, somewhat far out, of an unresolved and beyond-reasonable paradox. What Abraham is or is not, whether his actions were justifiable or not, is presented precisely as *problems* in the three Problematas, which – all three of them – end with and at a paradox (that is the sense of Abraham’s life). To conclude with a paradox, however, is a tricky deal which somewhat unstabilizes the settlement of that conclusion. To end with a paradox is not to reject the conclusion (as either unconvincing or unsustainable); it is, rather, to question the finality of conclusions, and to resist the totalizing power of self-confident comprehension.

On the surface, then, there is a significant difference between the writings of de silentio and the concerns of Levinas regarding the hierarchic evaluations of ethics and religion, yet, I found in *Fear and Trembling* an abyss or groundlessness (or openness) that called for a certain way of responsibility that could be said to be anterior to the divide between religion and ethics. In order to set up the distinction in a clear-cut manner, we might say that in *Fear and Trembling* ‘the religious is above the ethical’, while to Levinas ‘the ethical is above the religious’. However, this scheme seems to me a bit too simple, and, more gravely, going with this hierarchical structure, a profound sense of the plot or intrigue of the writings of

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ FT 66/SKS 4, 159: ”Abrahams Historie indeholder da en teleologisk Suspension af det Ethiske. Han er som den Enkelte bleven høiere end det Almene. Dette er Paradoxet, som ikke lader sig mediere.”

both Kierkegaard and Levinas may be lost. To this study, a vital point of their writings is to suggest a sense that we cannot *simply* file in either a box labelled ‘the discipline of ethics’ or a box tagged ‘the discipline of religion’. This suggestion may for some appear quite strange if not downright mistaken. As already mentioned, Levinas categorizes Kierkegaard as a Christian thinker, and, indeed, the latter does take up both a vocabulary and some distinctive themes from a religious tradition, to be more exact that of Protestant Christianity. Levinas, a ‘devotee of ethics’ (of the other) as designated by Badiou,¹⁹⁷ seems to be inseparable from ethical thinking based on the frequency in his own writings of the terms ‘ethics/ethical’ and, moreover, the scholarly works on his writings have primarily been concerned with (his) ethics. I do not wish to refuse these pronounced links that relate each writer to a field, nor that a reversal of connections can be argued for (that is, coupling Kierkegaard to ethics and Levinas to religion); I only wish to point 1) toward an understanding that somehow resists a too simple categorization, and 2) toward a way of writing that makes the relation between terms such as ‘ethics’ and ‘religion’ less straightforward, and perhaps even lets the definitions of the terms be re-written to the point where they suffer “de-termination,” an expression borrowed from Llewelyn,¹⁹⁸ and, in this study, is meant to signify the disruption of a term (or concept) that has lost its vibrancy, a manoeuvre such as the one of Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*, in which he lets (the) *other* senses of a word or term (*irony*) come into play.

I will – defiantly – desist the need to classify the thinking of Kierkegaard and Levinas as *either* ethical *or* religious. Without subscribing to an existential tradition (a problematic label of its own), this study regards the works of both Kierkegaard and Levinas as explorations of the difficult and yet wondrous significations of the (human) life of an existent. A sense (not to be confounded with *meaningfulness*)

¹⁹⁷ “Lévinas a consacré son œuvre, après un parcours phénoménologique (confrontation exemplaire entre Husserl et Heidegger), à destituer la philosophie au profit de l’éthique. C’est à lui que nous devons, bien avant la mode du jour, une sorte de radicalisme éthique.” Badiou 1993, 19. “Lévinas has devoted his work, after a brush with phenomenology (an exemplary confrontation between Husserl and Heidegger), to the deposing [destitution] of philosophy in favour of ethics. It is to him that we owe, long before the current fashion, a kind of ethical radicalism.” Badiou 2001, 18.

¹⁹⁸ John Llewelyn, “Stay!” in *Research in Phenomenology*, 33 (2003), pp. 97-118, 109.

that comes to us as questions, or as a questioning, and that (to Levinas) is put into words in an ‘ethical language’, and that (in the writings of Kierkegaard) is *re*-searched through concepts and problematics that oftentimes verge on or are linked to terms with a distinct theological ring to it. The complex relation to ethics in the writings of Levinas is expressed in a passage from *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (orig. and abbreviated to *Autrement*) on the ‘langage éthique’:

The ethical language [le langage éthique] we have resorted to does not arise out of a special moral experience, independent of the description hitherto elaborated. The ethical situation [la situation éthique] of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics [l'éthique]. It does indeed arise from what Alphonse de Waelhens called non-philosophical experiences, which are ethically independent.¹⁹⁹

An ethical situation of responsibility is somehow anterior to ethics, it is suggested by Levinas in the language to which one must “resort” in an attempt to describe a situation that is otherwise than that of ethics. In a formulation that tries to stay loyal to the convoluted track of the quotation, we may say that the ethical situation of responsibility is not understandable on the basis of ethics but can be said only in an ethical language. Though this formulation might not lead to a clarification of the “status” of the ethical in the writings of Levinas, I hope that it testifies to the *complexity* of that relation, an intricacy that (in my view) calls any simple categorization into question.

Trailing the anterior situation (inaccessible on the basis of ethics) for a little while longer, we find yet another turn that relates to the hierarchic ordering of ethics and religion, a ranking that is framed by Merold Westphal in the following way: “For him [Levinas] ethics is first, then religion [...], while for Kierkegaard religion is first, then, ethics.”²⁰⁰ A phrasing that reflects the structure of the concern of the ethical raised by Levinas. However, in a chapter heavy with signification in *Autrement* (*Chapitre IV*) entitled “Substitution,” the sense of the

¹⁹⁹ Levinas 1998b, 120/“Le langage éthique, auquel nous avons eu recours, ne procède pas d’une expérience morale spéciale, indépendante de la description jusqu’alors poursuivie. La situation éthique de la responsabilité ne se comprend pas à partir de l’éthique. Elle procède, certes, de ce que Alphonse de Waelhens appelait des expériences non philosophiques et qui sont éthiquement indépendantes.” Levinas 2004, 191.

²⁰⁰ Westphal 2008, 37.

anterior situation – a condition or rather an uncondition²⁰¹ of the human existent – is investigated in depth, or, to follow the inquiry of the passage, in its passivity²⁰²:

But in the ‘prehistory’ of the ego posited for itself speaks a responsibility. The self is through and through a hostage, older than the ego, prior to principles. What is at stake for the self, in its being, is not to be. Beyond egoism and altruism it is the religiosity of the self.²⁰³

My point here is not that Levinas *really* is all about religiosity or religion as opposed to ethics; that would only be a reversal of the hierarchy that I suggest may not quite express the sense which I am trying to trail. In the anterior situation – “prior to principles” – of the above quotation, I find a plot otherwise than that of self-interest; we are met, instead, with a relational self, through and through a hostage, whose stakes – “in its being” – is otherwise than that of a *conatus essendi*. I will call this situation an *intrigue* of responsibility:

Levinas cherche un site, une situation ; et comme le terme de situation est trop statique, on va chercher, avec lui, un mot plus dynamique, ou mieux, dramatique, qu’il appellera de plus en plus une « intrigue ». Il parle d’une intrigue dans un scénario, et, dans l’*intrigue* vous entendez l’*intrication*, intrication d’un mouvement du haut vers le bas et du bas vers le haut. (L’abstraction, c’est du haut vers le bas, et la concrétude, c’est celle qui, d’en bas, va faire apparaître, par virage, le haut.)²⁰⁴

In terms of a *dynamique* of the figure ‘intrigue’, I follow the account given by Benny Lévy in the above quotation, only not in opposition to the motif of a situation. There is, I believe, a sort of *situatedness* of the intrigue, even if this is an inescapable situation that cannot be pinned down to a fixed, locatable, or even recuperable, location. I also follow the graceful slide of connotation suggested by Lévy in the

²⁰¹ “[L]’incondition du sujet,” Levinas 2004, 183. Cf. “[T]he unconditionality of a subject,” Levinas 1998b, 116.

²⁰² The passage titled – as is the chapter – ‘Substitution’ opens with the question: “In this exposition of the in itself of the persecuted subjectivity, have we been faithful enough to the anarchy of passivity?” Levinas 1998b, 113.

²⁰³ “Or, dans la « préhistoire » du Moi posé pour soi, parle une responsabilité. Le soi est de fond en comble otage, plus anciennement que Ego, avant les principes. Il ne s’agit pas pour le Soi, dans son être, d’être. Au selà de l’égoïsme et de l’altruisme, c’est la religiosité de soi.” Levinas 2004, 186. Cf. Levinas 1998b, 117.

²⁰⁴ Lévy 2009, 143.

accentuation of an *intrication* of movement “*dans l'intrigue*.” That is a point which I have attempted to signal with the word *intricacy*, and what Bettina Bergo, commenting on the translation of *l'intrigue*, has referred to as a complexity.²⁰⁵ To keep this complexity in play, however, I suggest another intrication of movements than that of Lévy who puts forward a vertical route, a track *du haut vers le bas et du bas vers le haut*. This study wishes to explore figures and formulas otherwise than the linear schemes of vertical motions and hierarchical orders, and, perhaps, also otherwise than progressing movements where the forward (or backward) course is curled into the path of an on-going spiral (as in the movement of incessant re-opening referred to in the prologue of this part). I am looking for a sense that comes about otherwise than from uninterrupted oscillations between terms, or otherwise than a dialectical exchange that goes into circuit. A vertical movement, “haut en bas, bas en haut, comme les anges qu’a vus Ya’aqov qui montent et qui descendent au début de la section *Va-ye-tse’*,”²⁰⁶ can, indeed, be found in the works of Levinas, not least in *Totalité et infini*, where a metaphoric of height is drawn on when describing a space stretched out in the relation of *l’infini* and sociality. Concerning the intrication of movements in the intrigue of responsibility, I do not want to deny such tracks of elevation; I do, however, wish to point out that there may also be other movements at play, explored not least in *Autrement* (and onwards), where the intricacy is pushed beyond verticality (without leaving behind the metaphoric of height), towards a complex relationality of substitution, proximity, and separation. A plot that is not played out in the contour of a ladder, but in a situation where the coordinates of the intrigue are not quite mappable, and

²⁰⁵ Bettina Bergo in a note commenting on the translation of the word ‘intrigue’ appearing in the lecture “‘The Same and the Other,’ *Friday, December 12, 1975*”: “The French term *l'intrigue* has frequently been translated, adequately enough, into English as “the plot.” However, because “plot” does not always connote the complexity, even mystery and secrecy, connoted by the French term, I prefer “intrigue” here. - Trans. [Bettina Bergo].” Levinas 2000, 140. In the Kluwer translation of *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, the translator Alphonso Lingis opts for the English “plot”, for example in the following meditation on the enigmatic figure of *illéité*. In the original we read: “Intrigue qui rattache à ce qui absolument se détache, à l’Absolu – détachement de l’Infini par rapport à la pensée qui cherche à le thématiser et au langage qui essaie de le tenir dans le Dit – et que nous avons appelé *illéité*,” Levinas 2004, 230, which is translated into English as follows: “This plot connects to what detaches itself absolutely, to the Absolute. The detachment of the Infinite from the thought that seeks to thematize it and the language that tries to hold it in the said is what we have called *illeity*.” Levinas 1998b, 147.

²⁰⁶ Reference made by Benny Lévy in a note: “I. *Genèse* 28, 12.” Lévy 2009, 144.

where the spatio-temporal movements tend to lean towards the temporal dimension. I will return to a movement that finds its sense in a temporal intrigue in the following part (regarding the ‘moment in time’), so, for now, the *anteriority* of the situation will be the clue in my investigation which in yet another detour answers to a concern of the ethical raised by Levinas when reading *Fear and Trembling*.

The anterior situation – “older than the ego, prior to principles” – turned out to be an intrigue of responsibility, a relationality of unconditional stakes for-the-other, a radical passivity rather than a commitment. This responsibility is beyond any hierarchy of the ethical and the religious, but beyond in a sort of elliptical movement. In a formulation that raises problems of its own, we may say: the intrigue of responsibility ‘is’ *anarchic* to both religion and ethics (it arises *before* the ethical and the religious). Such an anterior responsibility comes close to the dreadful responsibility of Abraham as suggested in this study. Somehow, I find my-self²⁰⁷ in an inescapable situation where I am already culpable, and, in this situation, I am unconditionally responsible without reason(s) and ground(s), which, in the writings of Levinas, is also to say that one finds out that one *is* not as *one* but (already) as the-one-for-the-others, as an intrigue of relationality. To be is to answer for answering in and for a *relational* existence. This way of responsibility does not *belong exclusively* to either religion or ethics, it is not *owned by* or it is not the *property of* either; it is, in a certain way, *anterior* to both the ethical and the religious, and, yet, far from unrelated to the religious and the ethical. This sort of responsibility somehow answers to and for the abyss and groundlessness that opens in both the ethical and the religious; as an an-archic sense, it arises as a call from who-knows-where. A vocation that can be heard in both religion and ethics, yet cannot be traced, and that is *anarchic* to any hierarchy. I find, then, (in both de silentio’s ‘dialectical lyric’ and the complex intrigue of Levinas) an unconditional answerability, unreasonable and yet inescapable; a situation (of the human existent

²⁰⁷ To Levinas, this is in more than one sense how one finds oneself, in a pre-original intrigue that one did not commit to.

or self) that “is not comprehensible on the basis of [*à partir de*]” either ethics or religion, yet, perhaps not comprehensible *outside* of these fields either. I believe it to be of profound significance that such ambiguous relations are kept in play, also to stay faithful to the intrigue (in both de silentio’s and Levinas’ writings) that may lose its intricacy when unfolded in the linearity of a sentence such as that of Westphal, however loyal to a literal source it may seem: that “for [Levinas] ethics is first, then religion [...], while for Kierkegaard religion is first, then, ethics.”

I am not claiming that such a scheme of reversal cannot be found in the writings of Levinas. Westphal’s phrasing here faithfully follows the formulations of Levinas: “[Kierkegaard] describes the encounter with God at the point where subjectivity rises to the level of the religious, that is to say, above ethics.”²⁰⁸ I only wish to point towards a sense of an intricately situated situation that in an *an-archic* way is prior to such ordering. In this study I am, put otherwise, not so much aiming at reporting ‘what is (literally) said’ as I am trying to trail what may be signalled in and with the writing, or, put otherwise, I am attempting to trace a sense that may *wink* (at us) in the textuality and context of a work.

A Levinasian hesitation

Alongside an underlying critique of Kierkegaard’s cloistered subjectivity, Levinas also takes issue with the retelling of the *Akedab*. Noting an alarming violence in Kierkegaard’s rendering of the Abraham narrative, Levinas suggests another way of telling the story:

But one could think the opposite: Abraham's attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order, in forbidding him to perform a human sacrifice, is the highest point in the drama. That he obeyed the first voice is astonishing; that he had sufficient distance with respect to that obedience to hear the second voice - that is the essential.²⁰⁹

To Levinas, one does not become a father of faith by leaving behind the ethical order. As opposed to the Abraham of *Fear and Trembling* (as understood by

²⁰⁸ Levinas 1996, 77.

²⁰⁹ Levinas 1996, 77. As already quoted in the former subsection.

Levinas) who believes himself called to rise “to the level of the religious, that is to say, above ethics,” Levinas praises the father of faith (as retold by Levinas) for his attentiveness to the voice that forbids him “to perform a human sacrifice” by which Abraham would leave the order of the ethical. I have called this call for another plot line: a concern of the ethical. To answer (to) this concern, I suggested that the Abraham of de silentio’s not-so-simple story does not become a father of faith by rising to a level of the religious but by a mad passionate plunge into the absurd, and I have, furthermore, pointed towards an anterior situation of dreadful responsibility (to answer for answering) beyond-yet-not-outside the orders of the ethical and the religious, an intrigue anarchic to any hierarchy, or ordering, of religion and ethics. In other words, I found in both the writings of de silentio and Levinas a sense that questions the question of Levinas and his unease in relation to the violence of *Fear and Trembling*. From the writing of de silentio, however, another concern may be raised, this one also somewhat troubled by violence, or, to be more precise: it is a worry about a silenced violence.

In the alternative narrative offered by Levinas – a plot rife with voices – he joins de silentio in insisting that Abraham does not become the father of faith by human sacrifice or murder. To Levinas, the essential point of the story is Abraham’s “attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order,” which – somewhat oddly – makes the movement of Abraham one of *return*, as opposed to the trajectory suggested by de silentio: an exiled man’s journey into the unknown, into the openness of the absurd. With his interpretation of the drama, Levinas ensures that Abraham returns safely to the order of the ethical, whereby the course of the dutiful father comes very close to resemble the journey of a Greek hero such as the Ithaca-bound Odysseus. Although Abraham did indeed take his son and a knife to a mountain, they both get to go home, thanks to his equanimity and obedient attentiveness to the ethical: “That he obeyed the first voice is *astonishing*; that he had sufficient distance with respect to that obedience to hear the second voice - that is the *essential*.”²¹⁰ In this somewhat ambiguous line, Levinas does not

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, italics added.

quite detach the narrative from a discourse of obedience. Notwithstanding the “sufficient distance” – a space of composure – “with respect to” the observance of the first voice, there is no thorough disruption of the course of obedience; it is rather a shift in attention or orientation from one voice to another. There may be a significant deviation from the request of the first voice to the essential call of the second, but there does not seem, to Levinas in this essay, to be the devastating collision as that of *Fear and Trembling* – the anxiety-opening disaster – that turns the sense of Abraham’s life into a paradox. It appears as if Levinas glosses over the *Angest* of a shattering, that he silences the violence of the *demand* (what I have called *the words of God* as a shattering moment). A discourse of obedience is, to de silentio, not a true *adventure*, to speak with Levinas. In *Fear and Trembling* (of my reading) the compliance of obedience is opposed to the outrageous passion of faith, not because faith is a refusal to submission, or, a rebellious stand against authority, but because faith is the answer to the thorough uncertainty, the groundlessness, and openness after a dreadful collision.

How to comply with a *contradiction*²¹¹ of command(s)?

Obedience loses its tenor in the face of an abyss of *Angest*, the sort of openness in which freedom may show itself as a dreadful possibility (*Mulighed*). One does not become a father of faith by means of respectful obedience or sober-minded devotion to duty in *Fear and Trembling* as I read it. To the question of this paragraph (‘how does one become the father of faith?’), we may add a tortuous suggestion: one does not (either) become Abraham *based* on a voice even if Abraham is who he became through his (way of) *answering*. The matter of voices is, as I have already pointed out, a question of its own. An enigmatic openness seems to be related to this issue, also in the alternative storyline of the *Akedab* offered by Levinas: The source/s of the voice/s in the drama remain/s undisclosed; they seem to come from who-knows-where or from who-knows-whom. Yet, despite this unsettledness or even anonymity of voices, Levinas

²¹¹ A point of contradiction that was also indicated by David Kangas: “[A] duty is imposed that explodes the very idea of duty.” Kangas 2007, 136.

leaves no doubt: the essential point of the drama is that Abraham was attentive to the voice that led him back to the ethical order.

A concern of the ethical

The question of voices is also brought up in a lecture²¹² from 1951 given by Martin Buber in relation to *Fear and Trembling*. His critical stance regards the apparent justification of ‘a suspension of the ethical’:

The first book of Kierkegaard’s that I read as a young man was *Fear and Trembling*, which is built entirely upon the Biblical narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac. I still think of the hour to-day because it was then that I received the impulse to reflect upon the categories of the ethical and the religious in their relation to each other. Through the example of the temptation of Abraham this book sets forth the idea that there is a “teleological suspension of the ethical,” that the validity of a moral duty can be at times suspended in accordance with the purpose of something higher, of the highest.

When God commands one to murder his son, the immorality of the immoral is suspended for the duration of this situation. [...] But Kierkegaard here takes for granted something that cannot be taken for granted even in the world of Abraham, much less in ours. He does not take into consideration the fact that the problematics of the decision of faith is preceded by the problematics of the hearing itself. Who is it whose voice one hears? For Kierkegaard it is self-evident because of the Christian tradition in which he grew up that he who demands the sacrifice is none other than God. But for the Bible, at least for the Old Testament, it is not without further question self-evident.²¹³

How, indeed, can we *know* whether a voice one hears is the voice of God? It is this openness which Buber testifies to in his objection to what (to him) appears to be a certainty in *Fear and Trembling*. How – given the uncertainty of the source and soundness of (hearing) a voice of God – can Kierkegaard take for granted that whom-or-what-ever addresses Abraham (if he is addressed at all) is, indeed, God, Buber inquires. The source of the address to Abraham may not (explicitly) be

²¹² ”On the Suspension of the Ethical,” Buber 1988, 115-120.

²¹³ Buber 1988, 115-118.

disputed in *Fear and Trembling*, but the writing of *de silentio* is far from a work of certitude; by all means, the main body of that work is made up of the *Problemata* of which none ends up in unequivocal conclusions.²¹⁴ In relation to the pseudonymous works (*Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*) explored in this study, we may say that *de silentio* and *Climacus* insist on the unresolved to the point where it no longer is of interest to rule out the possibility of (hearing) a voice of God either. Finding that an assessment or settlement of the *ontological* status of (a) God only succumbs to the need of (or belief in) certainty, the pseudonymous voices investigated in this study seem more engaged in *re-searching* what the sense of that odd word (God) might mean in relation to (human) existence. Or, to put it a little less entangled: to this study, *de silentio* and *Climacus* seem considerably less interested in the (non-)existence of (a) God than curious as to what that term (God) might mean in relation to (human) existence.

However, Buber's objection, a concern of the ethical, does not hinge on a dispute regarding ontology. Rather than being a matter of the *existence* of God, it is, to Buber, a question of what we could call the *essence* of God.²¹⁵ A concern shared by another reader (also writing from a Jewish tradition) of *Fear and Trembling*:

What Kierkegaard asserts to be the glory of God is Jewishly regarded as unmitigated sacrilege. Which indeed is the true point of the *Akedah*, missed so perversely by Kierkegaard. While it was a merit in Abraham to be willing to sacrifice his only son to his God, it was God's nature and merit that He would

²¹⁴ Here I differ with the suggestions of Furtak put forward in *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling. A Critical Guide* (Conway 2015). My reading, however, turns on this point, which is also to say that my reading turns on the (sense of a) paradox.

²¹⁵ God would not – God *could* not – allow the unethical act of a child sacrifice: "Abraham, to be sure, could not confuse with another the voice which one bade him leave his homeland and which he at that time recognized as the voice of God without the speaker saying to him who he was. And God did indeed 'tempt' him. Through the extremest demand He drew forth the innermost readiness to sacrifice out of the depths of Abraham's being, and He allowed this readiness to grow to full intention to act. He thus made it possible for Abraham's relation to Him, God, to become wholly real. But then, when no further hindrance stood between the intention and the deed, He contented Himself with Abraham's fulfilled readiness and prevented the action. [...] It can happen, however, that a sinful man is uncertain whether he does not have to sacrifice his (perhaps also very beloved) son to God for his sins (Micah 6: 7). For Moloch imitates the voice of God. In contrast to this, God Himself demands of this as of every man (not of Abraham, His chosen one, but of you and me) nothing more than justice and love, and that he 'walk humbly' with Him, with God (Micah 6:8) – in other words, not much more than the fundamental ethical." Buber, 1988, 118.

not accept an immoral tribute. And it was His purpose, among other things, to establish that truth.²¹⁶

Steinberg joins Buber in the objection to a ‘theological suspension of the ethical’, a concern that also reflects the unease of Levinas concerning the violence of Kierkegaard’s ranking of the religious above the ethical. In my reading, the disputed suspension remains a *problem* throughout *Fear and Trembling*, and, from the perspective of this study, it may be asked whether Steinberg may not have missed some sense (other than the literal) in his understanding of the “Danish thinker’s interpretation of the *Akedab*.” In question here, however, is what Kierkegaard (as regarded by Steinberg) has “missed so perversely,” namely, the “true point of the *Akedab*.”

Although Abraham can be praised for his *willingness* to sacrifice his son (according to Steinberg), Abraham does not become the father of faith by means of murder. Both de silentio and Levinas can subscribe to the latter line, a repeated formula also in this study. The main point of the above quotation, however, does not revolve around Abraham; Steinberg redirects our attention to the “nature and merit” of God, what I have called the *essence* of God. The ‘true point’, which Kierkegaard ‘so perversely missed’, is that the essence of God is closely linked and not separable from the ethical: God would not accept an immoral tribute because it is his essence to be just, or, because He *is* the Moral Law. In this interpretation of the *Akedab*, the narrative is not so much about how Abraham became the father of faith as it is a testimony to how God stays faithful to the nature of God. The plot is, here, not that of an intricately plotted intrigue but one of accordance, of affirmation, of establishing the truth (of God’s nature and merits), and, furthermore, this confirmation was the plan and purpose of God *all along*. A

²¹⁶ Steinberg 1960, 147. The issue also comes from the disagreement between Kierkegaard’s ‘religious truth’ as Steinberg understands it, and the ‘Jewish viewpoint’, again as Steinberg understands it. “The sole principle of religious truth, according to Kierkegaard, is subjectivity. For Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum and infinite, personal, passionate interest in one’s eternal happiness.” Steinberg 1960, 133; “From a Jewish viewpoint, God remains beyond man’s reason, perhaps beyond all reason. He cannot be counter to it, rationality pertaining to His nature.” Steinberg 1960, 146.

similar point can be found in an essay by Lipman Bodoff reviewing the test of the *Akedah*:

I propose, first, that God was testing Abraham's willingness to *refuse* to commit murder even when commanded by God to do so; second, that Abraham went along with that command with faith that – in the end – he would not be required to do so, and *not* with the zealous intent to consummate Isaac's murder, although he was prepared, in the end, to resist the command to kill his son if he had to; and third, that Abraham was rewarded for his moral stance, and his faith that God really does not need or want child sacrifice, or any violations of His moral law, to prove man's love or fear of God. This view of the *akedah* is consistent with fundamentals of Jewish law and philosophy.²¹⁷

To Bodoff, Abraham is to be venerated for his moral stance by means of which he passed the test of God. Though it seemed as if God wanted him to sacrifice his son, Abraham had faith in the moral stance of God, so to speak. He trusted that God is (always) consistent with His moral law to which a child sacrifice would be a severe violation. In this interpretation, Abraham did not become a father of faith by means of murder either; indeed, he became a father of faith *precisely* by means of *not* murdering, that is, by refusing the command to kill his son. By uncovering what he terms “the real test of the Akedah” (which is also the title of his essay), Bodoff manages to keep both Abraham and God in accordance with the moral law, or, to speak with *de silentio*, ‘within the ethical’, whereby the dread, the anguish, and the paradox are dissolved in a scheme of conformity to and affirmation of the “*fundamentals* of Jewish law.” God and the moral law (or, the ethical) are not separated; there is no contradiction.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Bodoff 1993, 71.

²¹⁸ We may find a similar point in a passage of Kant commenting on the Abraham narrative and the obscure voicing; a passage characteristically thorough in its rationale, utterly aware of the horror of the biblical story, and critical towards inconsistencies with regard to the moral law: “If God should really speak to man, man could still never know that it was God speaking. It is quite impossible for man to apprehend the infinite by his senses, distinguish it from sensible beings, and recognize it as such. But in some cases man can be sure the voice he hears it not God's. For if the voice commands him to do something contrary to moral law, then no matter how majestic the apparition may be, and no matter how it may seem to surpass the whole of nature, he must consider it an illusion. We can use, as an example, the myth of the sacrifice that Abraham was going to make by butchering and burning his only son at God's command (the poor child, without knowing it, even brought the wood for the fire). Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice, “That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God – of that I

The aim of this section is not to refute other interpretations of the Abraham narrative, but to trail the *possible* sense that comes about in reading the retelling(s) of de silentio. It may very well be so that the “real test” of Abraham was a trial of moral stance, and it may also be so that he passed successfully; that is not, however, the proposal of the *Fear and Trembling* of my reading. In Steinberg’s and Bodoff’s bid for consistency, I find a common pulse, a worry that reverberates in the concern of the ethical, also in that of Levinas: there is an *interest* in the concern of the ethical that is (also) a concern *for* the ethical, or, a concern for the ethical consistency of God, for the justice of God – and for the *justification* of God. But to justify the God of the *Akedah* is (following de silentio) to whitewash the horror of a God who tempts, it is to silence the disaster of the collision and the violence of the demand. In disclosing the true nature or the real purposes of God, Steinberg and Bodoff make the reasons of the God of the *Akedah* accessible, and, thus, understandable. To silentio, I suggest, the God of the Abraham narrative is far from reasonable. Though it may be difficult to decide what *exactly* the sense of (the word) God is in *Fear and Trembling*, I suggest that it is an import that goes toward the beyond-reasonable, and in this taking leave of the reasonable (and perhaps also of validity and even explanations), there opens a chasm of fear and trembling, but also an openness of wonder and (another) sense of the *possible*.

Whatever intentions, purposes, or, more or less obscure plans a God, who demands a man to sacrifice his child, may have, his²¹⁹ justice is (henceforth) questionable seeing that it (his justice) is (no longer) *evident* or unequivocal. I am not suggesting that God is *not* just or that he is *not* justice. Such claim would still be assertions of essence, and it is precisely this essence-ness – in the sense of substance or consistency – that (in my reading of *Fear and Trembling*) would have been *shattered* in the devastating collision of God’s demand. I only wish to displace the reading of *Fear and Trembling* from an account of certainty and justification towards one of ambiguity and openness. A sort of re-orientation of attentiveness,

am not certain, and never can be, not even if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.” Kant 1979, 115.

²¹⁹ I am following the gender-ruling of the two mono-theistic traditions under investigation in this paragraph.

one might say. It is to hear in the negotiation of Abraham with regard to the threatened town of Sodom (Gen 18) a genuine pleading: “*Hasobofet kol ba’arez lo ya’aseb mishpat?* [Will the Ruler of the universe not do justice?] (Gen 18:25).”²²⁰ Perhaps this is not only a rhetorical reasoning (‘*certainly*, he will do justice – as he cannot contradict himself’), but also a fervant and sincere question(ing), a trembling appeal, that is, an anxious call²²¹ for justice (after (the) all)?

Trust me! Promise!

A need for certainty and justification is far from covering or tied to a particular tradition. I have brushed past some raised concerns with regards to the interpretation(s) of the *Akedah* coming from what we may call a Jewish tradition in the different voices of Buber, Steinberg, and Bodoff. Yet, the need for certitude and consistency can also be found in another tradition that likewise counts the story of Abraham among its constitutive narratives. Here, in the wordings of Simon Podmore, a stop at the Protestant Martin Luther:

While the events of the *Akedah* are disturbing and mysterious, Luther regards that they have been recorded in Scripture for the comfort of the believer, encouraging them to have faith in the promise of God, even in the depths of despair: ‘Wherever we experience the opposite of a promise [e.g. the appearance of wrath rather than the promised grace], we should maintain with assurance that when God shows Himself differently from the way the promise speaks, this is merely a temptation.’ [...] ‘The promise of God for the salvation of believers is so immutable that Luther even asserts (p. 131) that ‘if God Himself appeared to me in His majesty and said: ‘You are not worthy of My grace; I will change My plan and not keep My promise to you,’ I would not have to yield to him, but it would be necessary to fight vehemently against God Himself.’²²²

Following Podmore’s interpretative rendering here, we may say that also to a tradition of Christianity, the narrative of Abraham is – as *Fear and Trembling* – a story on faith, which, in the above quotation, indicates a firm belief – despite it all

²²⁰ Bodoff 1993, 71.

²²¹ That is, as a prayer and not as a demand.

²²² Podmore 2012, 88.

– in the promise(s) of God. What I wish to bring out here is a sense of promise and faith that may be conveyed in the story of how Abraham became a father of faith. Luther – who was no stranger to spiritual trials or dreadful tribulation – does in his “Lectures on Genesis”²²³ not underestimate the greatness of Abraham nor does he understate the terribleness of the trial, yet, in commenting on the narrative, Luther nevertheless provides a clarification of God’s ‘true’ intention (what Bodoff called the ‘real test of the Akedah’) and set forth an unwavering definition of ‘promise’: “It is a momentous command and far harsher than we are able to imagine. Yet the fact that the text clearly states that God was doing this to test him is full of comfort. If Abraham had known this, he would have had fewer worries.”²²⁴ Through the anguish of temptation, then, we are encouraged to hold on to the unchangeable promises, and to bear in mind that there might be a reason for ordeal:

Our only consolation is that in affliction we take refuge in the promise; for it alone is our staff and rod, and if Satan strikes it out of our hands, we have no place left to stand. But we must hold fast to the promise and maintain, just as the text states about Abraham, we are tempted by God, not because He really want this, but because He wants to find out whether we love Him above all things and are able to bear Him when He is angry as we gladly bear Him when He is beneficent and makes promises.²²⁵

Without diminishing the dread of the Abraham narrative, the story of Abraham is, even so, interpreted as a terrifying yet uplifting lesson on trials and temptations, commands and obedience,²²⁶ and, not least, the dependability of promises:

²²³ *The Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters Twenty-One – Twenty-Five, 1955-86.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 22.1.2, 98.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 22.1.1, 93.

²²⁶ “This is an extraordinary example and a description of perfect obedience, when so suddenly and at one and the same time Abraham thrusts out of sight and does away with everything he used to hold dearest in his life: his home, his wife, and his son who had been so long expected and upon whom such grand promises had been heaped. [...] Therefore this passage deserves careful consideration, in order that we may learn true obedience toward God and how important it is to have the assurance of a command from God and with what great confidence this fills the hearts of the godly.” *Luther*, Vol. 4, Ch. 22.1.3, 103, 105-106.

Therefore one should hold fast to this comfort, that what God has once declared, this He does not change. You were baptized, and in Baptism the Kingdom of God was promised you. You should know that this is His unchangeable Word, and you should not permit yourself to be drawn away from it. For although it can happen – as with those who were on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28) – that He pretends to want to go farther and seems to be dealing with us as though He had forgotten His promises, faith in the Word must nevertheless retained, and the promise must be stressed – namely, that it is true and dependable – even if the manner, time, occasion, place, and other particulars are unknown. For the fact that God cannot lie is sure and dependable.²²⁷

In this way of explication (also of the game plan of God), the chronicle of Abraham becomes a story of comfort for trembling believers worried about their salvation: the promise of salvation is – despite deceitful appearances to the contrary – guaranteed in the end. But, in his effort to reassure anxious believers caught up in the trials and temptations of life, does not Luther here make a promise that is less comforting than it may seem? Should not a troubled believer have some reservations when offered a good that is there only in its absence or in its *not-yet*? The ‘not-yet-here’ of a promise is not an inconvenient packaging that one can unwrap and get rid of in order to get a firm grip of an ‘in-your-hand-ready-to-go’ manageability; the ‘not-yet-here’ is rather the pulse, or the very way, of a promise. We may ask: Does a promise ever come free of risk? The point here is not to tell believers that they cannot believe (in promises); my point is that they can *only* believe (in promises). Or, to put it more marked, I am trying to displace the sense of a promise from a framework of certainty and justification to one of openness and ambiguity.

²²⁷ “Therefore one should hold fast to this comfort, that what God has once declared, this He does not change. You were baptized, and in Baptism the Kingdom of God was promised you. You should know that this is His unchangeable Word, and you should not permit yourself to be drawn away from it. For although it can happen – as with those who were on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28) – that He pretends to want to go farther and seems to be dealing with us as though He had forgotten His promises, faith in the Word must nevertheless retained, and the promise must be stressed – namely, that it is true and dependable – even if the manner, time, occasion, place, and other particulars are unknown. For the fact that God cannot lie is sure and dependable.” Luther, Vol. 4, Ch. 22.1.2, 97.

In order to comfort believers tormented by anguish and unrest, faith is offered up as a *firm belief*: Promises *will* be kept, no doubt *and* despite doubt, and confusing experiences that call into question the solidity of convictions, attempting to shake the firmness of belief, are merely temptations (terrible as they may be) that must be (firmly) rejected.²²⁸ To push this understanding a bit, we may say that this is a faith that is not challenged by a call to “Trust!” as coming from an unfathomable abyss – but a faith that is encouraged to hold on to a bolstering assurance (even) through all the hardship: “You can trust (me). Promise!” A point of the *Fear and Trembling* of my reading is that an openness, or uncertainty and risk, (always) follows the latter statement. After a ‘Promise’, I hear (once again) the dare or invitation of a “Trust!” No guarantees or firm grip, no immutable fundamentality (be it the Holy Word or the Moral Law) or solid ground, are given with either faith or promises. And this, I have suggested, is a ‘very human situation’, or the ungroundedness of and in human existence, not limited to believers or any other specific groups or spheres. It is the resonance of an unconditioned situation, the ungroundedness of existence, the vulnerability of a life involved in relations. “I love you. You can trust me. Promise! – ”

In my investigation into how one becomes a father of faith, the term ‘faith’ has turned out to be a question of its own. It seems as if one can become a father of faith in more than one way, and, not least, in more than one sense. We will stay for a while with this discourse to examine what it might mean to trust, and to explore more closely the kind of faith of which Abraham became the father.

The issue of trust in the Abraham narrative as it is played out in *Fear and Trembling* is regarded a key concept by Stephen Evans, who, in tackling the difficult questions concerning the disturbing demand of the *Akedah*, gives the following

²²⁸ ”For this reason St. Paul so often urges us to have full assurance (πληροφορία), that is, a firm and unshakeable knowledge of God’s will toward us, which gives assurance to our consciences and fortifies them against all uncertainty and mistrust.” Luther, Vol. 4, Ch. 22.1.25, 144-145.

expounding:

Abraham knows God as an individual; he knows God is good, and he loves and trusts God. Although he does not understand God's command in the sense that he understands why God has asked him to do this or what purpose it will serve, he does understand that it is indeed God who has asked him to do this. As a result of his special relationship, Abraham's trust in God is supreme. This trust expresses itself cognitively in an interpretive framework by which he concludes, all appearances to the contrary, that this act really is the right thing to do in this particular case. God would not in fact require Isaac of him (FT, p. 46); or even if God did do this thing, he would nonetheless receive Isaac back and "grow old in the land, honoured by the people, blessed in his generation, remembered forever in Isaac" (FT, 35).²²⁹

I find this explanation – of trust as well as of *Fear and Trembling* – both 1) well-founded as regards the textual evidence, and 2) slightly alarming in terms of the interpretation hereof. What troubles me in the Evans-quotation might be exemplified in a remark concerning his observations of "Abraham's supreme trust." It is here not a question of proclaiming the *right* (in the sense of correct) understanding of de silentio's intricate writing, but a matter of accentuating a *difference* in readings.

My unease concerns the trust expressed "cognitively in an interpretive framework by which he [Abraham] concludes, all appearances to the contrary, that this act [(the willingness of) sacrificing Isaac] is the right thing to do in this particular case." In the case of a father of faith who – all (seemingly contradictory) things considered – can conclude that his act "really is the right thing to do in this particular case", we may ask whether it still is a question of faith, or, if it somehow has slid into a position of confidence. As with the interpretations given by Evans and this study, the difference at issue is more one of slight displacement than of gaping disparity. It may, nevertheless, matter. There is a settled assurance of being right in Evans' explication of "Abraham's supreme trust" that almost consolidate the trust of a "special relationship" into a contractual warranty. Trust, here, spells confidence, and almost rhymes with certainty. There is a level-headedness in this

²²⁹ Evans 1981, 145.

conception of trust; an accountant nearly materializes, in suit and armed with a blackberry, and although such a character might very well be one of the so-called knights of faith, as proposed by de silentio, I find this confident trust a little too stable to the Abraham of my reading. As a (hu)man pushed to the extreme (*yderste*, SKS 4, 132/FT 37), not getting (a) closure (SKS 4, 203/FT 115), we may ask how Abraham could (ever) arrive at such an assessment that would deem his act “the right thing to do”? To this study, he is not in a position to reach a verdict like that because there is no ground upon which he can reach such conclusion.

To Evans, however, the proposal of a supreme trust in God, against “all appearances to the contrary”, is not without basis but relies on what we have called a matter of *essence*. How, I ask somewhat reluctantly, can Abraham (as understood by Evans) be so sure that “it is indeed God who has asked him to do this [sacrificing Isaac],” and that it was “the right thing to do”? Evans’ reply: because “Abraham knows God as an individual; he knows God is good, and he loves and trusts God.” Abraham’s firm trust is, in other words, *based* on something, namely, that Abraham is in a “special relationship” with God, and that he knows that “God is good.” A similar point regarding an ‘essence’ of God is made by Simon Podmore who: “offer[s] a theological reading of Abraham’s ‘ordeal’ [*Provelse*] as a test of faith in the unchanging nature of a God already known to him as a God of love.”²³⁰ But how, I stubbornly ask, does Abraham *know* that? Note that I do not (as Podmore) offer a theological reading or a scriptural exegesis but only a literary interpretation of a text in which the formulas “God is good” and “God is love” are put to the test (of faith) along with other matters of similar urgency. I do not object to a belief that states: “God is love” or “God is good.” Nor do I wish to enter a discussion as to whether God *is* or *is not* good, or *is* or *is not* love. The matter in question is (only) whether we can *know* it, or more precisely, whether Abraham can *know* it, that is, whether he can know it *for sure*.

²³⁰ Podmore 2012, 72.

Enters God

In de silentio's story about how Abraham became a father of faith, Abraham does, admittedly, *know* God in the sense of being *related* to God, a relation or a *relating* that in a tremendous way comes to define the life of Abraham. *Fear and Trembling* lets the story of Abraham begin before he had even become Abraham,²³¹ at the very first step on his adventure:

By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers and became an alien in the promised land. He left one thing behind, took one thing along: he 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.²³²

The *Eulogy on Abraham* then trails the father-to-be on his on-going journey and (not least) on his on-going trials, following the formula of *by faith* [Ved Troen]: “By faith Abraham emigrated,” “By faith he was an alien in the promised land,” “By faith Abraham received the promise.”²³³ All the way throughout the exile, the covenant, and, finally, the arrival of Isaac (“Then came the fullness of time”),²³⁴ God does not enter the story. We hear only about ‘God’s chosen’, Abraham, who left behind his worldly understanding and by faith became the father of Isaac. It is not, in this accord, by the loving word of God that Abraham left the land of his fathers, nor did he receive the covenant in a pouring out of God’s goodness. To be God’s chosen, to live by faith, proves an increasingly unreasonable affair. Had he not already left behind his worldly understanding, he could have lost it somewhere in the land of promise(s). Up to the point of the fullness of time (*Tidens Fylde*), where God has yet to enter the story, we may say that Abraham knows God (only) by faith. As the plot line unfolds and thickens, we are told that our lead character, grey haired but not dulled by grief, had fought “with that crafty

²³¹ As he was, then, still called Abram (Gen 12).

²³² FT 17/SKS 4, 113: “Ved Troen vandrede Abraham ud fra Fædrenes Land og blev Fremmed i Forjættelsen. Han lod Eet tilbage, tog Eet med sig; han lod sin jordiske Forstand tilbage, og tog Troen med sig; ellers var han vel ikke vandret ud, men havde tænkt, det er jo urimeligt.” The translation here convert the quizzical expressions (in Danish) ‘*vel*’ and ‘*jo*’ into the more positive and unwavering terms: ‘certainly’ and ‘surely’ (in English).

²³³ FT 17/SKS 4, 113-114: “Ved Troen vandrede Abraham ud,” “Ved Troen var han en Fremmed,” “Ved Troen modtog Abraham Forjættelsen.”

²³⁴ FT 18/SKS 4, 115: “Da kom Tidens Fylde.”

power that devises all things, with that vigilant enemy who never dozed, with that old man who outlives everything – he had fought with time and kept his faith. *Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment.*”²³⁵

Enters God:

‘And *God tempted* [fristede] Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain that I shall show you.’

So everything was lost, even more appalling than if it had never happened ! So the Lord was only mocking Abraham ! [...] *Who* is this who seizes the staff from the old man, *who* is this who demands that he himself shall break it ! [...] Is there no sympathy for this venerable old man, none for the innocent child? And yet, Abraham was God’s chosen one, and it was the Lord who imposed the ordeal. Now everything would be lost! [...] And it was God who tested him!²³⁶

We finally hear a *word of God*, and this is what we get. The horror of these words of God reverberates in the flood of exclamation marks that follow. The rising unreasonableness and dubious involvement of being God’s chosen is concentrated in one appalling moment. I have joined David Kangas in his formulation: in this moment of dire horror, *God withdraws behind a collision*. In that interpretation, the entrance of God is (also) the withdrawal of God. As this is a figure I shall return to, the point I wish to advance here is that whatever the relation between Abraham and God is about, it is not one of knowledge. It is rather one of faith. God may or may not be love. At this point in the story, or in this catastrophic moment of a life, we may say that it has indeed become a bit questionable. But

²³⁵ FT 19/SKS 115: “[H]an havde kæmpet med hiin snilde Magt, der opfinder Alt, med hiin aarvaagne Fjende, der aldrig blunder, med hiin gamle Mand, der overlever Alt, - han havde kæmpet med Tiden og bevaret Troen. Nu blev al Stridens Forfærdelse samlet i eet Øieblik.”

²³⁶ FT 19-20, italics added/SKS 4, 115-116: “Og Gud fristede Abraham og sagde til ham, tag Isak Din eneste Søn, som Du elsker, gaa hen i det Land Morija og offer ham der til Brændoffer paa et Bjerg, som jeg vil vise dig.’ Saa var da Alt forspildt, forfærdeligere end om det aldrig var skeet! Saa drev Herren da kun sin Spot med Abraham! [...] Hvo er da den, der river Staven fra Oldingen, hvo er den, der fordrer, at han selv skal bryde den! [...] Er der ingen Medlidenhed med den ærværdige Olding, ingen med det Uskyldige Barn! Og dog var Abraham Guds Udvalgte, og det var Herren, der paalagde Prøvelsen. Alt skulde nu være forspildt! [...] Og det var Gud, der prøvede ham.”

then Abraham would not be who he became. He is not (in this storyline) a questioner. He did not become the father of doubt(ing), but a father of faith. To the question of this section: “How can Abraham *know* that God is love?” – I have ventured that he *cannot* know. But he may believe so.

The suggestion of this section has been that a disastrous collision (*God* >< *tempts*) – an unresolvable contradiction – has thrown Abraham into an ambiguous openness without ground(s). In this unconditional and unfounded situation the passion called faith is a way of relating without certainty. In such a relating, there would be a vulnerability²³⁷ trembling slightly even at its most passionate, but also a pulsating fervor of madness that, looking into the abyss of absurdity, would (no longer) be asking for assurances or guarantees. I find in the confident trust of Evans a faint-hearted need of reason and justification. To the firm trust that God is good, the collision of “God tempted” is not a shattering disaster but more like an awkward misconception, an inconvenience of sort that must be explained (away), so that God, the ethical, and Abraham – and the internal consistency of all three of them – are preserved, or, perhaps: saved.

In another context, C. Stephen Evans has made it clear how the command to sacrifice a child is to be refused without rejecting what he calls the divine moral authority:

Logically, the conditional proposition (a) “If God commanded me to sacrifice a child, it would be right for me to sacrifice a child” is consistent with (b) “God would never ask me to sacrifice a child.” If I believe (b), then I can consistently believe (a) while holding that the antecedent of (a) will never be satisfied. I could even believe in the truth of (a) while holding that (b) is logically necessary, and thus that it is logically impossible for antecedent in (a) to be satisfied.²³⁸

What seems to be the essential point of Evans’ line of reasoning – or defence – is the proposal of proposition (b): “God would never ask me to sacrifice a child.” As

²³⁷ FT 16: “[B]ut Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness [...]”/SKS 4, 113: “[M]en Abraham var større end Alle, stor ved den Kraft, hvis Styrke er Afmagt [...]”.

²³⁸ Evans 2015, 64.

this proposition comes unexplained, we could – staying in line with Evans – conceive the following unfounded rationale: (b1) If God is good and loving and consistent, and (b2) a good and loving God would not demand the sacrifice of a child (as that is not considered a loving and good move), then (b3) God could not demand the sacrifice of a child since that would imply a contradiction, and God is good and love and consistent. I can, in a way, walk with Evans along these sorts of explanations. It does, by all means, seem reasonable to assume that a good and loving God would not demand the sacrifice of a child. But I am not quite convinced that conditional propositions, however logically sound they may be, sort out the anxiety awoken in a story such as that of Abraham, that is, when re-imagined by de silentio. Even before the conclusion of Evans’ argumentation, a wondering question arises: *Why* is this explanation considered necessary in the first place - if not because the rule of consistency has been called profoundly into question? Or, why is the God of the *Akedah* in need of all these vindicating schemes and explanations – if not because it remains a troubling narrative that raises complex and perhaps irresolvable problems? Whatever the outrageous demand (of the *words of God* in *Fear and Trembling*) might signify, it involves a disturbing or even devastating blow to the reasonability of reason and the order of logic in relation to (the word) God.

Perhaps, then, a pursuit for consistency is not the way to explore sense in a work like that of *Fear and Trembling*? That is, a pursuit for consistency that too obediently answers to logic, and a reasoning that assesses meaning based on strict coherency. Not that *Fear and Trembling* is an in-cohesive work, and de silentio’s writing a nonsensical rambling, but to my reading, the *heterogeneous* and the *equivocal* may have a sense of their own, or, open for a sense that cannot quite be ordered.²³⁹ I find that de silentio (as well as Climacus in the *Fragments*, as shall be pointed to in Part two) has a way of dislocating sense and orientation in a text. Somehow, along a passage, a term is put out of joint, its shades shifted slightly, or, the question(s) it

²³⁹ The sense that comes about in or with the heterogeneous and equivocal is difficult to get a hold on as it seems to somehow evade the discourse and not *quite* being there, or (perhaps simultaneous) it is too much, excessive, and, in this way, in-comprehensible.

comes with may concern us anew. I have called this manoeuvre in writing: a determination. In his far-from-simple writings, de silentio appears at times to investigate the import of a concept rather by exploring its complexity than by defining it by way of stringency. I find this work to be more curiously engaged in questions than determined to end up with valid definitions. I have suggested that an undercurrent of ambiguity reverberates throughout *Fear and Trembling*. To me, the story of Abraham hinges on a *paradox* and is radically opened by a contradiction that complicates the (final) settlement of the problems raised in and with this anxiety-ridden plot. It is not so certain to me that de silentio resolves the *Problemas* of *Fear and Trembling*,²⁴⁰ nor that he sorts out the dilemma(s) of the *Akedah*, but this may not be a failure after (the) all.

Hope and a mad passion to the point of non-sense

In my investigation of *how* Abraham became a father of faith, I have taken yet another detour to explore the question of ‘faith’, as I found that one can become a father of faith in more than one way, and, not least, in more than one sense. One definition, put forward by Evans, related faith to trust in a sense that leans toward conviction, or, as I phrased it: trust here spells confidence, and almost rhymes with certainty. Another take on the faith of Abraham as portrayed in *Fear and Trembling* is suggested by John Lippitt in an essay²⁴¹ relating de silentio’s work to a 1843 discourse of Kierkegaard titled “The expectancy of faith.” Building on²⁴² a proposal of John Davenport²⁴³ (‘faith as eschatological trust’), Lippitt pushes the sense of faith toward what he – with an expression found in a work by Jonathan Lear²⁴⁴ – calls ‘radical hope’. Lear’s book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* follows Plenty Coups, the last great Chief of the Crow Nation tribe. Met with a looming and fatal threat to the way of life of his tribe, Plenty Coups

²⁴⁰ I suggest that it remains an unresolved question whether Abraham – and God – ‘was justified’.

²⁴¹ Lippitt 2015.

²⁴² “My purpose here is to try to complement Davenport’s account, by putting more emphasis than is typical on the role of *hope* in Abraham’s faith.” Lippitt 2015, 122.

²⁴³ Davenport 2008.

²⁴⁴ Lear 2006.

finds “something to hold on to in the face of this overwhelming challenge,”²⁴⁵ namely, what Lear (inventively envisioning the thoughts of Plenty Coups) terms a radical hope, that is, a hope “directed toward a future that transcends the current ability of understanding.”²⁴⁶ Such hope does not have much to build its expectations on:

Rather, the commitment is only the bare possibility that, from this disaster, something good will emerge: the Crow shall somehow survive. Why that will be or how that will be is left open. The hope is held in the face of the recognition that, given the abyss, one cannot really know what survival means.²⁴⁷

Plenty Coups (and Lear) finds the inspiration to this radical commitment in a dream vision received long before the disaster sets in. The interpretation of the dream vision provides Plenty Coup and the elders of the Crow tribe with significant clues as how to handle the imminent and yet utterly unforeseeable devastation.

Lippitt identifies in Lear’s meditation on cultural devastation and the moral imagination of Plenty Coups:

key aspects [...] that in important respects parallel the Abraham case:

1. A divine source tells us that an accepted way of life is coming to an end.
2. Our conception of the good is tied up with that way of life – precisely the way of life that is about to disappear.²⁴⁸

To go along with Lippitt here, we may say that like Plenty Coups, Abraham must come to terms with a devastating threat to a way of life and the conceptions and expectations bound up with this way of life: “with the *Akedah* command, something radical has changed in Abraham’s understanding of God’s covenant and thus what the future holds.”²⁴⁹ Though I wish to point towards a sense of faith

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 92.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 104, slightly modified.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 94.

²⁴⁸ Lippitt 2015, 135.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

that relates to an openness of temporality that is not tied (exclusively) to the future, my reading of *Fear and Trembling* follows Lippitt's intuition of the situation of Abraham as being altered radically with the command. Whereas Plenty Coups faces a (looming) cultural devastation, we may say that Abraham faces an existential devastation, and yet is neither of these two narratives of strained father figures a tale of utter despair or capitulation, even if a sort of devastation was inevitable in both cases. Lear's imaginative and thoughtful study on vulnerability and survival "in the face of cultural devastation" links hope to courage, and, his book is, I suggest, a meditation²⁵⁰ on *a way of coping*, which is not far from a repeated point in this part: namely, of faith as a way of relating.

In the parallel situation of Plenty Coups and Abraham, facing a devastating threat, Lippitt draws attention to the possibility of a radical form of faithfulness (citation of Plenty Coups marked by inverted commas):

However, there are grounds for hope because:

"God . . . is good. My commitment to the genuine transcendence of God is manifest in my commitment to the goodness of the world transcending our necessarily limited attempt to understand it. My commitment to God's transcendence and goodness is manifested in my commitment to the idea that *something good will emerge even if it outstrips my present capacity for understanding what that good is.*"²⁵¹

As the "grounds for hope" in this case come from a dream vision, some might call them a bit shaky, however, the point I wish to follow in the above quotation is the description of commitment to "God's transcendence and goodness." A faithful commitment is here to testify to the "genuine transcendence" and goodness of God even if this goodness transcends my (present) understanding (of it). This way of committing commits without any guarantees or certainty. It is to say: God is goodness – whatever that means, or whatever that may be. To this study, the radical hope of chief Plenty Coups is a way of relating to whatever may come with the expectancy of hope, only, it is an expectancy that takes the *suspense* of hoping

²⁵⁰ I highlight here one motif among many thematic threads in Lear's book.

²⁵¹ Lippitt 2015, 135. Citing Lear 2006, 94, italics added by Lippitt.

seriously, committing to *whatever* that *may* come. A radical hope is not based on nothing, but the grounds for hope are (themselves) groundless: it may be a dream vision, or an incredible promise received by an exile on alien territory, or even a disturbing command; strange messages coming from who-knows-where and without a certificate. Plenty Coups does not get a lease to the free roaming of the land of his fathers and Abraham does not get a license to kill. They both walk into the unknown *as if* God is goodness – whatever that may be.²⁵²

To Lippett, the sense of a radical hope is linkable to the definition of trust as it is proposed by Evans: “I think the overall line for which I am arguing here is consistent with that of C. Stephen Evans, for whom Abraham’s trust in God amounts to a confidence that ‘God will keep his promises’ – without knowing *how*.”²⁵³ In a note referring to this compatibility, Lippett continues:

²⁵² It is possible to hear in this formulation an echo of the formula favoured by Richard Kearney, not least in his book *The God Who May Be. A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2001.) Since the openness of the title of Kearney’s much-cited book seems close to the suggestions of this study, I wish to indicate a possible divergence in the thoughts of Kearney and the writing in *Fear and Trembling* as I read it. Though Kearney is careful not to let the-god-who-may-be solidify into (a) being, this study still finds the question mark of this may-be a little too vague. The *capability* of Kearney’s God-who-may-be is weakened considerably, but not entirely. It seems, somehow, achievable for this God to be actualized (eventually and with the help of “us”), or to put it otherwise: without betraying his formula, Kearney seems to subtly replace the accentuation in the book title from ‘may’ to ‘be’ (a rather lengthy quotation from Kearney here follows): “If the play of eschatological possibility may indeed ‘save us,’ it is only to the extent that we choose to respond to it by acting to bring the coming Kingdom closer, making it more possible, as it were, by each of our actions, while acknowledging that its ultimate realization is impossible to us alone. That’s what we [Kearney] mean when we say ‘God may be.’ The Kingdom is possible but we may decide not to accept the invitation. The Gospel of Matthew acknowledges this freedom to respond to refuse when it says, ‘we sang for you but you did not dance’ (Matthew 11:17). We don’t *have* to dance,” Kearney 2001, 110, and furthermore, “Is such a thing possible? Not for us alone. But it is not impossible to God - if we help God to become God. How? By opening ourselves to the ‘loving possible,’ by acting each moment to make the impossible that bit more possible,” Kearney 2001, 111. Here the ‘impossible’ is impossible only if God and humans do not join their efforts, so to speak. If ‘we help God to become God’, the impossible will be (may be) *within* the realms of the possible, and, to follow the line of thinking in the quotation, it (the possible that may be) will then be within the realms of the achievable, that is, in the words of Kearney: in its ‘ultimate realization’. It comes down, then, not only to a question of the possible, but also of eschatology. This study has some hesitations concerning a may-be that can become “a bit more possible” (what does that mean?), and that can, in the very end, come to an ultimate realization. I do not wish to denounce the anticipations or hopes that is connected to such fulfillments; what is at issue here is the sense of the term ‘possible’, that is, whether it leans (or longs) towards a probable or an achievable.

²⁵³ Lippitt 2015, 137.

[As] Evans puts it, ‘Abraham simply rests unwaveringly in his trust in God’s goodness; he believes that God will keep his promises, *even though he does not know exactly how God will do this*, and realizes that from the perspective of human experience, it looks impossible.’²⁵⁴ What I [Lippitt] am suggesting is that drawing on Lear can enable us to gloss the italicized phrase – and also to show that Abraham’s hope is more radical than this way of putting it may at first make it appear.²⁵⁵

This study wishes to support Lippitt in his suggestion of a hope that might be “more radical than this way of putting it may at first make it appear.” It might even be more radical than it appears to Evans. Though I will not object to Evan’s formulation of an Abraham who “believes that God will keep his promises,” I do oppose the proposal of an Abraham who “*simply* rests unwaveringly in his trust in God’s goodness.” To my reading, the passion called faith is not a confident rest but a movement of risk²⁵⁶ (a risk and peril to which the radical hope proposed by Lear is precisely a relating). What I am pushing for is a reading that stays faithful to the sense of paradox as it is put forward in *Fear and Trembling*. Whereas Lippitt emphasized the *how* in his phrasing (“Abraham’s trust in God amounts to a confidence that “God will keep his promises” – without knowing *how*”), I wish to supplement by adding yet another stress: also on the *knowing*. We may even say that such a suggestion (regarding the passion called faith) calls the radicalness of Lear’s hope into question, that is, when ‘radical’ is taking in its etymological sense of ‘root’ [*radix*]. I wish (once more) to emphasize that the grounds of hope are (themselves) utterly groundless. Otherwise than Evans’ statement of confident trust – “he [Abraham] does not know exactly *how* God will do it,”²⁵⁷ I venture an expression that testifies to the utter openness of the situation: “he does not exactly

²⁵⁴ Evans, “Introduction” in *Fear and Trembling*, xix, Lippitt’s emphasis.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Lippitt is citing Evans from the introduction to *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans, Cambridge University Press 2006, xix.

²⁵⁶ SKS 4, 169: ”Den tragiske Helt er snart færdig [...], han gjør den uendelige Bevægelse og er nu betrygget i det Almene. Troens Ridder derimod holdes søvnløs; thi han prøves bestandig, og i ethvert Øieblik er der en Mulighed af at kunne vende angrende tilbage til det Almene, og denne Mulighed kan ligesaa godt være en Anfægtelse som Sandhed. Oplysning derom kan han hente hos noget Menneske; thi saa er han udenfor Paradoxet.” Cf. SKS 170: “Troens Ridder holdes bestandigt i Spænding.”

²⁵⁷ C. Stephen Evans, “Introduction,” in *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans, Cambridge University Press 2006, xix, italics added.

know *if* God will do it,” and yet, he stays committed; he relates *as if* God will do so. To me, the trust of Evans is a sort of postponed certainty: There might be some openness as to *how* God will resolve matters, but there is no uncertainty as to *whether* it will be resolved. That is openness to a certain degree,²⁵⁸ to speak with Kierkegaard. My study points toward a passion that does not rely on certainty of *any* degree:

[Faith] is no esthetic emotion [...] but the paradox of existence. If, for example, in the face of every difficulty, a young girl still remains convinced that her desire will be fulfilled, this assurance is by no means the assurance of faith [*saa er denne Forvisning slet ikke Troens*], even though she has been brought up by Christian parents and perhaps has had confirmation instruction from the pastor for a whole year. She is convinced in all her childlike naiveté and innocence [...]. Her assurance is most captivating, and one can learn much from her, but there is one thing that cannot be learned from her – how to make movements – *for her assurance does not dare*, in the pain of resignation, *to look the impossibility in the eye*.²⁵⁹

Faith is not defined by the (institutional) teaching of a religious tradition either at home or by the authorized representative of the church, *de silentio* mockingly remarks. More significantly to this study, however, faith, here, is *not* – in the face

²⁵⁸ On ”*Til en vis Grad*”: SKS 13, 131: ”Dog kan jeg ogsaa forklare mig noiere. At anbringe et Afgjørende – og dette er Ogaven – lader sig ikke gjøre paa samme Maade som Alt Andet; og naar nu tilmed Tidens Ulykke just er dette »til en vis Grad«, til en vis Grad at gaae ind paa Alt, naar dette just er Sygdommen, saa maa der for Alt passes paa, at det saavidt det er muligt ikke skeer, at den ogsaa til en vis Grad gaaer ind herpaa, hvorved Alt er tabt.”

”But I can also explain myself more fully. To introduce something decisive – and this is the task – cannot be done in the same manner as everything else; and therefore now, especially when the disaster of the time is precisely this ”to a certain degree,” to enter into everything to a certain degree, when precisely this is the sickness, every care must be taken so that as far as possible it does not happen that one also enters into this task to a certain degree, whereby everything is lost.” ”*Addition to This Must Be Said, or How Is Something Decisive to Be Introduced?*” in *The Moment and the late Writings by Soren Kierkegaard*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press 1998, 93.

²⁵⁹ FT 47, italics added/SKS 4, 141-142: ”Troen er derfor ingen æsthetisk Rørelse [...], men Tilværelsens Paradox. Naar saaledes en ung Pige tiltrods for alle Vanskeligheder dog holder sig forvisset om, at hendes Ønske vel bliver opfyldt, saa er denne Forvisning slet ikke Troens, og det uagtet hun er opdragen af christelige Forældre, og maaskee et heelt Aar har gaaet til Præsten. Hun er forvisset i al sin barnlige Naivetet og Uskyldighed [...]. Hendes Forvisning er saare elskelig, og man kan lære Meget af hende, men én Ting lærer man ikke af hende, man lærer ikke at gjøre Bevægelser; this hendes Forvisning tør ikke i Resignationens Smerte see Umuligheden under Øine.”

of all difficulties [*tiltrods for alle Vanskeligheder*] – to stay *convinced* of the fulfilment of one's hopes (however courageously that may be; *heroic* even). It is, rather, to let go of assurances, to risk it all, and to look the impossible in the eye. The passion called faith (though wholehearted and unswerving) is not a firm belief; it relates to a paradox and, thus, does not *found* itself on something. To 'remain convinced in the face of all difficulties' is endearing [*saare elskelig*] and admirable, but it is not a guide as to how one 'makes movements' or how one becomes a father (or mother) of faith. Assurance (as that of the young girl in the above quotation) remains safely on the ground, stays put with confidence and hangs on to convictions, whereas the 'movement of faith' is a plunge "into the absurd."²⁶⁰ Faith is not to hope-fully believe that it *might* be possible, but to dare to acknowledge that it *is* impossible:

This is the peak on which Abraham stands. The last stage to pass from his view is the stage of infinite resignation. He actually goes further and comes to faith. All those travesties of faith – the wretched, lukewarm lethargy that thinks: There's no urgency, there's no use in grieving beforehand; the despicable hope that says: One just can't know what will happen, it could just possibly be – those travesties are native to the paltriness of life, and infinite resignation has already disdained them.²⁶¹

To me, a *non-sense* trembles in the faith of Abraham (of *de silentio*). Faith is (in my reading) an answer to *openness*, to *bare* uncertainty, rather than the trust *in* something. It is a relating that lets go of the 'something' of expectations and commits to 'the impossible' of the hope: "for if he wants to imagine that he has faith without passionately acknowledging the impossibility with his whole heart

²⁶⁰ FT 34: "I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently [*tillidsfuld*] into the absurd; it is for me an impossibility, but I do not praise myself for that. I am convinced that God is love, for me this thought has a primal lyrical validity." / SKS 4, 129: "Jeg kan ikke gjøre Troens Bevægelse, jeg kan ikke lukke Øienene og styrte mig tillidsfuld i det Absurde, det er mig en Umulighed, men jeg roser mig ikke deraf. Jeg er overbevist om, at Gud er Kjærlighed; denne Tanke har for mig en oprindelig Lyrisk Værdi." Note here how *de silentio* stays securely on the ground, holding on to a firm belief ("I am convinced that God is love"), and finding it impossible (for him) to plunge into the absurd. Staying on the safe side, however, is not how one becomes a father of faith.

²⁶¹ FT 37/SKS 4, 132: "Paa denne Spidse staaer Abraham. Det sidste Stadium, han taber af Sigte, er den uendelige Resignation. Han gaaer virkelig videre og kommer til Troen; thi alle disse Vrængbilleder af Troen, den jammerlige lunkne Dorskhed, der tænker: det har vel ingen Nød, det er ikke værd at sørge før Tiden; det usle Haab, der siger: man kan ikke vide, hvad der vil skee, det var dog muligt – disse Vrængbilleder høre hjemme i Livets Elendighed, og dem har allerede den uendelige Resignation uendelig foragtet."

and soul, he is deceiving himself and his testimony is neither here nor there, since he has not even attained infinite resignation.”²⁶² The passion called faith in *Fear and Trembling* is a commitment *without reason*, it is a hope that recognizes the *impossibility* of that hope. It may all be *for nothing*. Abraham might take his son and a knife to a mountain *for nothing*. He cannot *know*. His journey is not one of confidence (though he might be unwavering in his steps); it is a walking testimony to absurdity. We have brought in the formula of ‘*for nothing*’ from the writings of Levinas: from his suggestion of an “overflowing of sense by nonsense” (*ce débordement du sens par le non-sens*).²⁶³ In an ambiguous play of sense and non-sense, Levinas indicates “a surplus of non-sense over sense” (*le surplus du non-sens sur le sens*) that – with a formulation of Hent de Vries – makes sense “possible in the first place.”²⁶⁴ There is (in this suggestion) a sense that is not possible without non-sense, and it is this sort of (im-)possible sense that I insist on with regards to the faith of which Abraham became the father. Would faith be a *passion* without “a glimmer of nonsense,”²⁶⁵ without the disquietude of a ‘*for nothing*’? Or, as a nod to chief Plenty Coups, is not hope only (radical) hope in the face of hopelessness?

The faith of Abraham is portrayed in *Fear and Trembling* as a madness without reason(s) or assurances:

²⁶² FT 47/SKS 4, 141: “thi vil han uden med al sin Sjæls Lidenskab og af sit ganske Hjerte at erkjende Umuligheden, indbilde sig at have Troen, da bedrager han sig selv, og hans Vidnesbyrd har intetsteds hjemme, da han end ikke er kommen til den uendelige Resignation.”

Cf. FT 47: ”The knight of faith realizes this just as clearly; consequently, he can be saved only by the absurd, and this he grasps by faith. Consequently, he acknowledges the impossibility, and in the very same moment he believes the absurd [...]”/SKS 4, 141: ”Denne Bevidsthed [at det ”var og bev en Umulighed”] har Troens Ridder ligesaa klar; det Eneste, der altsaa kan frelse ham, er det Absurde, og dette griber han ved Troen. Han erkjender altsaa Umuligheden og i samme Øieblik troer han det Absurde [...]”.

²⁶³ ”On ne saurait la [ambiguïté du sens et du non-sens] prendre à la légère.” Levinas 2004, 255. Cf. Levinas 1998b, 164.

²⁶⁴ de Vries 1999, 130.

²⁶⁵ “If the uniqueness of the I [*Moi*] is in this patience - a patience that must risk itself in the eventuality of nonsense, a patience necessary even before a discovery of arbitrariness - then non-exonerable patience is possible. There must be an opening [...] that ridicules the nobility or the purity of patience that sullies it [*l'entachant*]. If patience has a meaning as inevitable obligation, this meaning becomes sufficiency and institution if there is not beneath it a glimmer of nonsense.” Levinas 2000, 20.

There was one who was great by virtue of his power, and one who was great by virtue of his wisdom, and one who was great by virtue of his hope, and one who was great by virtue of his love, but Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that *hope* whose form is *madness* [Vanvid], great by the love that is hatred to oneself.²⁶⁶

Without a certain madness, a pulsing nonsense, hope would merely be confident optimism. Powerlessness, foolishness, and madness (*Afmagt, Daarskab, Vanvid*) – the story of becoming a father of faith is no fairy tale in *Fear and Trembling*. Abraham cannot *know* whether he will get back Isaac. It may indeed all be *for nothing*. He might be an insane murder,²⁶⁷ and the whole affair a terrible misunderstanding. Perhaps the repeated mention in *Fear and Trembling* of the disquieting possibility that Abraham is but a murderer²⁶⁸ is not a move made to solve the unsettlement and save Abraham, but a way of keeping the questioning in motion, a way of keeping the anxiety, the distress, and the paradox in tension (FT 63/SKS 4, 156)? Abraham is not justified but kept in the paradox; the sense of his

²⁶⁶ FT 16-17/ SKS 4, 113 (italics added): “Der var den, der var stor ved sin Kraft, og den, der var stor ved sin Viisdom, og den, der var stor ved sit Haab, og den, der var stor ved sin Kjærlighed, men Abraham var større end Alle, stor ved den Kraft, hvis Styrke er Afmagt, stor ved den Viisdom, hvis Hemmelighed er Daarskab, stor ved *det Haab*, hvis Form er *Vanvid*, stor ved den Kjærlighed, der er Had til sig selv.”

²⁶⁷ FT 73-74: “But if I regard the task as a Paradox, then I understand it – that is, I understand it in the way one can understand a paradox. [...] In the moment he [Abraham] is about to sacrifice Isaac, the ethical expression for what he is doing is: he hates Isaac. But if he actually hates Isaac, he can rest assured that God does not demand this of him [...]. He must love Isaac with his whole soul. [...] But the distress and anxiety in the paradox is that he, humanly speaking, is thoroughly incapable of making himself understandable. Only in the moment when his acts is in absolute contradiction to his feeling, only then does he sacrifice Isaac, but the reality of his act is that by which he belongs to the universal, and there he is and remains a murderer.”

SKS 4, 165-166: ”Betragter jeg derimod Opgaven som et Paradox, saa forstaaer jeg den [omvendt c-tegn] jeg forstaaer den saaledes, som man forstaae et Paradox. [...] I det Øieblik han vil offre Isaak, da er det ethiske Udtryk for hvad han gjør dette: han hader Isaak. Men dersom han virkelig hader Isaak, saa kan han være rolig for, at Gud ikke forlanger det af ham [...]. Isaak maa han elske af hele sin Sjæl. [...] Men dette er Nøden og Angesten i Paradoxet, at han, menneskeligt talt, aldeles ikke kan gjøre sig forstaaelig. Kun i det Øieblik, da hans Gjerning er i absolut Modsigelse med hans Følelse, kun da offerer han Isaak, men hans Gjernings Realitet er det, hvorved han tilhører det Almene, og der er og bliver han en Morder.”

²⁶⁸ SKS 4, 126; 149; 150; 159; 165; 166.

life hinges on a madness – an utter *non-sense* – without which it would not be what it is, namely: a faith *by virtue of the absurd*.²⁶⁹

It is this mad residue of non-sense, the oxymoronic figure of an absurdity that overflows sense, that maybe lacks in the radical hope put forward by Lear, what we might call a courageous psychological manoeuvre of re-imagining not just the future but hope ‘itself’, that is, a *coping* that de-terminates the sense of hope, pushing it beyond a hopeful expectancy of that-which-is-to-come to an unconditional commitment to what-ever-may-come. Though I do not wish to underestimate the radicalness of such hope, I nevertheless suggest a slight difference in terms of comprehension, and, perhaps, of vulnerability.

The radical hope of Plenty Coups as imagined by Lear leans toward a *provisional* openness:

I [Lear] would like to consider hope as it might arise at one of the limits of human existence. In the scenario outlined in the preceding chapter, Plenty Coups responded to the collapse of his civilization with radical hope. What makes this hope *radical* is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is.²⁷⁰

Radical hope commits to what we do not *yet* understand, at *this* time, what “transcends the current ability” of understanding.

To this reading, a possible difference between Lear’s courageous hope and the mad passion of *Fear and Trembling* can be found in so far as the passion called faith answers to an openness that does not only transcends the *current* ability to understand,²⁷¹ but challenges the *over-all* capability of understanding, that is, a

²⁶⁹ Almost a formula in *Fear and Trembling*: “by virtue of the absurd,” FT 35-36; 37; 46-47; 50; 56; 69/ “i Kraft af det Absurde,” SKS 4, 131; 132; 141; 143; 151; 161.

²⁷⁰ Lear 2006, 104.

²⁷¹ What I here call a non-sense of faith, inextricably linked with the absurd, is un-graspable in a unruly way. I find this possibility of a defiant anarchy *otherwise* than a provisional or postponed openness, otherwise than a relation of inverse-dialectical connectedness, to be reflected in the following de silentio phrasing: “The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen.” FT 46/”Det Absurde hører ikke til de Differentser, der ligge indenfor Forstandens eget Omfang. Det er ikke identisk med det Usandsynlige, det Uventede, det Uformodede.” SKS 4, 141.

comprehension that believes the rule of its empire to be complete and the ground of its conquered (and ever expanding) land unshakeable. This study trails a sense that twinkles (only) in an ambiguous openness, a sense that in this part is linked to an *unresolvable* paradox: a sense that does not become determined by understanding even if roams *in* understanding,²⁷² and that resists the grasp of comprehension by way of anarchy. I have found this sense to be related to a disturbing non-sense, to an ambiguous openness of existence. The passion called faith is (to my reading) an un-reasonable way of relating: it is to look the impossible in the eyes, acknowledging the utter un-groundedness of existence (and, with it, understanding), and yet, by means of vulnerability [*Afmagt*], foolishness [*Daarskab*], and madness [*Vanvid*], to keep on walking, into the abyss; an onward movement that in *Fear and Trembling* is to head for a mountain, bringing a son and a knife. To become a father of faith in *Fear and Trembling* is not only to respond to disaster with a radical hope of the 'bare possibility'²⁷³ that what *for now* transcends our current ability to understand it will turn out to be goodness.²⁷⁴ It is, rather, to testify to the pulsing non-sense that in every moment defies the grasp of understanding, to acknowledge with open eyes that the binding of a son might be *for nothing*, and, as already suggested: it is to stay with the contradiction, the unresolved paradox, the openness.

At the edge of an abyss – to love *in faith*

To shift the discourse of trials slightly, we could ask: perhaps the temptation of the *Akedah* is not to succumb to confusion and doubt in the face of (seeming)

²⁷² I find this way of signalling expressed in de silentio's ambiguous description of the paradox in the following quote: FT 73-74: "But if I regard the task as a paradox, then I understand it – that is, I understand it in the way one can understand a paradox."/SKS 4, 165-166: "Betragter jeg derimod Opgaven som et Paradox, saa forstaaer jeg den o: jeg forstaaer den saaledes, som man forstaaer et Paradox."

²⁷³ Lear 2006, 97.

²⁷⁴ Imagining the train of thoughts of Plenty Coups leading to a radical hope, Lear writes: "I am committed to the idea that while we Crow must abandon the conception of the good life that our tribe has worked out over centuries. We *shall get the good back*, though at the moment we can have no more than a glimmer of what that might mean. So *might* Plenty Coups have thought." Lear 2006, 94.

contradictions,²⁷⁵ but to give in to the need for redeeming explanations, to follow the urge for bridging the abyss and reinstall *meaningfulness* (so that it *all* makes sense)?

Otherwise than interpretations that despite it all finds a source of comfort in the story of Abraham,²⁷⁶ this study suggests that *de silentio* lets it be: an intricate narrative of ambiguous openness. I have ventured to stay with the openness as long as possible, and, thus, I hesitate when met with propositions that offer a way *out of* the paradox, which seems to be the case in the below quotation of Ronald M. Green:

The solution lies in Kierkegaard's/Johannes's assumptions about God's nature. Johannes tells us early on, for example, that he is convinced that "God is love" (*FT* 34). Within the context of such a belief, unstinting obedience to God makes sense even when he appears to require horrific deeds or sacrifices, as in the case of Genesis 22.²⁷⁷

Once again, it comes down to the sense of faith or belief of which Abraham became a father. This study does not find a context in *Fear and Trembling* within which an "unstinting obedience to God makes sense." I have tried to shift the sense of faith in a direction otherwise than (that of) both obedience and assurance. To Green, the assumptions of Kierkegaard and *de silentio* about God's nature present us with a way to make the acts of Abraham (*and* God) reasonable *after all*. Green reminds us that *de silentio* "early on" tells us that "he [*de silentio*] is convinced that 'God is love' (*FT* 34)." It is, in other words, a firm belief about God's nature or essence that (once again) provides a soothing solution to the eerie feel of the story. Yet, the context in which *de silentio* assures us of his conviction

²⁷⁵ "[We] should maintain with assurance that when God shows Himself differently from the way the promise speaks, this is merely a temptation." Podmore (citing Luther) 2012, 88.

²⁷⁶ While it may very well be that the Abraham narrative can be understood as a story of comfort (for believers), I find the rendering of it in *Fear and Trembling* to bring out the disturbing elements and the discomfiting plotline of the *Akedab*. That is not to say that it is a story of despair or distress (as opposed to comfort) either. My study attempts to steer clear of oppositional solutions that end up in categorical dichotomies.

²⁷⁷ Green 1998, 267.

reads as follow:

Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life; I am constantly repelled, and despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it [...]. I stretch every muscle to get a perspective, and at the very same instant I become paralyzed. [...]

I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently [*tillidsfuld*] into the absurd; it is for me an impossibility, but I do not praise myself for that. I am convinced that God is love, for me this thought has a primal lyrical validity.²⁷⁸

Though de silentio recognizes that the sense of Abraham's life hinge on a 'prodigious paradox', and though he may go to the very edge of the abyss (of ambiguous openness) with resolve, shivering slightly and looking into its depth, he stays securely on the ground, holding on to a firm belief ("I am convinced that God is love"), and finding it impossible (for him) to make the movement of faith: to plunge oneself into the absurd. The movement of faith in *Fear and Trembling* is, in my reading, a loss of footing and reason, and, perhaps, also of any tight grip on the exact or determinate definition of what or who God is. Johannes de silentio seems, to me, more interested in moods and motions than in settlements and conclusions. The difference between de silentio's conviction (that God is love) and the movement of faith (plunging into the absurd) is at once slight and significant:

If it had been otherwise with Abraham, he perhaps would have loved God but would not have had faith, for he who loves God without faith [*elsker Gud uden Tro*] reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith [*elsker Gud troende*] reflects upon God.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ FT 33-34/SKS 4, 128-129: "Naar jeg derimod skal til at tænke over Abraham, da er jeg som tilintetgjort. Jeg faaer i ethvert Moment Øie paa hiint uhyre Paradox, der er Indholdet af Abrahams Liv, i ethvert Moment bliver jeg stødt tilbage, og min Tanke kan, trods al sin Lidenskab, ikke trænge ind i det [...] Jeg anstrænger enhver Muskel for at faae Vuet, i samme Øieblik bliver jeg paralytisk. [...] Jeg kan ikke gjøre Troens Bevægelse, jeg kan ikke lukke Øienene og styrte mig tillidsfuld i det Absurde, det er mig en Umulighed, men jeg roser mig ikke deraf. Jeg er overbevist om, at Gud er Kjærlighed; denne Tanke har for mig en oprindelig Lyrisk Værdi."

²⁷⁹ FT 37/SKS 132: "Hvis det ikke stod sig saaledes med Abraham [vidunderligt "at tro i Kraft af det Absurde," 131], da havde han maaskee elsket Gud, men ikke troet; thi den der elsker Gud uden Tro, han reflekterer paa sig selv, den, der elsker Gud troende, han reflekterer paa Gud."

A literal reading might find this quotation to confirm faith as a firm belief that relies on conviction, on relations (of love), on God (*paa Gud*). Yet, if we follow the (grammatical) movement of and in the passage (in the Danish version a different story is told), an ambiguity opens (that is somewhat lost in the English translation). Whereas the first part of the sentence mirrors the professed conviction of *de silentio* (to love God *without* faith), the second part sets the relation (of love) in motion: to love God *troende* is an accentuation of the *way* one loves. Grammatically, the *present participle* mode of *troende* is an inflexion that refers (back) to the verb (to love), making the relation of faith a distinctive *way* of loving, or a way of *relating*, as suggested in this study. By shifting the emphasis from the (grammatically) straightforward subject-verb-object (*den, der elsker Gud*) construction of the first part of the sentence to the less common composition of an adverbial present participle modifying the verb in the second part of the sentence (*den, der elsker Gud – troende*), *de silentio* makes the point of faith refer more to the *how* of the relating ('at elske *troende*') than the *who* or *what* (subject-object connections) of the relation. The passage leading up to *de silentio*'s curious description of the relation(s) of love accentuates the madness and wonder of faith as a movement by virtue of the absurd. This way of relating (a plunge into the absurd) is called forth by the abyss that opens with the words: *God tempted*. That terrible moment when God enters the story in a collision of demands, a contradiction of voices, whereby the *who* or *what* of God is called into question, and from which point (of the narrative) the unequivocal determination of God has been shaken dramatically. Or put otherwise, a faith by virtue of the *absurd* is called for or called forth because the grounds upon which one could believe by virtue of the *reasonable* or *defensible* is shattered to pieces: the *all* is hereafter only in fragments; the *who* or *what* of God is no longer well-grounded.

One can, *de silentio* suggests, love God *without* faith, *without* the distress, the anxiety, and the paradox, *without* the ambiguous openness. One does, then, simply love God. This sort of relation (grammatically speaking: subject-verb-object) is the firm belief in the *what* of God (I am convinced that God is love), a conviction that finds an object for its love, that is, it trusts its transitive verb (*to love*) to lead to – and end (up) with – an object (*God*). Such a relation of love can be both

courageous and devoted, but it is not (according to *de silentio*) a movement of faith. The passion called faith in *Fear and Trembling* stays with the tension of the paradox and relates to an ambiguous openness. It does not attempt to pave the ground or cover up the abyss of (and in) existence; it desists the temptation to find in belief a new footing, or a verifiable object (to rely *on*).²⁸⁰ The relating of faith is, in this study, a risky venture without guarantees: an answering to an ambiguous openness that is not a disclosure of any-thing, and an answering to the groundlessness of existence that does not (either) lead to a void of complete meaninglessness (an *all* of nothingness). I have suggested that a dreadful responsibility comes with the movement of faith, this passionate motion of madness and vulnerability: it is also to answer *for* the openness, *for* the unjustifiable-and-unfounded-but-no-less-genuine-and-profound answers we are to give (in a life of relations), and for the *non-sense* without which sense would not be possible. This way of relating is, to this study, not a property of either the religious or the ethical field (yet far from unrelated to those fields either, as already formulated); it is, rather, the answer to and for an unconditioned condition of the (human)²⁸¹ existence (in which both the religious and ethical may play their significant part).

In the inquiry into how one becomes a father of faith, I have found ‘faith’ to be a question of its own, or, put otherwise: I have found the question of faith to be closely related to a *how*, namely a *way* of relating, a *movement* of a peculiar kind. With *de silentio*’s description of two different ways of relating (how to love God), we are also given two different motional trajectories. The passage reads: “he who

²⁸⁰ Levinas also detects a sort of temptation or lure in the face of an openness of ambiguity where an orderly mind might give in to a need for object(s) or essence (here writing about ‘a trace lost in a trace’): “Béance d’un abîme dans la proximité, l’infini qui clignote se refusant aux audaces spéculatives [...]. L’approche est dia-chronic non synchronisable, que la représentation et la thématization dissimulent en transformant la trace en *signe* du départ et en réduisant dès lors l’ambigüité [...]. Mais ainsi s’ouvre la voie dangereuse où pensée pieuse, ou soucieuse d’ordre, déduit en hâte l’existence de Dieu.” Levinas 2000, 149.

“A gaping open of an abyss in proximity, the infinite which blinks, refusing speculative audacities [...]. The approach is a non-synchronizable diachrony, which representation and thematization dissimulate by transforming the trace into a *sign* of a departure, and then reducing the ambiguity [...]. But thus opens the dangerous way in which pious thought, or one concerned with order, hastily deduces the existence of God.” Levinas 1998b, 93.

²⁸¹ Or we may just say ‘existence’ to mark that existence might not necessarily be a term pertaining exclusively to human beings.

loves God without faith (*elsker Gud uden Tro*) reflects upon himself (*reflekterer paa sig selv*),” while ”he who loves God in faith (*elsker Gud troende*) reflects upon God (*reflekterer paa Gud*)” (SKS 4, 132/FT 37).²⁸² To love God without faith is, following de silentio, a movement that refers (back) to oneself; it is a relation of homecoming, or what Levinas would call an egological movement. To love God without faith is not a motion that goes beyond the one who loves because the object of love is (already) encompassed or com-prehended by the one who loves (some-thing or some-one). This way of relating is a movement without (transcending) movement, so to speak, as it stays on the firm ground of beliefs (believing also that such grounds are there), sidestepping the abyss of the absurd, and leading (only) to a safe return (though this arrival may not have a fixed date and might follow a time of trouble). Storywise, we could say that this way of relating follows the plotline of a fairy tale. To love God in faith (*troende*), on the other hand, is a movement that leads elsewhere than the one who loves: it relates to God. To relate to God *in faith* (*troende*), however, is not to refer to a *who* or a *what* but to take the plunge into the absurd with eyes wide open, to relate to an ambiguous openness. This is the movement of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, but also, curiously, the movement of Abraham par excellence to Levinas: leaving the land of his fathers for a land that is not yet (his), that is, to leave his home without return: “To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land [...]”²⁸³ Storywise, a true adventure, in the particular Levinasian sense of that term.²⁸⁴ In *Fear and Trembling* (of my reading), the passion of faith is a movement into the *unknown*. It is to loose one’s footing, to live without ground(s), to relate to an ambiguous openness that one is given over to after a disastrous collision, after God withdrew behind a contradiction. How is this not “a religion for adults”²⁸⁵ as

²⁸² In the SKS-commentary to this quotation, the explanation of the term '*reflekterer [paa]*' suggests: to relate to [*forholder sig til*]. SKS K4, 121.

²⁸³ Levinas 1986, 348.

²⁸⁴ On the distinction between the homecoming of Odysseus and the adventure of Abraham: “Il vient de la maison et y retourne, mouvement de l’Odyssée où l’aventure courue dans le monde n’est que l’accident d’un retour.” Levinas 1990, 192.

²⁸⁵ “Un Dieu d’adulte se manifeste précisément par la vide du ciel enfantin.” Cited from Levinas 1963, 220.

called for by Levinas? How is this passion not a dire break (away) from sentimental longings for essence? An empty sky but not a void of nothingness: The command of God does not make sense – it comes as an unsettling non-sense, what I have called a shattering of *meaningfulness*, and yet, in *Fear and Trembling*, it (also) opens for sense.

A concern for the ethical – whitewashing the violence?

To a leading question of this part, we may say, somewhat elliptically but without sketching a circle (of return): one becomes a father of faith *through* faith, that is, through a movement of faith *by virtue of the absurd*. To become a father of faith is a continual movement, it is to stay with the contradiction, the unresolved paradox, the ambiguous openness.²⁸⁶ In *Fear and Trembling*, the passion of faith is indeed a venture for adults: de silentio lets Abraham become the father of faith in the face of a fatal collision – the unfathomable words of *God tempted* – leaving the essence of God splintered (for good). To become a father of faith is in a certain way also to become fatherless. A strange loss that also trembles at the heart of the stories of Isaac the Son in the plotline of the Akedah, and Christ the Son in the plotline of the Passion.²⁸⁷ To become a father of faith, then, is in a certain way to

²⁸⁶ An ambiguity of movements is more than once brought into play by de silentio when describing the passion called faith, not least in the ambivalent figure of "going further" [*at gaae videre*], at once a motion of ridicule and a move of the father of faith (FT 37/SKS 4, 132). This ambivalence is unfolded – and entangled – in the below citation expressing how to "remain standing at" faith in a "continual movement" of faith: FT 37: "Would it not be best to stop with faith, and is it not shocking that everyone wants to go further? Where will it all end when in our age, as declared in so many ways, one does not want to stop with love? [...] Would it not be best to remain standing at faith and for him who stands to see to it that he does not fall, for the movement of faith must continually be made by virtue of the absurd [...]" /SKS 4, 132: "Var det dog ikke bedst, at blive staaende ved Troen, og er det ikke oprørende, at Enhver vil gaae videre? Naar man i vor Tid, og det forkyndes jo paa forskjellig Maade, ikke vil blive staaende ved Kjærligheden, hvor kommer man da hen? [...] Var det ikke bedst, at man blev staaende ved Troen, og at den, der staaer, saae til, at han ikke faldt; thi Troens Bevægelse maa bestandig gjøres i Kraft af det Absurde [...]" Following this passage, de silentio somewhat mockingly describe how one can make motions without making (a) movement: "For my part, I presumably can describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them. In learning to go through the motions of swimming, one can be suspended from the ceiling in a harness and then presumably describe the movements, but one is not swimming." /SKS 4, 132: "Jeg for mit Vedkommende kan vel beskrive Troens Bevægelser, men jeg kan ikke gjøre dem. Naar man vil lære at gjøre Svømmebevægelserne, da man kan lade sig hænge i Seler under Loftet, man bskriver vel Bevægelserne, men man svømmer ikke [...]"

²⁸⁷ It might carry a particular signification that the mood of *Fear and Trembling* is set with allegories of separation: of the weaning off of a child, the difficult and ambivalent duty of motherhood.

be weaned off from any childish dreams of ‘an inhabited heaven’, weaned off from the need for justification and certainty. *Fear and Trembling* stubbornly insists on looking the impossible straight into the eyes, intensifying the eerie feel of the Abraham narrative.²⁸⁸ In the biblical narrative (which de silentio is inventively retelling) an odd rupture is indicated that questions the happy ending of the storyline: after the appalling demand there is no account of any communication between Abraham and his God. A silence that, to this study, tells a tale of its own.

The *Akedah* is no fairy tale and offers no justification of God.²⁸⁹ Bearing this in mind, we may ask whether the many attempts at defence, that is, proving God to be *good* or *reasonable* despite indications of the contrary, or the efforts at documenting the test to have a sound *cause*, and/or confirming the *coherence* of God/the law/the ethical/religion to be intact after all, do these attempts not tend toward what we have called a whitewashing of the contradiction? Or put otherwise: how is this worried whitewashing not an expression of a ‘need of salvation’²⁹⁰ that Levinas found in the writing and tradition of Kierkegaard? I recognized this movement of succumbing in the soundless shift whereby the concern *of* the ethical somehow slides into a concern *for* the ethical, a concern *for* vindication and consistency. Whereas Levinas finds in the account of the Abraham narrative in *Fear and Trembling* a violence in the proposed priority of the religious over the ethical, we may ask whether the alternative rendering of the *Akedah* offered by Levinas does not involve another violence, or, as we have suggested, a silencing of a violence: does not his version somewhat gloss over the violence of the contradiction? This would, to de silentio (of my reading) be a move to muffle the tremendous clash of the collision, to downplay the ambiguity of the (different) voices (perhaps) heard, to soothe the absurdity opened by the demand(s).

²⁸⁸ The deliberate choice of the wording “God tempted” over the common translation “God tested” emphasizes the terror of the story.

²⁸⁹ Which is not to reject that God may be justice (beyond the need of vindication). Here I only wish to point out that the uncanny feel of the story is not a creation of pure imagination by de silentio who might have many literary tricks up his sleeve, but who also have a distinctive attentiveness to difficult narratives of any kind.

²⁹⁰ The point here is not to discredit the ‘need for salvation’, be it for oneself or someone-or-something-else, as I believe it to be a very human need or wish; the point is only that such need might be found – human as it is – in more than one tradition, and more than one writer.

Movements of God – God withdraws behind a contradiction

Through this meditation on the intricate work of *Fear and Trembling*, I have noted how *de silentio* heightens the drama and deepens the dread of a well-known narrative. In his retelling of how Abraham became the father of faith, the absurdity and anxiety of the story are played up as we follow an exiled man leaving behind the land of his fathers and his worldly understanding, going toward the unknown in a movement of increasing preposterousness (*Urimelighed*). The retelling of *de silentio* lets Abraham be the pronounced protagonist of the story (as in the biblical version), curiously leaving out an active role for God, that is, suspending that part until a certain point (a tremendous moment) where the latter is finally let on stage, and what an entrance that is: with the words “*God tempted Abraham and said, ‘take your son Isaac to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering,’*”²⁹¹ the promise of nations is left in ruins and the meaning-fulness of a subject (here: God) is shattered to pieces. The horror (*Forfærdelsen*) of this moment²⁹² is concentrated in the very *devastation* of these words that is not merely a grim and unpleasant command, but a contradictory collision (between ‘God’s command and God’s command’), an address of *impossibility*. It is precisely this sense of impossibility that is highlighted in *de silentio*’s narrative: the situation of Abraham does not call for bravery in the face of a glum and difficult task to be handled; after the words of God, Abraham is rather left to a situation of absurdity, an dire groundlessness, an openness of ambiguity. This catastrophic entrance of God (in *Fear and Trembling*) was formulated as follows by David Kangas: *God withdraws behind a contradiction*. I vowed to go with this formula for a while, and will hold on to this company a little longer while pursuing the second question of this detour of the passage: what is the passion called faith *about*, or, *where* does it come from?

²⁹¹ Gen 22:2.

²⁹² FT 19: “Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment”/SKS 115: “Nu blev al Stridens Forfærdelse samlet i eet Øieblik.”

The formula of Kangas is tied to an old figure that can be found in both religious traditions and philosophical writings, namely *a movement of withdrawal or retreat*.

What follows, or, what I am going to follow, are two movements of retreat that relate to the sense of the word that I am tracing. Two movements that will take us through different traditions and different ways of thinking, leading astray to questions concerning the understanding of movements and relations ‘themselves’, yet without losing track of the peculiar word that is still the heart of the matter of this study.

Movements of God – Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* and absolving

In my attempt to find out what the passion called faith is *about*, or *where* it comes from, this study is trailing the sense of a word, a concern that is also expressed in the following inquiry put forth by Kangas: “But here it is necessary to be precise: what does the word ‘God’ mean in *Fear and Trembling*? Is that so obvious?”²⁹³ Resembling not only the question that reverberates throughout this study – namely, how does the word ‘God’ come *about* in *Fear and Trembling* (and the *Fragments*) – Kangas furthermore gives voice to an intuition that also guides my investigation: “Is that so obvious?” Is anything ‘so obvious’ or, as I have earlier put it: is anything ‘obviously so’ when it comes to approaching the word ‘God’? Kangas’ bid as to the meaning of that word reads:

Certain things are immediately clear: as in *Repetition*, God signifies the *before whom* of existence itself, transcendence as what *faces* human existence – the divine Other. In addition, though, *Fear and Trembling* adds something decisive: God is ‘The absolute.’ [...] What is the absolute? If one attends to the logic of the text, one finds that the absolute signifies what *absolves itself*, what withdraws, what holds itself in reserve from every general order of meaning, intelligibility, presence. The God who appears in *Fear and Trembling* – God the absolute – not

²⁹³ Kangas 2007, 126.

only faces human existence as a Thou, but withdraws in that very facing. God absolves Godself in the very drawing near.²⁹⁴

I have some hesitations as to how the verb ‘to be’ seems to be replaceable with the verb ‘to mean’ or ‘to signify’ in the run of the sentences just cited. There may be a difference between 1) trailing *how* a particular word might come *about*, and 2) clarifying *what* the import of the term *is* (as in ‘God *is* x’ or ‘*what* is the absolute’). The latter act might not be caught up in ontological interest but bends (however slightly) toward what I elsewhere have called a concern about essence (‘what is the *essence* of x’). Tentative hesitations put aside, what I wish to explore here is the main point of Kangas’ explanation of the meaning of the word (God/the absolute), a sense that unfolds as movement(s): “What is the absolute? If one attends to the logic of the text, one finds that the absolute signifies what *absolves itself* [...]” The withdrawal of God means in this account an *absolving*, a movement that – if one is to follow ‘the logic of the text’ in the quotation above – draws significantly on what we might call an impulse of non-contradictory contradiction: the absolving (movement) signifies a God “who appears,” and, yet, “holds itself in reserve from every presence,” a God who retreats and reveals in the (same) movement (of non-dual opposition, one might add), or, as it is elegantly phrased by Kangas: a God who “withdraws in that very facing.” The *dialectical* relation of this movement – of absolving – is crucial to keep in mind if one is to understand the distinct sense it is given by Kangas. As the etymological signification of the word (*ab-solvo*) indicates, the absolving is a movement of setting free or untying,²⁹⁵ however, since this withdrawal is also a facing (without manifestation and thus in a certain sense face-less), the absolving is not a movement without (any sort of) obligation: “An absolute duty to God, in this sense, would signify the demand to hold oneself open to God’s withdrawal; or again, a duty to *let oneself be absolved* from the ethical order of self-consciousness (that of manifestation, meaning,

²⁹⁴ Kangas 2007, 126.

²⁹⁵ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Lewis & Short), *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1879. Following this dictionary the term [*ab-solvo*] means: ”to set free, release, discharge, untie,” and in judicial language: ”to absolve from charge.” [absólūtĭo] II completion, perfection, consummation.

universality, representation).²⁹⁶ In this interpretation, the withdrawal of God (as absolving) opens for “an absolute duty” to this very withdrawal (as a “demand to hold oneself open to God’s withdrawal”); it is, in other words, an untied relation with demand(s) of its own. The distinct signification of absolving might become more pronounced when introducing the wider framework of *Kierkegaard’s Instant* (Kangas 2007; hereafter mentioned as the *Instant*), namely “the texts of German idealism,” recognized, by Kangas, as ‘essential’ to any reading of Kierkegaard.²⁹⁷ A proposal of the *Instant* is that Kierkegaard’s thinking “both appropriates and undoes” the insights of these text, or, to cite Kangas, the “obsessions” of these texts, when it comes to notions such as origins, representation, (self-)consciousness, and, not least in this context, foundations. As a distinctive spokesman of the German idealist philosophers, Hegel is invoked in the framework of the book, that is, in the *Preface* (ix) and in the *Conclusion* (195). Yet another tradition is called forth in the main body of the *Instant* as an impulse to the “critical force of Kierkegaard’s texts vis-à-vis idealism” (9), that is, the Eckhartian tradition²⁹⁸ and in particular the “Eckhartian notion of *Gelassenheit*, or releasement.”²⁹⁹ *Gelassenheit* or releasement would, in this tradition, signify a renunciation of one’s will in a movement towards God (as a “groundless abyss of divine being”): “Eckhart and Tauler used the term *Gelassenheit* [...] to describe the letting go of the will necessary for (re)union with God.”³⁰⁰ There is in this gesture a significant dimension of passivity in which the letting-go is also a letting-be, a strange undertaking of a will that must will its own surrender, and yet must will nothing (as it is a giving over of willing). To Kangas, this maneuver (of self-

²⁹⁶ Kangas 2007, 126-127.

²⁹⁷ “To read Kierkegaard must always also be to read the texts of idealism. In this book I place Kierkegaard’s thought in relation to certain idealist texts that are particularly important for clarifying the meaning of his thought: Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, J. G. Fichte’s *Vocation of Man*, and Friedrich Schelling’s *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*.” Kangas 2007, 1.

²⁹⁸ “I say the Eckhartian *tradition* rather than Eckhart himself because it cannot be ascertained definitely that Kierkegaard read Eckhart himself [...]. He did, however, read texts whose metaphysical horizon is entirely derived from the thought of Meister Eckhart: the *Theologia Germanica*, *Die Nachfolgung des armen Leben Jesu Christi* (pseudo-Tauler), Johann Arndt’s *Von warhem Cristentum*, Jacob Boehme’s *Der Weg zur Christo*, as well as other pietists such as Gerhard Teersteegeen.” Kangas 2007, 9.

²⁹⁹ Kangas 2007, 127.

³⁰⁰ Taylor 2007, 56.

negation³⁰¹ or self-surrendering) is reflected in the movement of faith as it is portrayed by *de silentio*:

In this sense faith is what Eckhart calls *Gelassenheit*, or ‘true obedience,’ the renunciation of oneself or going out of oneself. Yet here [in *Fear and Trembling*] as in Eckhart, the renunciation of oneself is identical to a receiving of everything; it receives on the condition that its very act of receiving is grasped as a loan, in the power of the absurd. Thus faith is an essential humility that keeps nothing in reserve [...].³⁰²

Relations otherwise than oppositional schemes

To this study, such movement of essential humility is no less passionate than the mad way of relating (by which one becomes a father of faith) that my reading has found in *Fear and Trembling*; I do, however, find that the humble receiving may be better described as a gesture of devout modesty than as a preposterous (ad)venture ‘in the (non)power of the absurd.’ It seems, to me, that a moment of outrageous dis-order, of disturbing dread, or, as I have suggested elsewhere, a pulse or glimmer of non-sense, is lost in a movement of faith where “the renunciation of oneself is *identical* to a receiving of everything.” There is, to me, a moment of madness that diverts the story of Abraham from a discourse on ‘true obedience.’ The inter-changeability of the terms in the Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* (as rendered in above quotation) makes for a seamless movement of unbroken oscillation, a circularity of a kind: the renunciation is identical to a receiving, or, the renunciation *is* (already) a receiving.³⁰³ Though this gesture of letting-go calls for a tremendous courage in the face of a groundless abyss (a *grundloser Grund*),³⁰⁴ there is in the unreserved surrender of *Gelassenheit* a movement of *homecoming*, of letting

³⁰¹ See, for example, Meister Eckhart 2009, Sermon Fifty-Five, 290: “And this is not to be gained by storm, by man’s being obstinately determined to do this and leave that, but by gentleness and sincere humility and self-abnegation in that as in everything that befalls, not by a man saying to himself, ‘You *will* do this at whatever cost!’ – that would be wrong, for that is an assertion of self,” and Sermon Fifty-Seven, 298: “That man who is established thus in God’s love must be dead to self and all created things [...]. This man must have abandoned self and all this world.”

³⁰² Kangas 2007, 155.

³⁰³ “Losing everything, it receives everything: not in a dialectical sense, but in the sense that its losing everything *is* its receiving everything.” Kangas 2007, 194.

³⁰⁴ Meister Eckhart, Predigt 48, *Die deutschen Werke*, Bd. 2, 420 (Ausgabe Largier 1993, Bd. 1, 508).

oneself fall back into the divine (in the innermost of the soul or a *Seelengrund*). Or put otherwise: the storyline of the Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* is *in the end*³⁰⁵ a tale of (re-)union³⁰⁶ and rebirth,³⁰⁷ whereas I found the narrative of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* to be a plot of separation and of going into the unknown. Simplified in an imagery of parenthood, we may say that the movement of faith in the works of Eckhart goes toward an unifying process (of on-going creation) where one is reborn as a son (or daughter) of God and thus takes part in the life of the *Gottbeit*, while the on-going journey of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* (in my reading) leads him to become a father of faith (by way of the absurd in the face of a shattering dis-order) and *thus* relate to God. The point I am trying to write forth is one of difference, not only between two different interpretations of the movement of faith,³⁰⁸ but more significantly (here): a possible difference *of* the way of movement. In the exploration of movement(s) in this section, I am looking for ways of ‘signifying otherwise than within correlative structures’. I am trailing the sense that may come about in movements of non-identical and non-reversible terms; movements where the meaning of one point is not already reflected or included (as a difference) in the point of the other.³⁰⁹ To my reading, there is indeed a relation of ‘renunciation’ and ‘receiving’ in the narrative of Abraham, as rendered by *de silentio*, only these terms do not *correlate*, or, to refer to the Kangas quotation: they are not ‘identical,’ but, rather, incongruous. The structure of their

³⁰⁵ Note that the work of creation is an *on-going* process in the works of Eckhart; what I am getting at here is that the undertaking of Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* has as its ‘telos’ a (re-)union with God as a rebirth into the divine life.

³⁰⁶ Meister Eckhart, Predigt 7, *Die deutschen Werke*, Bd. 1, 122 Z. 4f (Ausgabe Largier 1993), Bd. 1, 92f.).

³⁰⁷ See Meister Eckhart 2009, for example, Sermon Forty-Eight, 260: “In this interior illumination she [the soul] soars above herself in the divine light. Now she has come home and is at one with Him, and is a fellow worker,” and Sermon Seventy-One, 363: “God has all His Joy in giving birth, and therefore He gives birth to His Son in us, that we may have all *our* joy therein, and that we may give birth to the same natural Son with Him: for God has all His joy in giving birth, and therefore He gives birth to Himself in us, so that he may have all His joy in the soul and *we* may have all our joy in Him.”

³⁰⁸ Both movements can be found in *de silentio*’s writings, and neither comes out on the top. I do not wish to overthrow the interpretation of Kangas; my hope is only to bring out the points where my reading meets and parts way with that of the *Instant*.

³⁰⁹ See, for example, Meister Eckhart 2009, Sermon Sixty-Nine, 354: “Sometimes I say, if the soul is to know God, she must forget herself and lose herself: for if she were aware of herself, she would not be aware of God: but she finds herself again in God.”

connection is perhaps better described as that of an *oxymoron*, which – letting its etymological denotation ring in the pronunciation – carries a sense of the madness or foolishness (*moron*) that is lost in a harmonious connection of coherence. Offering (a son) does not (in my reading) *lead to* receiving (a son); the first gesture (offering a son) is related to the other (receiving a son) by (a wondrous) way of the absurd. Deflecting the interpretative framework elsewhere than that of obedience and reward, I have suggested that the offering and the receiving are linked not by a causal connection but as a *paradoxical* relation. However, before I get lost in dubious deeds of sacrifice, I will move forward by returning to the movement of *absolving* as presented by Kangas.

A significant point of the *Instant* is to connect the movement of *Gelassenheit* to God, namely, as a way of un-tying God (*Gottheit*) from our conceptions of God, that is, to release God (*weiselos* and *ohne Warum*) from our representational configurations:

Releasement is the one and only condition in this tradition through which the self may avoid thinking God according to being, in terms of its own representations, and relate to God as the ab-solute, to God *as God*. It is out of a released sense that Eckhart could pray his famous prayer: “So therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of God.”³¹⁰

The reasoning here seems to be that only by letting go of our need for grounds and our obsession with presence can we begin to relate to God as the ab-solute; only by letting go of God as idol can we come to know God as God. Though this study does not wish to investigate the meaning of God *as God*, but hopes to explore a possible sense of God *as* [a] *word*, I share the sense of groundlessness, or openness, that is brought into play by Kangas’ understanding of a ‘releasement’ of (the sense of the word) God from being and representation: the letting-go of idols and grounds is a loss of foundation and mastery towards which I have pointed with the notion of a *shattering*.

³¹⁰ Kangas 2007, 10. Kangas is quoting Eckhart from Sermon 52, *Beati paupers spiritu*. See *Meister Eckhart, The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, New York: Paulist Press 1981, 200.

To revolve around nothing

Curious to this study and in particular to the questions I am trailing, through detours of detours, in this section (what is this passion called faith *about*, or *where* does it come from?), Kangas offers his answer,³¹¹ guided by a sense of releasement: “Faith is a sinking into nonbeing, to what absolves itself from being, a relation to what cannot be gathered into presence, to what cannot be posited, to what cannot become a *project* of a subject.”³¹² In context (of the *Instant*), this definition of faith is given partly in reply to the tradition of German idealism as represented, mainly, by Hegel and Kant (again, in the context of the *Instant*), and the problems of beginning and consciousness considered (precisely as problems) in the works of these thinkers. Through a perceptive reading of several Kierkegaardian texts,³¹³ and via an Eckhartian impulse, Kangas finds a critical force in the notion of ‘the religious’: “The religious names those moments in Kierkegaard’s texts [...] where it is necessary to think otherwise than in terms of being and on the horizon of presence.”³¹⁴ Or put otherwise, the moments (or, instants) of ‘the religious’ allow for a way of thinking existence otherwise than within the framework of (self-)consciousness. In the context of my exploration of movements, that is, trailing movements in and of a text rather than analysing epistemological or ontological problems, I here (only) wish to delineate a sense of faith *in relation to the movement of absolving*, as put forward by Kangas.

To the Kangas of my reading, faith is also a passion, but moreover, in connection with this study, it is a way of relating or a relation of a certain kind as we read in the above quotation: as a relation to what absolves itself, faith is a

³¹¹ The main project of Kangas in the *Instant* is not bound up with a question on faith; in this paragraph, however, trailing questions of faith in relation to movements, I single out the point that faith in the *Instant* is a motional notion connected closely to the movements of absolving and releasement.

³¹² Kangas 2007, 8.

³¹³ *The Concept of Irony, Either/Or, De omnibus dubitandum est, Repetition, Fear and Trembling, and Concept of Anxiety.*

³¹⁴ Kangas 2007, 9.

sinking into nonbeing.³¹⁵ In a way, then, the answer to my question – what is the passion called faith *about* – is here presented in a wager that may come with an ambiguity of its own: faith is in a way about – *nothing*:

Following the Eckhartian tradition, I have suggested that Kierkegaard's texts counsel faith as releasement: that is, becoming one's own groundlessness, becoming *nothing*, letting go of one's self-understanding as foundation, letting go of the conception of being (and of God) as what grounds and secures the self's being. One has to sink *absolutely* into *nonbeing* and accept dispossession [...].³¹⁶

This formulation testifies faithfully to the steadfast case against grounds, substantiality, possession, and representation that is submitted in the *Instant*; a case and a formulation that I in many ways side with, yet, also have some reservations about. Those reservations are not to be taken as rejections. I will in the following passage address them in a detour revolving around 'nothing' in an attempt to point out the small gaps of difference that there may be in the suggestions as to what the passion called faith is *about*.

The matter in question is (here) what we could call the *gravity of groundlessness*, or the weight of nothing.

A faith that is about *nothing*, or about *no-thing*, is not (in the case pursued here) without weight or without responsibility. Faith as a relation to what absolves itself comes with a certain commitment, namely, as already cited: the "duty to *let oneself be absolved*" from "manifestation and representation," from self-possession and the need of foundations. In a formulation loyal to the enigmatic intuitions of the Eckhartian tradition, we may say that faith here is an untied relation bound up with commitments (not least in the sense of devotion). A relation to what absolves itself is not an airy matter, then, but a profound faithfulness to that very absolving,

³¹⁵ Cf. Meister Eckhart, Sermon Ninety-Six, 463ff: "You should sink away from your youness and dissolve into His Hisness, and your 'yours' and His 'His' should become so completely one 'Mine' that with Him you understand His uncreated self-identity and His nameless Nothingness. [...] And in that One may we eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness. So help us God."

³¹⁶ Kangas 2007, 197 (in the 'Conclusion'), emphasis added.

answering to the “demand to hold oneself open to God’s withdrawal.” In the committed relation to what absolves itself, the faithful creature answers (sincerely) to *nothing*, gives itself over to nothing as well as holds on to nothing, but is this not very close to saying that one answers *for* nothing?

To this study, the passion called faith in *Fear and Trembling* also relates to an utter groundlessness; however, I found in the disaster of a command: an ambiguous address and a certain gravity. The dire address of the command (sacrifice your son!) is, I have suggested, ambiguous both in terms of origin and message: it comes in too many voices, or, in contradictory voices, it comes from who-knows-where, indeed, it may have come from the deluded man himself, having waited a lifetime (for a son) to the point of the preposterous. And yet, it is a voicing or a summon that one has to answer even if it is not certain whether anything was heard at all, and even if one perhaps misunderstood the message – was it addressed *to me*, was it *from God*, was it *about a sacrifice of a son*? A terrible ordeal comes with the demand, a test or trial, one may say; a dreadful abyss of madness that opens not only in what is said or heard, but also in what may or may not have been said or heard. To answer such an ambiguous address is to carry out a possible wrong, or, to follow the sense of the dreadful responsibility I have pointed to in de silentio’s writing: to answer such an address comes with a culpability that one cannot escape, namely the culpability of answering without grounds or justification. It is to answer not only *to* the groundlessness (as in the faith relating to *no-thing*) but also *for* the groundlessness.

Having (perhaps) heard the ambiguous address – the dreadful command, a shattering of the all, a devastating loss of foundation – one has to answer, and in this answering, one answers for the groundlessness of one’s (unjustified and unjustifiable) decisions, choices and actions done and undone, or, to push the point, one answers for answering *at all*, in the first place – and, not least, *in the first person*. Agamemnon, the tragic hero, did not get the *inescapability* of this guilt; still wanting vindication, he tried to escape the blame for something (to be) done by making his decisions reasonable and even honorable, but failed to notice the guilt of the *very reasoning* of his argumentative negotiations (oh, blindness, such a

shared trait of tragic heroes) that was *his* answer to the divine demands (sacrifice your daughter!).

Movements of irony

My reservations with regard to a faith that is about nothing, or that answers to nothing, comes down to a question of answering and the gravity of relations. To me, the duty of a relation to what absolves itself – the demand to let oneself be absolved and to hold oneself open to groundlessness – comes very close to the no less committed movement of irony³¹⁷ as it is found in the figure of Socrates by Kierkegaard in his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*. Here, in the words of Kangas, it is also about a relation of no-thing:

To relate to the divine as the absolute is to abandon positive determinations. Once the absolute is grasped as absolute, positive determinations appear as essentially and fatally relative. Socrates' whole effort of thinking was, ever anew, to arrive at this sense of the relativity of all ontological predicates. His irony consisted in the dialectical work of destroying predicates in terms of their ultimacy by showing their internal contradictions.³¹⁸

The irony of Socrates, a way of existence rather than (merely) an aesthetical exercise, perhaps a movement rather than a concept, is a manoeuvre to liberate thinking (save it, one might say) from the deceptions of thinking such as positivity beyond doubt and objectivity without stricture. Testifying faithfully to nothing,³¹⁹ as a sort of divine mission,³²⁰ the Socrates of *The Concept of Irony* takes on the task of continually *re-opening* the groundlessness of thinking, that is, letting a

³¹⁷ An intuition that might be shared with K. Brian Söderquist who describes *irony* in a phrasing that runs somewhat parallel to the terms *releasement* or *absolving*: "Irony is a concept of *liberation*, or better yet, a concept which *liberates*." Söderquist 2007, 91.

³¹⁸ Kangas 2007, 22.

³¹⁹ CI 270: "Therefore we can say of [Socrates'] irony that it is earnestness about nothing – insofar as it is not earnestness about something." /SKS 1, 307: "Man kan derfor sige om Ironien, at det er den *Alvor med Intet*, forsaavidtsom det *ikke* er den *Alvor med Noget*."

³²⁰ CI 236: "But in order to be able to hold him fast at this point, in order never to forget that the content of his life was to make this movement at every moment, we must recollect his significance as a divine missionary. Although Socrates himself places much weight on his divine mission, Hegel has ignored this." /SKS 1, 277: "Men for at kunne fastholde ham paa dette Punkt, for aldrig at glemme, at hans Livs Indhold var dette, I ethvert Moment at forestage denne Bevægelse, maa man erindre hans Betydning som *guddommelig Missionar*. Denne hans guddommelige Mission har Hegel ikke paaagtet, omendskjønt Socrates selv lægger saa megen Vægt derpaa."

dialectical work or a work of ‘infinite negativity’ come into play that ever anew and at every moment pulls the rug out from under a misled thinking that spells *Truth* with a capital T and puts its faith in universal principles. The work of negativity is a movement *of* thinking (as ironic critique)³²¹ that takes a swipe at the *delusions* of thinking (misconceptions such as Knowledge with a capital K); Socrates remains within thinking, a philosopher through and through. Irony is in this way sceptical about all but scepticism³²² ‘*itself*’, one might say, thus indicating the vague slide whereby irony almost becomes a concern about *something* after all. Incessantly at work, however, the reply of irony might be that any such *something* would turn out to be without basis or substance, without an essential core, or, put otherwise: without essential content,³²³ it would (still) be about *nothing*. To say that the movement of irony ends up with nothing, is also to say that one does not ‘end (up)’; terms such as ‘end’ (as finality) and ‘beginning’ (as foundational) are precisely notions of quite problematic character if not downright dubious misconceptions to a missionary of ‘pure irony’.³²⁴ The venture of irony does not lead to conclusions thought as ultimacies, then, but works ‘at every moment’ to keep thinking suspended: “Socrates exercises his subjectivity by reflexively grasping the content of his own position, that is, its sense of the nothing at the heart of all phenomena. [...] The movement of thinking is for him an infinitely light playing with nothing.”³²⁵ Answering to nothing, irony is in a way a non-answer, an answer

³²¹ Darío González keenly differentiates between ‘doubt’ and ‘irony’ in his perceptive article: “Unlike ‘doubt’ (another form of absolute negativity), irony does not concern ‘concepts’ but the ‘subjectivity’ of the individual. That is why irony ‘does not have to do with the thing, but with itself’ (SV1 XIII, 331/KW 2, 257).” González 1996, 280. As I understand this quotation (or, as I misunderstand it), González brings out a distinction of *The Concept of Irony* that pushes the operation of irony from an abstract manner of dealing with ‘objects’ of thinking – a doubt about something, so to speak – towards an understanding of irony as an existential way of re-opening thinking (as a sort of subversion of the mad dreams of unity and totality that can be found in thinking), that is, an *internal* resistance movement of sorts. In this interpretation – which this study follows insofar as I can be said to have understood it – thinking and subjectivity are not separated, or, more to the point, they *cannot* be separated which brings along entangled and possibly insoluble problems that so caught the attention of Kierkegaard, a thinker of existence and (once) an existing thinker.

³²² Here understood broadly as an impulse of thinking to question the certainty of any knowledge, a critical inquiry not bound up with any specific school or tradition of philosophy.

³²³ CI 54: “Socrates does not peel off the husk in order to get to the kernel, but hollows out the kernel.” I came across this fine citation in Söderquist 2007, 70.

³²⁴ CI 210: “purely negative.”/SKS 1, 254: “*blot negativ*.”

³²⁵ Kangas 2007, 26. Referring here to Smyth 1986.

that refuses to give an answer in that very answering; infinitely light and suspended, it keeps negativity in play.

Though the movements of absolving and irony cannot be said to be centripetal as they precisely take issue with, or hollow out, cores and kernels (that is, centres of unity, so to speak), there is, still, – to my study – a *circularity* to these movements that both, in a certain way, are about: themselves. With the movement of absolving, faith is faithfulness to that very absolving, and in the movement of irony, irony is not about something (else), but a work that keeps ‘itself’ in play. These are movements that the faithful in the Eckhartian tradition (as regarded by Kangas) and the missionary of irony (as regarded by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*) must give themselves over to, letting those movements work *within* them; movements at every moment reopening (themselves) which the faithful and the ironist must (then) testify, or answer. Put otherwise, both the movement of absolving and the movement of irony can be said to be: an incessant opening that one must keep oneself open to.

In *Fear and Trembling*, I have found in the passion called faith a movement of a different trajectory and a relation of a different kind. With the horrific demand to sacrifice a son, Abraham does not only answer to this demanding (‘itself’), nor does he answer to nothing. In answering, Abraham answers also *for* someone, namely Isaac, the son to be sacrificed. His task is not “an infinitely light playing with nothing” but an unjustified undertaking of monstrous *gravity* in the weight of a body, promise and joy incarnated in a child of flesh, blood, and bones.

The weight of a body – differences of gravity

The binding of Isaac is such an appalling deed also because there is already a bond to Isaac to whom Abraham is related in a profound sense.³²⁶ Although to answer the demand (in *Fear and Trembling*) is to take upon oneself ‘the dreadful responsibility of loneliness’ – that (the) I alone must bear the responsibility – it is (again, in *Fear and Trembling*) precisely a responsibility that does in a very significant

³²⁶ Though we may very well, and quite strongly so, could differentiate between the sacrifice of *a* child and the sacrifice of *my* child, it is a transgression so violent that it might not (and perhaps along with the decisive difference) make sense to assess the atrocity rankwise.

way involve others, namely, the son to be knife-stabbed and the mother to lose her only child. We may put it as follows: Abraham *alone* must bear his responsibility but Abraham *is* not alone *in matters of life*.

Johannes de silentio's enigmatic formulation – that Abraham cannot speak – has brought about many reflections and much discussion, and understandably so. It may therefore, given the multitude of examinations, be worth to keep in mind that this strange situation – that Abraham cannot speak and yet he speaks without saying anything³²⁷ – is presented as a problem precisely with regards to those *relations* involved in the journey to Moriah and the looming sacrifice of a child, or, to go to the heart of it, it is presented as a problem with regard to the relations (already) *involved in the life* of Abraham. This concern is voiced in the question of the third Problema (“Was It Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?”),³²⁸ pointing towards the *others* of the narrative, to the other relations into which Abraham is already woven; a *relational* intrigue, so to speak, that is a way of how we are in the world.

My study finds (in the reading of *Fear and Trembling*) an emphasis on bonds and relationships: in the main story of Abraham, in the several intertwined narratives of love and loss, and in the four analogies of a mother and her child in the poignant section of Mood (*Stemming*). An abundance of relations that – following the many storylines in *Fear and Trembling* – makes life so complicated, and in a more condensed sense, makes (up) life. With the third and last Problema of *Fear and Trembling*, we are reminded of the relationality of life, of the others³²⁹

³²⁷ SKS 4, 206: ”Imidlertid er der dog bevaret et sidste Ord af Abraham, og forsaavidt jeg kan forstaa Paradoxet, kan jeg ogsaa forstaae Abrahams totale Tilstedeværelse i dette Ord. Han siger først og fremmest ikke Noget, og i denne Form siger han hvad han har at sige.”

³²⁸ SKS 4, 172: “Var det etisk forsvarligt af Abraham, at han fortiede sit Forehavende for Sara, for Elieser, for Isaak?”

³²⁹ Pushing it towards a Levinasian point here, I wish to suggest a sense of 'the others' that goes beyond the family relations of a father or a mother and a child, of those 'near and dear to us' ("ceux qui nous sont chers," Levinas 1995, 165). In *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Levinas writes forth a sense of responsibility that *always also* involves the *third*: "En ce désintéressement – quand responsabilité pour l'autre, il est aussi responsabilité pour le tiers." Levinas 2004, 33. Cf. Levinas 1998b, 16. Or as it is said in an almost poetic formulation in *Totalité et infini*: "Le tiers me regarde dans les yeux d'autrui." Levinas 1990, 234. The *third* (le *tiers*) is the other's other ("Le tiers est autre que le prochain, mais aussi un autre prochain, mais aussi un prochain de l'Autre et non pas simplement son semblable," Levinas 2004, 245) and also, ambiguously, all the others of the other. This relational intrigue – a complexity of substitutions, proximity, and non-presence – must

whom we answer for (in our answering, and in our decisions and choices) even if we cannot offer them a proper response, or, to follow the sense I am pushing for here: even though we cannot offer them a proper response. How can we ever – walking as we are on groundless grounds – give an accurate or full answer that is not provisional and incomplete? How or when can we ever say that we acted or responded “ethically defensibly” when the justification for such an assessment is without grounds? We are guilty already in answering.

The movement of faith (in my reading) carries a gravity that – in a sense not entirely metaphorical – keeps Abraham in the world of soil and finitude, to the bonds and temporality of life on earth (*dette Liv*, SKS 4, 116). In the binding of Isaac, the father of faith did not merely offer ‘the best’ (FT 28/SKS 4, 124) that he had; he had to sacrifice his son. The weight and warmth of that body gives the movement of faith, in its risk and absurdity, a load of *mortality* that cannot be exchanged for a ‘vague term’ (*ubestemt Udtryk*) or an abstract idea whereby the burden of the other would evaporate into a sphere of speculation. To suggest a responsibility otherwise than the enterprise of speculation is not (meant) to separate thinking and life, but to point towards a way of thinking that cannot be untied from life, and a way of life that cannot be untied from (the) others.

To sum up the suggested difference between the movement of absolving and the movement of faith (in *Fear and Trembling*), we may put it as follows: it can be said to be the difference between *life as on loan* and *life as in debt*. When life is on loan, I must recognize that ‘my’ life is not mine – I do not own it; the humble courage of the Eckhartian tradition is therefore to let go and hold on to nothing. In a life of debt, I am indebted to the relations that make up my life and the others *for* and *to* whom I am bound to answer even though my answers are never quite adequate or

be understood in its anarchic structure: ”Le sensible [...] noue le nœud de l’incarnation dans une intrigue plus large que l’aperception de soi; intrigue où je suis noué aux autres avant d’être noué à mon corps.” Levinas 2004, 123. The *inescapability* of the relations with the others as a pre-original structure of the I is among the significations that resounds in the provocative Levinasian notion of *hostage* (*botage*). The *monstrosity* and downright *impossibility* of the responsibility for *all* the others (“Le mot *Je* signifie *me voici*, répondant de tout et de tous,” Levinas 2004, 180-181) are played up in a no less radical reading of the Abraham narrative by Derrida 2008b.

sufficient; a life as in debt is an existence of inescapable responsibility and guilt that I must nevertheless take up as *mine*.

To sum up the possible difference between the movement of irony and the movement of faith, we may say that whereas the ironist through an incessant reopening of thinking finds “at the heart of all”: a “sense of the nothing.” There is at the heart of Abraham’s life: a paradox, or, as I have suggested, an openness of ambiguity.

Letting go of the movement of absolving and in particular the pulse of negativity, we are yet to depart from the track of retreats. I am trailing movements in an attempt to answer a question of this part (what is the passion called faith *about*, or, where does it come *from*), and in this pursuit, I am also tracing *the sense of a word*, namely, the peculiar word which the passion called faith, also in *Fear and Trembling*, in a certain sense is *about*. A word that has been in front of every movement that has yet been explored, and yet, it may have fallen into the background of this investigation so easily distracted by motions and gestures, and ever intrigued by cracks of difference. Somehow that distinct word has lost its pronunciation in the very movement of the inquiry, although the movements under consideration all take their beginning, or departure, from this very word: *God*. *God* withdraws (behind a contradiction), *God* absolves (from being). My attention to movements is not a lack of interest in the peculiar word, however; I have followed the intuition that a *sense* of the word might come about in the movements of those formulations. The word *God* is a main concern of this study – a word at issue and, perhaps, at stake; it opened the investigation (*God tempted*) of this part as well as the story of Abraham, and yet again, it seems also in *Fear and Trembling* to be eclipsed by the many other words (dramatic figures, tragic heroes, and proper nouns), although it is, in my reading of that work, of crucial significance.

To sum up, then: the sense of this peculiar word is at the heart of the investigation, even when not explicitly pronounced. This is the case also in the following passage where the movement under consideration departs rather than takes its beginning from that word.

A movement of the gods – Nancy and spacing

In a curious essay, playing with the mythological fabric of which the premise is (precisely) at issue, Jean-Luc Nancy³³⁰ opens his plot of movement with the brief and puzzling line: “One day, the gods retreated” [*Un jour les dieux se retirent*]:

One day, the gods retreated. On their own, they retreated from their divinity, that is to say, from their presence. What remains of their presence is what remains of all presence when it absents itself: what remains is what one can say about it.³³¹

One day, the gods retreated from their own presence; they absented from their divinity, and all there remains is: “what one can say about it.” We are left with language, or, we are left in language, with the words that always only re-presents presence, with stories *about* that absented presence. Thus, the above citation must be read in its elegant elliptical circuit, so that presence (any presence) is withdrawn from the first line, a short story in five words (“One day, the gods retreated”). Neither ‘the gods’ nor that ‘one day’ can be said to have ever been present, or, those terms can only *be said* to have once been *as* presence; what remains is (only) the story *about* a retreat. A point of Nancy’s essay is that both terms of the English title, implied in the *deux* of the French title and unfolded in the essay, “Between story and truth” (“*Entre deux*”), are emptied of presence. Put otherwise: emptied or deprived of presence, neither of the terms can be *as present*, that is, no story can be true *as story*, and no truth can be narrated *as truth*, “for, no presence will be able to attest it.”³³²

The plotline of the essay (opened equivocally as a story itself) is precisely to be understood *in* the separation dividing and defining (albeit in a somewhat negative sense) both narration and truth, and thus tells a tale lacking (any) truth

³³⁰ I am not so much shadowing a trail of Nancy as I am trailing a shadow of Nancy given that I am here only tracking a movement of retreat as it is put into play in a short essay that so far from does justice to the subtle complexity of his suggestions in more elaborate works. Although I am not offering a thorough reading of the work(s) of Nancy, I am, hopefully, not betraying the points of his dense essay either.

³³¹ Nancy 2000, 4.

³³² Nancy 2000, 5.

(being there), or, to put it otherwise: when we are told that "one day, the gods retreated," we are also told that this 'one day' *is* not and (for what we know) never was, and that those 'retreating gods' *are* not and (for what we know) never were. As I understand it, narrative(s) and truth (both now absent of a certain presence) come about in this separation from which they cannot be separated. We cannot (*now* in the sense of after-the-retreat) get behind this gap of opening; we cannot reach or get hold of a(ny) divine presence ('the sacred body') which we (after-the-retreat) hear about only in its mythical rumours. An echo of this after-the-retreat (perhaps even after-the-fact) resonates soundlessly in the following citation: "Truth and narration are separated in such a manner that it is their separation that installs them as one and the other. Without the separation, there would be neither truth nor narration: there would be the divine body."³³³

However, the main interest of the essay is neither of those two terms in their deprivation, but the movement of retreat in a quite particular sense: "For Nancy the dichotomy (matter and spirit, story and truth) is secondary, and the *spacing* of the two terms is what is important, in their inextricability and incommensurability."³³⁴ What is at issue in the essay is not so much a movement of retreating in the sense of a linear route of withdrawal, as if there were once upon a time a presence that was then later pulled back; what is at issue is rather a movement of retreat as *spacing*.

The accentuation is neither on 'story', nor on 'truth', but on the '*between*', a point that is already indicated in the original title: *entre deux*. We may say that the movement of absencing is a spacing *entre deux*, a sort of *intervalling* that might seem to unfold its sense in a spatial trope, that is, as a movement that in its retreat or retraction makes place or leaves room. However, the movement of *spacing* is not about space as expanse (or rooms to be filled up),³³⁵ but is described in the essay with an unexpected figure:

³³³ *ibid.*

³³⁴ Watkin 2011, 84, emphasis added.

³³⁵ "Do not abandon the service of truth nor that of the figure, without however, filling up with meaning the gap that separates the two. Do not abandon the world, which becomes always more world, more under the spell of absence, more in interval, incorporeal, without saturating it with signification, revelation, proclamation or apocalypse." Nancy 2000, 5.

What one can say of the absenting presence is always one of the two things: its truth, or its story (*histoire*). Of course, it could even be its true story. But because the presence has fled, it is no longer certain that any story about it can be absolutely true: for, no presence will be able to attest it. Thus what remains is straightaway divided into two parts: story and truth. The one and the other have the same origin and are related to the same thing: the same presence which has retreated. Its retreat is thus manifested as the *line* that separates the two, the story and the truth.³³⁶

In a characteristically elliptical phrasing (a way of formulation that reopens the meaning of the already said), Nancy lets the retreat be ‘manifested’ as the *line* that separates the two: the line *entre deux*. This line – manifest (only) as an absence of presence – is the *between* of terms, at once a line of separation and a line of entanglement; a line that divides terms, but also divides itself in its (re-)opening movement of ‘*intervalling*’. What we may call the double bound signification of the dividing line can be found in writing as the stroke of a dash (-) or a slash (/), lines of separation *and* relation: borderlines in-*between*.³³⁷

A sense of opening

Between ‘the one and the other’, between story and truth, then, is a dividing line that also partakes and *en-gages* in an entangled relation of absence and presence, a connection we might schematically or graphically depict as absence – presence. The line of retreat is in a way *between* absence and presence, but that way is a very particular one. Since the ways of movements are of great interest to this study, an interest also pursued in the part to come, I will stay attentive to the sense of (the) *between* and the figure of a line in the following passages.

In the essay trailed, lines (in the sense of sentences) of nounal descriptions delineate movements that resonate in the entangled play of absence – presence: we are told about a presence that absented (a “presence that fled”) and about an

³³⁶ Nancy 2000, 4.

³³⁷ Cf. Žižek 2009, 275: ”This is Lacan's final late "Hegelian" insight: the convergence of the two incompatible dimensions (the real and the Symbolic) is sustained by their very divergence, i.e., difference is constitutive of what it differentiates. Or, to put it in more formal terms: it is the very intersection between the two fields which constitutes them.”

absenting that is presented (“manifested”). Such movements might easily be mistaken for dialectical activity (between oppositional terms); yet, the complex point of the movement of spacing does (precisely) not come about in the *oscillation* between contrasting-and-reversible terms – as an absence that is as presence and a presence that is as absence; rather, the line of retreat is a movement of absenting that challenges and de-termines (also in the sense of destabilizes) the condition of both terms *as such* (which is also to destabilize the sense of the ‘as such’). With a treacherously simple (that is, at least grammatically straightforward) phrasing, Nancy writes: “there is absence of presence.” As I understand it, Nancy here writes forth (though, perhaps not quite ‘into view’) a complexity as well as an *intricacy* of the movement of absenting. There is not a line between absence – presence in the way of oscillation, a route for sense travelling back and forth; there is, rather, absence-presence, an “intrigue of absenting,”³³⁸ one might say. However, this absence-presence *is* only in its *movement* of absenting, and thus, it never is *as such* (or, as *present*). After the gods retreated, (which is also to say, *from* the line of retreat), whatever there is, *is* only in this absence-presence, where a movement of absenting withdraws the foundation of that ‘is’. Or, perhaps: the movement of absenting is not so much about a *retreat* of presence or foundations (“there is not a presence that then retreats”), as it is about an unconditional (re-)*opening* of absence-presence. Perhaps the movement of absenting is not so much about retreat in the sense of a linear line of withdrawal (as already suggested), but rather a somewhat coiled gesture of a line of divide, a paper-thin and abysmal breach of spacing that incessantly re-opens absence-presence in our world of representation, between story and truth:

There is absence of the body of gods. [...] What remains is what we can say of it — and the *said* (*le dit*) has become incorporeal, like the void, like space and like time. These are the four forms of the incorporeal, that is, the interval in which some bodies can be found, but which is never one body. *The interval is*

³³⁸ An expression of Nancy suggested in another text. See Nancy 2008, 86.

ever being opened up and divided. The *said* is no longer given, attached to the divine body, [...] it becomes distended, *logos*.”³³⁹

With the opening of an interval – a line of spacing – Nancy points, in my reading of his essay, towards a way of movement between terms otherwise than that of dialectical oscillation. A movement of absenting that is not a *withdrawing* of sense but an *ever opening* of sense (and, in this way, it can be said to follow an essential dynamics of dialectics). A way of opening that does not make room for a sense to arrive in its fullness: it is not an opening *for* sense to be (present) but an opening *of* sense in a way that re-opens the absence-presence *in* every sense, the lack of a present presence that could *verify* the truth of any sense. What remains after the gods retreated is what one can say about it. What one can say “is no longer given,” and does not have a corporeal, or ‘real’, essence that would underwrite the capitalization of any word. But we may (also) say that a mind believing a capital letter to bestow on a word some essential power (or threat) is giving in to a mythological thinking of a certain kind – whether one refrains from or swears to capitals.³⁴⁰

With the movement of absenting, I may have found what I have elsewhere sought: “But we are searching for movements otherwise than the back and forth routes ruled by dialectics.” The movement of spacing – *entre deux* – is a way of opening sense *between* terms, and yet, it does not travel in the course of oscillation. It is a movement *within* a set of *binary* structures – *entre deux* – and yet, it does not find sense to be caught up in such schemes. All the same, having trailed a movement of *intervalling* through the last passages, this study is already seized by the lure of duality, the forceful pull of binary structures; a powerful structure, or a power-

³³⁹ Nancy 2000, emphasis added.

³⁴⁰ This goes for both those who find that small letters may save thinking from substantialism and other dangers of the like, and for those who believe a capital letter to entail what we may call a sort of capitalization of sense as well. Might it not be possible to signal in writing, with words, a sense of difference without ascribing to these words or signs a presence/fullness/existence/finality? This is one of the suggestions of my study, trailing the sense of a word in two pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard who spells God with a capital G, seemingly unabashedly but perhaps not without a wink of a sort.

structure that is closely linked to the formula from which my exploration of movements took its departure: *God withdraws behind a contradiction*. As my on-going exploration of movements passes down a road of duality, I might have to loosen our allegiance to this formula without deserting my indebtedness to Kangas. The matter at stake – regarding the withdrawal behind a contradiction – is turning on the sense of *contradiction*.

The pull of binary structures and the need of meaning

What I have called a lure of duality, or the forceful pull of binary structures, can be said to be one of the many courses of organisation for thinking, a *modus operandi* of our ingenious minds to ensure a flexible flow in a complex network of processed sensations that would otherwise be but a fuzzing disarray. Our adept minds secure connections and find paths and passages, often taking the highways of thinking, high-speed routes well-travelled and well-established, leading the way so smoothly that we seldom give the choice of course, that is, the way(s) of thinking, a second thought. The highways and shortcuts of thinking are mostly helpful and often efficient, but, perhaps, also a little too swift when it comes to trailing the sense of a word that might only be traceable through detours and digressions. As highways and shortcuts, binary structures are infrastructural means that provide short travel time and faster arrivals. Efficiency that can be quite advantageous in the transportation of both thoughts and bodies, but in a study that has vowed not to rush toward conclusions, and that presently is trailing movements of departure (absolving, and absenting) rather than arrivals, we may better look for other ways of traveling.

I found in the absolving of *Gelassenheit*: a dynamics of interchange, where sense opens in this exchange of difference. These movements unfold in the *binary structures* which so effectively and yet so subtly guide a considerable part of our thinking and writing. This study is looking for a sense that is not unfolded in *pairs*

of opposition; movements otherwise than those of oscillation and dialectics.³⁴¹ This might appear to be a reachable quest, yet, it strikes me as quite a tricky task, given the seamless reign of binary patterns that silently governed the sentence prior to this one, and which is also shaping the course of *this* line of phrasing still on its way to a full stop.³⁴² These binary structures of organisation are sometimes marked in language by conjunctions and adverbs (such as ‘and,’ ‘but,’ ‘moreover,’ ‘too,’ ‘nevertheless,’ ‘however,’ ‘besides’), but often go unnoticed, coordinating our thinking into accessible frameworks such as the format of on-the-one-hand-and-on-the-other-hand, this-and-that, and this-or-that; a service of understanding (as so often: a double genitive) that breathes through difference(s). I find a framework of oppositional pairs to echo in a formulation as the following where meaning spelled with lowercase letters is conferred on meaninglessness *as an achievement* (as a response to nihilism):

Rather than restoring meaning, a response to nihilism will lie, I [Critchley] believe, in *meaninglessness as an achievement*, as a task or quest [...]. Here the task, the labour of interpretation – of interpretation respecting the determinate negation of meaning enacted by Beckett’s work – is *the concrete reconstruction of the meaning of meaninglessness*.³⁴³

The respectful desisting from restoring meaning (to its full glory, one might say) and the task of a ‘concrete re-construction’ of some sort of ‘meaning of meaninglessness’ take on sense from the backdrop of a relation of contrast: *meaninglessness* here gets its contours from the countering *meaningfulness* to which meaning shall not (or cannot) be restored; the meaningfulness that collapsed or fell apart or was shattered to pieces (or was revealed to be only a dream or a delusion); the splintered meaningfulness on the grave of which nihilism dances in praise of

³⁴¹ That is to say, I am looking for a sense of a particular word that is not unfolded in a movement of oscillation or pairs of opposition; however, that is not to say that this study will overcome or leave behind the pull of binary structures. Not only is that not a goal of the study, the very idea or ambition of ‘overcoming’ or ‘leaving behind’ is to this study, as will be underlined in a following passage, a misconception.

³⁴² The structure of the foregoing sentence rests on the opposition between the sense that this study is and is not looking for, and the sentence to which this note refers is split (even if not in equal parts) between a ‘manageable quest’ and the contrast of a ‘quite tricky task’, and so follows the highway of binary structures.

³⁴³ Critchley 1997, 27.

nothing. In other words, the *re-construction* of ‘the meaning of meaninglessness’ can be seen as a re-action to the ruins of meaningfulness. After the fullness of meaning crumbled, we are left with nothing but meaninglessness (which is also to say: *all* we are left with is but meaninglessness); after meaningfulness fell to pieces, any meaning to be found is devoid³⁴⁴ of meaning, or, following my interpretation, devoid of fullness, of conclusiveness, or, as a nod to the former section (on *Entre deux*), of presence. To have meaninglessness as a task, then, in the proposal of Simon Critchley, who authored the above quotation, would be to keep the lack of meaning in meaninglessness open, so to speak, that is, to respectfully acknowledge that meaninglessness is all there is, and, as a response to nihilism, to find a fragmentary sort of meaning after all in the quest of attending to this lack, this absence, this ‘determinate negation’ of (the fullness of) meaning,³⁴⁵ that is, a de-constructive mission not unlike the re-opening movement of irony.

To this study, the shattering of the all (found in the story of Abraham) does not lead to *meaninglessness*, as that would (merely) bring about another all, another totality (in its unreserved negativity). I have suggested that sense might be possible after-all even when there is no fundament to ground it, or no present presence to attest to it: a possible sense – resonant and loaded and (yet) vulnerable and unsettled – that does not have meaningfulness or meaninglessness as a task or an achievement.

Critchley, however, cleverly avoids the trap of falling into a pit while escaping a pothole; he does not end up with another all. Taking the sting out of meaninglessness, he does not succumb to a ‘flat nothing’³⁴⁶ (or, a full nothing, I am tempted to write) of the sort of nihilism to which *meaninglessness as an achievement* is a

³⁴⁴ A sense of the suffix *-less* is: ‘devoid of’ [from Old English: *-lēas*].

³⁴⁵ Might there be a slight difference, a slight shifting (*forskydning*), between the proposed quest of meaninglessness and the provocation of absurdity? That is, between a ‘respectful and determinate negation of meaning’ and a mad overflow of unreasonable sense that is baseless, out of place and in a way too much? Is it, perhaps, to stand on the edge of the same abyss after the shattering of the all, and either 1) to commit to a work of deconstruction, loyal to persistent negativity, or 2) to respond (as responsible) to an anonymous laughter, frivolous and disturbing, that can be heard from the openness of the chasm?

³⁴⁶ “On the interpretation I develop in Lecture 3, Beckett is not a nihilist, that is, he is not flatly stating that life is meaningless or celebrating the meaninglessness of existence, rather he indicates how meaninglessness can be seen as an achievement.” Critchley 1997, 27.

response.³⁴⁷ The proposal of Critchley, as I understand it, is to earnestly address the problems posed by nihilism (as it has been formulated by various traditions) without giving in to the “cynicism and resignation” of ‘passive nihilism’, that is, without abandoning the world – the finite world,³⁴⁸ or, as de silentio wrote, *this world*³⁴⁹ – entirely to a nothing-at-all. Not *entirely*. A single adverb that holds a force of resistance to the lures and temptations of totalities and completeness; we are to steer clear of any fullness as the title of the book (from which the above citation is taken) precisely indicates: *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing*.

Almost nothing – an infinitesimal difference of great significance, wherein a major bid of the book in a way pulsates:

Of course, this conclusion is disappointing. Moreover, it *must* be disappointing for this is where I began and to offer anything more would be to exacerbate the very nihilism I am seeking to confront. This is very little . . . almost nothing. Yet, the entirety of the effort here must be directed towards keeping open this ‘almost’.³⁵⁰

Keeping this ‘almost’ open, Critchley escapes the all, but we might say that his proposal leans toward the negative, also in the accentuation of meaninglessness. In this way, he can be said to follow the course that Wyschogrod in her thorough investigation of philosophical accounts of the negative has identified in a strand of the continental thinking of the twentieth century (here in relation to the binary opposition between being and non-being): “Yet existential thought fails to dismantle the binary oppositions of being and nonbeing or of being-for-itself, the being of the subject, and being-in-itself, the being of things. Rather, it simply attributes primacy to the negative.”³⁵¹ ‘Almost nothing’ is very close to nothing,

³⁴⁷ “To return briefly, in closing, to the problem of nihilism, the difficulty here is that if one accepts, as I hope to show, that one cannot find meaningful fulfilment for the finite, if death (and consequently life) is meaningless, then how does one avoid moving from this claim into the cynical conformism and sheer resignation of passive nihilism?” Critchley 1997, 27.

³⁴⁸ “To accept the diagnosis of modernity in terms of nihilism is to accept the ubiquity of the finite. That is, if God is bracketed out as the possible source of a response to the question of meaning of life, then the response to that question must be sought within life, conceived as a finite temporal stretch between birth and death.” Critchley 1997, 24.

³⁴⁹ SKS 4, 189.

³⁵⁰ Critchley 1997, 28.

³⁵¹ Wyschogrod 2006, 4.

with a heavy inclination towards the negative, yet, it only *almost* takes (a) side concerning the binary structure it takes on sense from.

In this study, I find that the identification made by Wyschogrod (concerning a generation of existential thinkers³⁵²) also goes for Critchley's proposal of meaninglessness as a task. Though he does not give into an all, he *does* "fail to dismantle the binary oppositions." However (and here I am following a point of Wyschogrod), this shortcoming may not be a failure after all (that is, it might be a intricate point, as will also be suggested in the following section).

A question of progress – "going futher"

Critchley's de-constructive quest for a meaning of meaninglessness, as I read it, takes place in the opening of binary structures. As the frame of his proposal, I found an unstated opposition between meaningfulness and nihilistic meaninglessness, and as a pronounced composition of re-action, I find a dividing line between 'active nihilism' and a 'liminal experience':

In [...] order to consolidate a critique of active nihilism that does not passively fail to respond to the problem, I would like to try and delineate a *fifth* response to nihilism that borrows heavily from the work of Heidegger and Adorno. [...]

Rather than overcoming nihilism, it is a question of *delineating* it.

What will be at stake is a liminal experience, a deconstructive experience of the limit – deconstruction *as* an experience of the limit – that separates the inside from the outside of nihilism and which forbids it both the gesture of transgression and restoration.³⁵³

³⁵² The thinkers to which the proposal is applied are named as "Heidegger and existential thinkers of his generation": "Heidegger and existential thinkers of his generation fasten upon the finality of death, upon facing up to the end. The *Angst* of human existence lived in anticipation of its coming to an end precludes the realization of Hegel's dream of crossing over, the conversion of nonbeing into being. Yet existential thought fails to dismantle the binary oppositions of being and nonbeing or of being-for-itself, the being of the subject, and being-in-itself, the being of things. Rather, it simply attributes primacy to the negative." Wyschogrod 2006, 4. The point here is not what 'existential thinkers' might or might not mean, whether such term makes sense, or which thinkers could be included. My interest is the binary oppositions and how to work within them without abiding by this scheme entirely.

³⁵³ Critchley 1997, 12.

Critchley's bid, his response as it is played out between meaningfulness and nihilism, between transgression and restoration, his *entre deux*, is – not quite unlike the suggestion of Nancy³⁵⁴ – given in the shape of a line: a limit of sorts, a borderline of separation and prohibition, or, of inter-diction, one might say. To deliver a profound critique (of active nihilism) is, in this understanding, not to dismantle a construction altogether; it is, rather, a balancing act of distinction insofar as this act, far from a move of stability, is understood in the sense of re-opening a line, or, to follow the phrasing of the citation: a de-constructive undertaking of “delineating it.” It is not a question of *overcoming* nihilism, of defeating it or demolishing it, but of working on the limit of it.³⁵⁵ The motion of overcoming bears in it a desire for mastery and triumphs, it shares the dreams of imperialistic totalities. Is it not the vanity and pride of such desires that de silentio in *Fear and Trembling* takes a swipe at in his ridicule of the urge of “going further”³⁵⁶? Through a wholehearted mockery, and by letting the tricky aspects of movements come into play, de silentio questions the triumph of going further, reflecting an old suspicion concerning the motion of overcoming (of a certain kind); a suspicion, or downright distrust, that, here in the words of Critchley regarding a challenge to metaphysics, finds very little advance in the movements of going further:

However, and this is the core of Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche, this counter-movement to metaphysics is held fast to the essence of that which it opposes. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche believes that the overturning (*Umkehrung*) of Platonism is an overcoming (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics. However, every overturning of this kind is but a self-deluding entanglement

³⁵⁴ Nancy 2000.

³⁵⁵ And, perhaps, as suggested elsewhere by Derrida, travelling the borders of the line in the double-gesture of ‘passing’ it: “[...] I insist on imposing on myself to mark *and pass* over these borders: pass over them in the sense that *to pass* is to exceed and pass to the other side, to exceed the limit by confirming it, taking it into account, but also in the sense that *to pass* is not to let oneself be detained at a border, not to take a border for a border, for an impassable opposition between two heterogeneous domains.” Derrida 2002, 369.

³⁵⁶ SKS 4, 210/FT 123: “One must go further, one must go further.’ This urge to go further is an old story in the world.”

within the logic of that which it opposes, and therefore the Nietzschean *Umkehrung* is simply a *Verkehrung*, a reversal.³⁵⁷

Though a perceptive distinction of terms (*Umkehrung*, *Überwindung*, *Verkehrung*) is a main point in the above quotation, I will – following the exploration of binary structures – call attention to the link that is somehow spun in the gesture of *counter-movements*, whatever the prefix. With oppositional schemes, a passage of exchange seems to open.³⁵⁸ Such channels of exchange – or reversal – have, I suggested, a circularity to their motions, and tend to stay “within the logic” of their (own) entanglement. Overcoming as a countermovement, or as a classical oppositional plot of dialectics, is, by way of its own procedure, an affirmation of a connection or a structure rather than the dismantling or departure of “that which it opposes.” Or, in other words, it “remains accompanied or even haunted by what it seeks to overcome.”³⁵⁹ A charged doubt, or a haunting shadow, does, in this understanding, accompany the triumph and perhaps even the possibility of overcoming (or going further) when understood in a particular sense of being over and done with a term, notion, or idea. This study is played out in the outline or trace of such doubts, not least with regard to the word: God (the sense of which may not be over and done with after (the) all).

In the framework of *Fear and Trembling*, a thematic thread of both the *Preface* and the *Epilogue* relates to the movement of *going further*, questioning not only whether the motion of leaving something behind is a sign of progress, but also the pursuit of progress itself. As it is also hinted by de silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, this study finds in the urge for advancement a latent desire for closure and completion,³⁶⁰ even if only in the stages of partial goals and by degrees. My reading

³⁵⁷ Critchley 1997, 4.

³⁵⁸ I suggest this as a *tendency* of oppositional structures, and not as a rule of *necessity*.

³⁵⁹ de Vries 1999, 122.

³⁶⁰ FT 122: “Faith is the highest passion in a person. There perhaps are many in every generation who do not come to faith, but no one goes further. Whether there also are many in our day who do not find it, I do not decide. I dare to refer only to myself, without concealing that he has a long way to go, without therefore wishing to deceive himself or what is great by making a trifle of it, a childhood disease one may wish to get over as soon as possible.”/SKS 4, 209: “Troen er den høieste Lidenskab i et Menneske. Der er maaske i enhver Slægt Mange, der end ikke komme til den, men Ingen kommer videre. Om der ogsaa i vor Tid er Mange, der ikke opdager den, afgjør jeg ikke; jeg tør kun beraabe mig paa mig selv, der ikke dølgger, at det har lange Udsigter med ham, uden at

is not an attempt to dismantle, overcome, or to go further. Searching for movements otherwise than the back and forth routes ruled by dialectics, I am not trying to reject or eradicate binary structures. Rather, I am looking for a possible sense of a word that does not play (entirely) by the rules of oppositional schemes.

It comes down to the sense of opposition or contradiction when tracking down movements otherwise than those of dialectical oscillation. We have in the oppositional formats visited³⁶¹ met up with dynamics of interchange and passages of reversal, formations where the terms were connected by an unbroken line³⁶² of travelling sense. These movements of correlation and interaction seem, to this study, a little too neat to be consonant with the kind of movement that I am trailing in the narrative of a father of faith. I have so far described the movement in question – when the word God enters the story – with the borrowed formula: *God withdraws behind a contradiction*. But is the oppositional scheme of a contradiction not a little too well regulated to express the sense that I am after? Might there not be a difference between 1) the opening of (a) conflict (in a contradiction), and 2) a dire shattering (of “*God tempted*”)? Or put otherwise and in the words of de silentio: where is the dread and anguish in a structure such as an oppositional contradiction? As a figure of logic working within logic, such contradiction somehow lacks that flash of madness that is written forth in *Fear and Trembling*. My suggestion is that the shattering of “*God tempted*” is not due to a ‘mere’ contradiction, a situation of oppositions that (albeit in a negative sense) only affirms the order of logic. The shattering of the all brings about an abyss of ambiguous openness, an *anxiety-ridden* paradox that does not showcase a rule of logic, but, rather, puts meaning in question. More than a sneer at a system,³⁶³ it is a traumatic blow at existence, at the meaning(s) of life that cannot ground itself on fundamental principles or orders, but trembles (only) in the answers given by an

han dog derfor ønsker at bedrage sig selv eller det Store ved at gjøre dette til en Ubetydelighed, til en Børnesygdom, man saa snart som muligt maa ønske overstaet.”

³⁶¹ Pointing out a tendency in oppositional connections, I am not proposing a general or universal rule of any kind.

³⁶² I find these movements of difference to open a channel for passing of sense. Though figures of opposition, they are not in discord. The opposition of the link, thus, makes the movement thoroughly dynamic: it continually re-opens as movement, yet, it is not, to my interpretation, itself interrupted.

³⁶³ FT 7-8/SKS 4, 103-104.

addressee.³⁶⁴ To de silentio, passion pulsates in the person who can reply: “I have my whole life in it.”³⁶⁵ In what? In love, which in this context (FT 123/SKS 4, 210) is described as a movement, and, thus, not exactly a fundament upon which to build an empire. Note that I am not outside of understanding here, nor am I rejecting contradictions; I only wish to push for a sense of that is not governed by too neat a coherence; I am trying to trace a sense (of a peculiar word) that does not entirely play by the rules.

An oxymoronic relation – a flash of madness: *out of tune, out of line, out of place*

In my reading, *Fear and Trembling* points towards a sense of a paradox that is not governed *entirely* by structures of correlation, interactive differences, or connections of contrast. I have suggested an *unruly* sense of paradox, otherwise than the figure of oppositional contradiction but not outside of it either.

The paradoxical relations in *Fear and Trembling* are pointedly inaccessible, oddly incongruous, and utterly incommensurable:

I [de silentio] for my part have applied considerable time to understanding Hegelian philosophy and believe that I have understood it fairly well [...]. All this I do easily, naturally, without any mental strain. Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; *then I am shattered*. I am constantly aware of the *prodigious paradox* that is the content of Abraham’s life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth.³⁶⁶

Unreasonably inordinate and tremendously *too much*, the paradoxical relations in the narrative of Abraham (as told by de silentio and read by this study) do not fit

³⁶⁴ To this study, a meaning comes to life in the answering, in responses such as: ‘I do’ or ‘here I am’, to mention a few but significant ones.

³⁶⁵ FT 123/SKS 4, 210: “[Da] jeg har mit Liv deri.”

³⁶⁶ FT 33, emphasis added/SKS 4, 128: ”Jeg for mit Vedkommende har anvendt adskillig Tid paa at forstaae den hegelske Philosophi, troer ogsaa nogenlunde at have forstaaet den [...]. Alt dette gjør jeg let, naturligt, mit Hoved lider ikke derved. Naar jeg derimod skal til at tænke over Abraham, da er jeg som tilintetgjort. Jeg faaer i hvert Moment Øie paa hiint uhyre Paradox, der er Indholdet af Abrahams Liv, i ethvert Moment bliver jeg stødt tilbage, og min Tanke kan, trods al sin Lidenskab, ikke trænge ind i det, ikke komme et Haarsbred videre.”

(together) and cannot by any means be mediated; they are, in a way, impossible. The paradoxical relations, in their unruliness and too-much-ness (or prodigiousness), can, perhaps, be likened to my suggestion of an *oxymoronic* relation in an earlier passage concerning the movement of *Gelassenheit*: ‘The structure of their connection (otherwise than that of *Gelassenheit* or ‘mere’ contradictions) is perhaps better described as that of an *oxymoron*, which – letting its etymological denotation ring in the pronunciation – carries a sense of the madness or foolishness (*moron*) that is lost in a harmonious connection of coherence.’ As a figure of speech, the oxymoronic relations are not outside of language or outside of understanding, and yet, they do not quite play by the rules of reason; we may say that they are *in* language and understanding *by way of the absurd* (a formula also of faith in *Fear and Trembling*). The way of the absurd – letting the etymological denotation of the latter word reverberate in the formula – conveys the unruly manner of being *out of tune* [Latin: *ab-surdus*, ‘out of tune’], the defiance of not playing entirely by the rules,³⁶⁷ and in this noncompliance, it gives way for a sense that blinks (only) in this mode of anarchy, of too-much-ness, a flash of madness, of thorough ambiguity. A sense that is not outside of language and understanding, and yet, in another way and with a nod to former passages, is disturbingly *out of line*.

‘Not outside’, ‘not overcoming’, ‘not denying’ – reservations that must be voiced repeatedly to avoid misunderstandings. Perhaps the very formula of ‘otherwise than’ (a sort of watermark in the Levinasian works that this study relates to) has a way of leading our minds down paths of exclusion? Otherwise *than* – a mischievous preposition that triggers a plot of comparison which so easily stumbles into a pair of opposition, and from there slides into a gesture of refusal. This study wishes to point to an understanding of the formula in its most tentative sense possible. The Levinasian suggestion of an *otherwise than being* is, to me,

³⁶⁷ An ambiguous sort of evasion that I also find to ring in the following citation. FT 46: “The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen.”/SKS 4, 141: “Det Absurde hører ikke til de Differentser, der ligge indenfor Forstandens eget Omfang. Det er ikke identisk med det Usandsynlige, det Uventede, det Uformodede.”

precisely a suggestion of a possible sense *otherwise* than, but – quite significantly – not *outside* of being. Being, or the question of being, is not left behind or overcome in the work of Levinas entitled *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, but, I suggest, re-searched in a way that finds questions and sense which signal otherwise:

Ce n'est pas parce que autrui est nouveau – quiddité inédite – qu'il signifie la transcendance [...]: c'est parce que la nouveauté vient d'autrui qu'il y a dans la nouveauté transcendance et signification. C'est par Autrui que la nouveauté signifie, dans l'être, *l'autrement qu'être*.³⁶⁸

A similar point can be made with regard to the writing of Kierkegaard. Though a recurring theme of his oeuvre takes on a critical, and at times satirical, tone concerning the reign and capacity of thinking (in the sense of rational reasoning), there is no (naïve) belief in his works that writing, or existing for that matter, can escape or leave behind thinking. A writing that is critical of thinking or points towards a sense otherwise than thinking might not (necessarily) be *against* thinking.³⁶⁹ It can also be read as a way of calling thinking into question, that is, the strands of thinking that forgets to examine its own presuppositions and premises. Put otherwise: To Kierkegaard and Levinas (as they are read in this study), it is not about taking side or going further, but about exploring sense and ways of thinking (as existing relations).³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Levinas 2004, 279. Here cited in the original formulation since the translation, perhaps symptomatically, neglects the punctuation marks that embrace and thus accentuate the two-word-phrase of such significance: 'dans l'être', and, in this omission, it allows for a misunderstanding that binds the *way* of the otherwise to being rather than letting it *signify*, enigmatically, in being. The translation reads: "It is not because the other is new, an unheard of quiddity, that he signifies transcendence [...]; it is because newness comes from the other that there is in newness transcendence and signification. It is through the other that newness signifies in being the otherwise than being". Cf. Levinas 1998b, 182.

³⁶⁹ "The putting in question of the ontological priority is a question that is posed, philosophically, against philosophy. The question obliges us, at the same time that we seek another source of meaning, not to repudiate philosophy." Levinas 2000, 129.

³⁷⁰ This point may seem, to some readers, quite obvious, perhaps even a bit banal. They may very well be right. And yet, it is easily forgotten or overlooked. As in the following quotation, unfairly taken out of its context: "The difference between Levinas and Blanchot is that Levinas cannot abandon philosophy, that is, cannot give up the discourse of concepts and definitions. Saying for Levinas is always ambiguously implicated in the said; it is not (as in Blanchot) a refusal of concepts and definitions, of mastery and work (of philosophy)." Bruns 1997, 114. I do not object to the proposed difference between Levinas and Blanchot (there are, indeed, significant differences). My suggestion here is only that Levinas might not wish to *abandon* philosophy or concepts or definitions (as he is not *against* philosophy). Or put otherwise: It is not that Levinas *cannot* abandon

This approach is also taken in this study, where differentiations are made to explore differences *and* relations, and where the suggestion of one point is not (necessarily) a rejection of others.

A word hard to track down

My search for movements *otherwise than* the back and forth routes regulated by a logic of opposition is not a *refusal*, then, of these highways of thinking, efficient paths also taken frequently by this study; I am only tracing the possible sense of a word that might come about in movements otherwise than such smooth tracks of oscillation, or, perhaps, comes about *as* otherwise. I have suggested that the sense (of the word we are tracing) may not play entirely by the rules of logical reasoning, rather, it is in language and in understanding *by way of the absurd*: out of tune, out of line, and, in a profound way, *out of place*.

Here, however, a concerned reader might ask, having followed the inquiry so far with great patience, whether or not this study, in all its trailing, has come out of its way, that is, whether or not it has lost sight of the story of which this part is a meditation. We seem, admittedly, to have moved far away from Abraham and the mountains of Moriah, and yet, we are now, at this moment, as close as possible to answering the questions that rose from the plotline in *Fear and Trembling*, and which I have ventured to investigate through circuitous routes and roaming detours; questions that (to this study) revolve around a peculiar word (God). Questions that were formulated as follows: what is this passion called faith *about*, or, *where* does it come from?

My reading has throughout this part tried to close in on the word which the passion called faith in a certain way is *about*. Perhaps we are, indeed, about to get some sort of hold of that word, but how to encircle the sense of a word that is out of place and, in an odd way, *out of reach*? How to handle words the sense of which

philosophy; rather, his project is not one of refusal. Curiously, to this study, however, Gerald L. Bruns, whether or not intentionally, seems to seize my point in his sentence: "Saying for Levinas is always ambiguously implicated in the said." A sense that is *in* the said by way of ambiguity, that is, a sense that winks in the said without being unfolded as said.

somehow defies encompassment:

[T]he glow of a trace is enigmatic, equivocal. [...] The infinite cannot be tracked down like game by a hunter. The trace left by the infinite is not the residue of a presence; its very glow is ambiguous. [...] This detour at a face and this detour from this detour in the enigma of a trace we have called illeity.³⁷¹

Perhaps the detour of a detour is the only possible way to trail the sense of a word that cannot be tracked down like game by a hunter; the sort of glowing or glimmering sense that one never quite catches up on; that does not end up as glass-eyed trophies on a wall. We might dissect a word only to find that the sense of it has slipped out of our hands even before we seized it. The passion called faith in *Fear and Trembling* is, in my reading, *about* a peculiar word, namely *God*; it is called forth by this word, it *relates* to it, and, we may even say that it is the answering to this word that prevents faith from ever coming to a conclusion.

Taking place without taking up place

The sense of this word is out of place, also in the sense of taking up no place. Rather than a retreating movement making place for otherness, it takes place *as* otherness or as *otherwise*. In *Fear and Trembling* (of my reading), the taking place of this word is a significant happening. In a way, it is the horrific peak of the story of Abraham, and yet, it is barely an event: God enters the story³⁷² in the devastating wording: “And God tempted” (FT 19/SKS 4, 115), and yet, who-knows-if-it-ever-happened? Is he not insane? Who can tell³⁷³ if a voice did *in fact* come to Abraham?

³⁷¹ ”La luisance de la trace est énigmatique, c’est-à-dire équivoque dans une autre sens encore qui la distingue de l’apparaître du phénomène. [...] L’Infini ne saurait donc être suivi à la trace comme le gibier par le chasseur. La trace laissée par l’Infini n’est pas le résidu d’une présence ; sa luisance même est ambiguë. [...] C’est ce détour à partir du visage et ce détour à l’égard de ce détour dans l’énigme même de la trace, que nous avons appelé illéité.” Levinas 2004, 27. Cf. Levinas 1998b, 12.

³⁷² In a way, and as a point of this reading, the word God enters the writing of *Fear and Trembling* (already) in the Exordium [*Stemming*], opening the book with an ambiguous tale revolving “that beautiful story” from which an old man, perplexed but nevertheless full of admiration, takes the violence of the story to be the glory (or beauty) of the story: FT 8: “Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham [...]” SKS 4, 105.

³⁷³ FT 77, emphasis added: “It takes him [Abraham] seventy years to get what others get in a hurry and enjoy for a long time. Why ? Because he is being tested and tempted [*fristetes*]. Is it not madness ! [...] Who can endure it ? Would not his contemporaries, *if such may be assumed*, have said, ‘What an

Perhaps it was only a trick of his mind, gone mad from all the waiting? It all takes place – without taken up place – in a fleeting moment (*i eet Øieblik*),³⁷⁴ in the blink of an eye, a shocking flash of madness, in (a) passing. A wink only, and yet, it changes the whole story, or the whole of the story. Abraham does not – as the tragic hero – get a closure (FT 78/SKS 4, 169). How could he when, for all we know, he took his son and a knife and went toward a landscape of mountains with the sole purpose of sacrificing his child to a God that may or may not have spoken to him? How could ethics ever exonerate him when he offers no explanations to anyone,³⁷⁵ when he does not give any reasonable explication that would shed some light on his decision and thus serve as a sort of defence of his actions? And yet, how could it be otherwise when the happening he is answering to and for³⁷⁶ is but a flash of madness, barely an event, and nonetheless life-altering for a man (and a son and a mother and a people to come)? What could he say when the call was a shattering of the all, a disastrous blow at the reasonable and the coherent? How could he explain when the sense of his life and that journey hinged on a prodigious – or *in-ordinate* – paradox³⁷⁷? Or, as I put it elsewhere: The command of God does not make sense – it comes as an unsettling non-sense.³⁷⁸ Preposterous, outrageous,

everlasting procrastination this is; Abraham finally received a son, it took him long enough, and now he wants to sacrifice him – is he not mad?”/SKS 4, 168: “Hvad Andre faae hurtigt nok og længe have Glæde af, det bruger han [Abraham] 70 Aar til; og hvorfor? fordi han prøves og fristes. Er det ikke Afsindighed? [...] Hvo kan holde det ud, skulde ikke hans Samtid, *hvis der kunde være Tale om en saadan*, sige: ‘det er en evig Nølen med Abraham; endelig fik han en Søn, det varede længe nok, saa vil han offre ham – er han ikke sindsvag?’”

³⁷⁴ “Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment. ‘And God tempted [fristede] Abraham [...]’ FT 19/SKS 4, 115: “Nu blev al Stridens Forfærdelse samlet i eet Øieblik. ‘Og Gud fristede Abraham [...]’”

³⁷⁵ SKS 4, 200: “Abraham talte altsaa ikke, han talte ikke til Sara, ikke til Elieser, ikke til Isaak [...]” Also, citing Derrida’s reading of the *Akedab* or *Chouraqi* in *Literature in Secret*: “No one would dare dispute that the very brief narrative of what is called the sacrifice of Isaac or Isaac bound [*Is’hac aux liens* (Chouraqi)] leaves no doubt to this *fact*: Abraham keeps silent, at least concerning the truth of what he is getting ready to do, as far as he knows about it but also as far as what he doesn’t know and finally will never know. Concerning God’s precise, singular call and command, *Abraham says nothing and to no one.*” Derrida 2008b, 128.

³⁷⁶ Answering also for the uncertainty as to whether anything happened and whether it then was even addressed to him, Cf. SKS 4, 154: “Er det muligt, at dette kan være andet end en Anfægtelse? Og hvis det er muligt, men den Enkelte greb fejl, hvad Frelse er der for ham?”

³⁷⁷ SKS 4, 150: “Dette Standpunkt lader sig ikke mediere; thi al Mediation skeer netop i Kraft af det Almene; det er og bliver i al Evighed et Paradox, utilgængeligt for Tænkningen.”

³⁷⁸ And yet, as my phrasing continued, it (also) opens for sense.

disastrous; the taking place of the word God (also as the words of God)³⁷⁹ in the narrative of Abraham is a happening that leaves the sense of that story unresolved, open for discussion, a pro-vocative challenge, or a test, some might add. Answering to this dreadful call, Abraham becomes a father of faith, but also, for all time, a person in question.

Entering without entering – the in-coming of a word

When the taking place of the word God in a story is understood (as it is in this study) as a catastrophic happening that Abraham somehow must face (up to) although there is no appearance to rely on, the taking place is more like a confronting coming than a departure. I am, thus, now to take leave of the formula of retreat: *God withdraws behind a contradiction*. Having already re-searched the sense of *contradiction*, and having investigated different movements of God, my study wishes to push the way of happening toward a direction otherwise than that of retreat. Rather than a withdrawal, I suggest the movement of (the word) God (as it comes about in the narrative of *Fear and Trembling*) to be an entering without entering³⁸⁰ (that is, without *presenting*). What to call this taking-place-without-taking-up-place, this sense that enters only in a flash of madness, barely an event, as phrased above? I will call this way of coming into a story without ever arriving as such – a *passing*, in the sense of entering a story only *in passing*, in a wink (*Øieblik*), a moment only but of tremendous signification. A blinking sense that comes from who-knows-where; *ex-orbitant* not only in the sense of

³⁷⁹ FT 19: "Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment. 'And God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain that I shall show you.'" SKS 4, 115: "Nu blev al Stridens Forfærdelse samlet i eet Øieblik. 'Og Gud fristede Abraham og sagde til ham, tag Isaak Din eneste Søn, som Du elsker, gaa hen i det Land Morija og offer ham der til Brændoffer paa et Bjerg, som jeg vil vise Dig.'"

³⁸⁰ With this suggesting it is necessary to ask – here with the words of Derrida – whether we are not – again – enveloped in a dialectical play, whether we can ever escape that game, and whether that is even an aspiration to be driven by: "Unless - unless the double bind as such is still too linked to opposition, contradiction, dialectic; unless it still belongs to *that kind* of undecidable that always derives from dialectical calculation and contradiction. In which case, it would be necessary to think another undecidable, to interrupt *this* double bind with a gap or a hiatus - and recognize in an *arrhythmic* caesura the respiration of rhythm. This necessity still awaits us." Derrida 2008b, 196-23; 225. However radically one might imagine or hope such interruptions to be, it is still 'necessary' or significant to question the ways – and orders – of our thinking.

incommensurability but also in the sense of *exteriority*. It enters the story from *who-knows-where-if-any-where*. In my reading of *Fear and Trembling*, the sense of the word God does not lurk as a spectral residue of sense, haunting the story, and reopening itself and the narrative ever anew. It comes (about) as a shattering openness, confronting and pro-vocative, a summoning enigma that signifies (only) in ambiguity. This is the possible gap of sense hinted at in the prologue of this reading: a ‘wager of this study is the suggestion of a difference – however minimal – between 1) a pulsing rift that keeps reopening (in) the text, and 2) an ambiguous openness that interrupts the text *from-who-knows-where*’. The sense of the word God is (insofar as one can say it ‘is’) out of place, also in the opaque sense of ‘coming from outer space’, or: *as if* it came (in a passing) from who-knows-where. This is not to say (it is precisely not to say) that this is *how it is*. It is to point out that this unfounded wager of exteriority is a suggestion that can be found in the writing of *de silentio*. A suggestion (of an intricate sense of exteriority) that – due to the very openness of (his) writing³⁸¹ – is never beyond doubt; groundless and unreasonable, this way of exteriority, of transcendence, is not definite, certain, unequivocal, or beyond question. In the selected works of this study, it is rather as if it comes about as (a) questioning, or as a question mark.

Secrets and signs

Otherwise than a movement of withdrawal, I have found the word God to come about in the story as an *in-ordinate* happening, and yet, as an entering without entering, without arriving as such. Happening and yet to arrive; perhaps as a secret without secrecy,³⁸² as it is formulated by Derrida who plays up the motifs of secret and silence in his interpretation of the Abraham narrative, a double-bind that is closely related to the absolute responsibility that Abraham, in the reading of

³⁸¹ As I understand it, Kierkegaard is aware of the groundlessness *upon* which he is writing. There may not be any ‘objective’ position from which the concept of truth can be determined, but that is not to say that the signification(s) of truth cannot be explored, contemplated, and in this sense determined and proposed. Though Kierkegaard might at times write in a tone which rings with a somewhat assured echo, verging on the normative, I find that his writings are open to questions, to the point where a quest for verification or validation is no longer the issue.

³⁸² Derrida 2008b, 157.

Derrida, is called to with the command to sacrifice Isaac.³⁸³ I find that the sense trailed in this study is both very close to and yet not quite in tune³⁸⁴ with the secret of *The Gift of Death* (*Donner la mort*), a possible difference that once again hinges on *nothing*:

We share with Abraham what cannot be shared, a secret we know nothing about, neither him nor us. To share a secret is not to know or to reveal the secret, it is to share we know not what: nothing that can be known, nothing that can be determined. What is a secret that is a secret about nothing and a sharing that doesn't share anything?³⁸⁵

I follow this quotation in its insistence regarding the secret of Abraham that 'to share a secret is not to know or to reveal the secret': there is 'nothing that can be known' or 'determined'. Yet, the accentuation in my reading would be on *the indeterminacy* of the secret more than on the 'nothing' repeated four times in the quotation. The odd sense of the word of my study is not 'about nothing', but is, rather, a *prodigious* paradox (*uhyre Paradox*, SKS 4), in-ordinate and too-much. What this tremendous sense might share with the secret without secrecy is, however,

³⁸³ "Secrecy is essential to the exercise of this absolute responsibility as sacrificial responsibility." Derrida 2008b, 68. As already mentioned: whereas this study has attempted to push for a reading that takes the gleaming knife of Abraham into account without letting that reflection dazzle the interpretation ("*det er kun ved Troen man faaer Lighed med Abraham, ikke ved Mordet*," SKS 4, 126, emphasis added), Derrida lets the sacrifice (of a son and so much more) be the leitmotif of his striking and influential reading of this difficult short story at the heart (and as a battlefield) of three religious traditions: "The account of Isaac's sacrifice can be read as a narrative development of the paradox that inhabits the concept of duty or of absolute responsibility. This concept puts us into relation (but without relating to it, in a double secret) with the absolute other, with the absolute singularity of the other, whose name here is God." Derrida 2008b, 67. The paradox of the absolute responsibility is heightened in the relation (without relation, 73) to the absolute other, who is put into play with the 'discreet displacement' (from where "two alarmingly different renditions" emerges, 83) of the elliptical formula '*tout autre est tout autre*': "It implies that God, as wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other. And since each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other [...], [then] Every Other (in the sense if each other) is wholly other (absolutely other)" (78). The aporia is, thus, that absolute and infinite responsibility to each and every other is impossible: "I can respond to the one (or to the One), that is to say to the other, only by sacrificing to that one the other" (71). In a quasi-paradoxical formulation, classical Derrida, one might say, it can be phrased as follows: I am absolutely responsible only by being absolutely irresponsible (or "Abraham is thus at the same time [...] the most responsible and the most irresponsible of men, absolutely irresponsible because he is absolutely responsible," 73).

³⁸⁴ There is, I believe, a difference between the reading of *The Gift of Death* and the reading of this study with regard to the theme of sacrifice. Whereas Derrida makes a profound point out of this theme (for example, that the sacrifice is both an outrageous impossibility *and* an everyday act), I point toward a plot otherwise than that of sacrifice and obedience.

³⁸⁵ Derrida 2008b, 80.

that they both seem to be un-graspable and out of place: “A secret doesn’t belong, it can never be said to be at home or in its place (*chez soi*).”³⁸⁶

The possible and slight divergence in signification between 1) an enigmatic sense of a prodigious paradox, and 2) a secret without secrecy (– *about nothing*) comes into play with the deal of silence, or, in the words of the above citation: a ‘sharing that doesn’t share anything’.

The theme of silence is evoked throughout *Fear and Trembling*: it is called into question in the third *Problema*, and, perhaps most slyly, it is announced with the pseudonymous writer who signs the *Preface*: “Respectfully, Johannes de Silentio” (*Ærbødigt Johannes de Silentio*).³⁸⁷ When a prologue dripping (with) sarcasm is signed ‘respectfully’, one should at least consider whether a certain mischievousness might not be linked to such signature. Johannes *de silentio* – a writer ‘from (or on) silence, and yet, a man of many words; a seemingly mismatch as it is also noticed by most commentators (on *Fear and Trembling*) with an ear for pseudonymity. Taking the many pages of his *Dialectical Lyric* into account, sheets packed with import and an abundance of tales, one should, perhaps, hear an inaudible stroke when this surname is said aloud, so that Johannes is also a man off-silence (*de-silentio*), as if he occasionally drifts *away* from the silence, as if he is not all about silence, or as if silence is not all there is? However we are to understand his name, there is an ambiguity to it that is gracefully voiced in this brief but vibrant formulation from *Donner la mort*: “This pseudonym keeps silent, it expresses the silence that is kept.”³⁸⁸ Insofar as *de silentio* ‘keeps silent’, or keeps a secret, he is nevertheless a man of expression. This simultaneity, of keeping silent and yet carrying on communicating, is the very plot of the strange epigraph by Hamann, in a way the first tale of many in *Fear and Trembling*:

Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den Mohnköpfen *sprach*, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote [What Tarquinius Superbus *said* in the

³⁸⁶ Derrida 2008b, 92.

³⁸⁷ FT 8/SKS 4, 104.

³⁸⁸ Derrida 2008b, 59.

garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not]³⁸⁹

The plot is³⁹⁰ that Tarquinius Superbus does not trust the messenger, a courier between Tarquinius Superbus and his son, and thus he takes the envoy, supposedly unknowing and quite oblivious to symbolic meaning, with him into the garden where he, Tarquinius Superbus, decapitates the highest poppies with a walking stick, letting this gesture be his message to the son. In one dense sentence, the epigraph showcases how to remain silent (in the sense of wordless) without staying silent (in the sense of unexpressed). One can, according to the compact story, convey a message without understanding the import(s) as does the courier, and one can express a significant point without putting it into explicit words as does Tarquinius Superbus.³⁹¹ What ‘silence that is kept’ does the pseudonymous writer, Johannes de silentio, express? What point does he make without stating it explicitly or unequivocally?

In *Fear and Trembling*, lavish with opaque stories and puzzling gestures, there are many such points to be found, and so, my study will here trail only one point made in relation to the word God, so sparsely mentioned in this work, and yet, to my reading, the very openness to which Abraham answers in his becoming a father of faith.

A word in question

The telling point which I am to track, is found in the ‘Eulogy on Abraham’ (*Lovtale over Abraham*) which may (or may not) be a veneration of Abraham. However, a tribute to (the word) God it is not. Note that it is not that the word God is

³⁸⁹ FT 3/SKS 4, 100, emphasis added.

³⁹⁰ My reading relies here on the rendering in the *Commentaries* to Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter: “Da Tarquinius Superbus’ søn, Sextus Tarquinius, i sin bestræbelse på at bringe byen Gabii under sin fars herredømme, ved list havde fået sig selv anbragt i en magtfuld position i byen, sendte han et bud til sin far i Rom for at høre, hvad han videre skulle gøre. Tarquinius Superbus, der ikke stolede på budet, sagde intet, men førte ham ud i en have, hvor han med sin stok slog hovederne af de højeste valmuer. Dette fortalte budet til sønnen, som da forstod, at han skulle rydde byens mest fremtrædende mænd af vejen.” SKS K4, 101.

³⁹¹ And the recipient, who was not present in the garden, must interpret the symbolic gesture into an instructive meaning as does the son, Sextus Tarquinius.

neglected in the eulogy, and in this sense unsung; it is in fact the passage in which that word is brought up the most in *Fear and Trembling*. The point regarding (the word) God is not made by way of *absence*, but precisely by way of *telling*: a telling gesture or a gesture of telling, it is *expressed*, as Tarquinius Superbus' violent gesture in the garden, without being explained or declared manifestly. In the eulogy on the father of faith, it becomes increasingly unreasonable to be God's chosen one (*Guds Udvalgte*) as God turns out to be increasingly unreasonable:

By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers and became an alien in the promised land [...]: he left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith. Otherwise he [...] surely would have considered it unreasonable [*urimeligt*]. [...] By faith he was an alien in the promised land, and [...] yet he was God's chosen [...] ! As a matter of fact, if he had been an exile [...], he could have better understood it – but now it was as if he and his faith were being mocked. [...] By faith Abraham received the promise that in his seed all the generations of the earth would be blessed [...]; time passed, it became unreasonable, Abraham had faith. [...] Abraham became old, Sarah the object of mockery in the land, and yet he was God's chosen [...].³⁹²

“What does it mean to be God's chosen?” – it is inquired somewhat worried (FT 18) as the trouble and woes seem to have no limit or end. What does it mean but despairing trials and mocking waiting time? And then, when God at long last does turn up, or enter the story, the unreasonableness is only magnified to the point of the deranged:

Then came the fullness of time. [...] So there was joy in Abraham's house [...]. But it was not to remain that way; once again Abraham was to be tried [*forsøges*]. He had fought [...] with that vigilant enemy who never dozes [...] – he had fought with time and kept his faith. Now all the frightfulness of the struggle

³⁹² FT 17-18/SKS 4, 113-114: “Ved Troen vandrede Abraham ud fra Fædrenes Land og blev Fremmed i Forjættelsens [...], han lod sin jordiske Forstand tilbage, og tog Troen med sig; ellers [...] have [han] tænkt, det er jo urimeligt. [...] Ved Troen var han en Fremmed i Forjættelsens Land [...]. Og dog var han Guds Udvalgte [...]! Ja havde han været en Forskudt [...], da kunde han bedre have fattet det, nu var det jo som en Spot over ham og over hans Tro. [...] Ved Troen modtog Abraham Forjættelsen om, at i hans Sæd skulde alle Jordens Slægter velsignes [...]; Tiden gik hen, det blev urimeligt, Abraham troede. [...] Abraham blev gammel, Sara til Spot i Landet, og dog var han Guds Udvalgte [...]”

was concentrated in one moment. “And God tempted [*fristede*] Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, [...] and offer him as a burnt offering [...]. So everything was lost, even more appallingly than if it had never happened! So the Lord was only mocking Abraham! [...] This was indeed a piece of folly, but Abraham did not laugh at it [...]. All was lost!³⁹³

What we are told in the eulogy on Abraham is that (the word) God comes about as utterly unjustified, and preposterously and disturbingly so. In the wake of the shattering entrance of (the word) God, the storyline continues in a voice that trembles with outrage:

Who is this who seized the staff from the old man, who is this who demands that he himself shall break it ! Who is this who makes a man’s grey hair disconsolate, who is this who demands that he himself shall do it ! (F^T 19)³⁹⁴

Who, indeed.

How are these appalled questions not a swipe with a walking stick, a telling gesture that points our attention in the direction of the God ‘*who* tested Abraham?’ We are at no point told that God is unreasonable in a *literal* sense, in words spelled out and evident. We are only *shown* that God seems unreasonable to the point of the absurd in the storyline of the eulogy. And here we are closing in on the point that I am here trailing with regards to *de silentio* and a certain sense of secrecy. To my study, the word of God came into the story as a flash of madness: In one passing moment (*i eet Øieblik*), everything is lost. *Meaningfulness* is shattered. The ground(s) disintegrates. Hardly there, and way too much: the sense of the word God enters-without-entering as a catastrophic address, a prodigious and in-ordinate paradox. In other words, *the sense of the word God does not make sense*, and the wager of *de*

³⁹³ F^T 18-19/SKS 4, 115: “Da kom Tidens Fylde. [...] Da var der Glæde i Abrahams Huus [...]. Dog saaledes skulde det ikke blive; endnu engang skulde Abrahama, forsøges. Han havde kæmpet [...] med hiin aarvaagne Fjende, der aldrig blunder [...] – han havde kæmpet med Tiden og bevaret Troen. Nu blev ak Stridens Forfærdelse samlet i eet Øieblik. ‘Og Gud fristede Abraham og sagde til ham, tag Isaak Din eneste Søn [...] og offer ham [...] til Brændoffer [...].’ Saa var da Alt forspildt, forfærdeligere end om det aldrig var skeet! Saa drev Herren da kun sin Spot med Abraham. [...] Det var jo en Daarskab, men Abraham loe ikke deraf [...]. Alt var forspildt!”

³⁹⁴ SKS 4, 115-116.

silentio, to this reading, is that he does not try to make sense of it. He does not explain the paradox away, and he does not try to put this in-ordinate sense into order. In this way, he does keep a secret (of sorts) – by letting the enigmatic sense blink in the text as an ambiguous openness that cannot be unfolded or uncovered, but signals *as* this shattering. He may be a jester, *de silentio*, but his stakes are high concerning the word God. Though not a father or (supposedly) a man of faith, he remains defiantly faithful to the in-ordinate sense of that word. He abstains from the temptation to make sense of the word, to make it sensible or reasonable. He does not make of it a “wordly wisdom” (*Leve-Viisdom*, FT 37/SKS 4, 132), a luring trap that this study continually stumbles into, obliged as it is by formal requirements and anxious to make some sort of sense. Johannes *de silentio* does not silence the violence of the story, nor does he cover up the paradox in a blanket of explanations (which would have solved the *Problemas* conclusively and thus have justified Abraham). Such clarifications might otherwise have helped the old man who got lost in a bleak circle of violence and explanations. Johannes *de silentio* does not re-install a new *meaningfulness* after the shattering of the all; in *Fear and Trembling* we are not offered (new) ground to stand on, but are given over to an ambiguous openness (and, so, a responsibility of our own). And yet, nor does *de silentio*, in front of this un-coverable abyss, succumb to meaninglessness or to (a) nothing. To suggest that the word God does not *make* sense is not say that it is *without* sense. A point of this study is that the sense of this word is somehow *out of place* or *out of line*. It does not *make* sense in the way that is required by the principles governing the main domains of comprehension where to-make-sense is to be intelligible, accessible and coherent.³⁹⁵ The sense of the word I have been trailing in this reading does not play *entirely* by the rules of these regulations, it signals *otherwise*. I have called this sense *in-ordinate*: un-ruly and too much. To this reading, then, the paradox that *de silentio* expresses without explaining is not a secret about *nothing*, and nor are the gestures of telling in *Fear and Trembling*, to my reading, ‘a sharing that doesn’t share anything’.

³⁹⁵ Or, we might ask in the voice of Levinas: “Can openness have another signification than that of disclosure?”

The impossible paradox and the ambiguous openness of a word

To answer (to and for) a cluster of questions that has led this study both ahead and off track, namely, *what is this passion called faith about, and where does it come from*, my suggestion is: the passion of faith in *Fear and Trembling* is about an in-ordinate sense of a word that comes from who-knows-where, a shattering encounter that makes of Abraham a father of faith *by way of the absurd*:

Venerable Father Abraham! [...] You who were the first to feel and to bear witness to that *prodigious* passion that disdain the terrifying battle with the raging elements and the forces of creation in order to contend with God, you who were the first to know that supreme passion, the holy, pure, and humble expression for the divine *madness* that was admired by pagans [...].³⁹⁶

Father Abraham – venerable as far as a madman³⁹⁷ – may be esteemed. This tried man who took on the terrible coming about of the word(s) of God with eyes wide-opened and who acted without any reasons given. This patient man who answered, *Here I am*, to an appalling demand of which we can never know if it were ever given. When it comes to the word God (in *Fear and Trembling* as here read), we can never *know*, that is, we can never know for sure.³⁹⁸ This is a point that I hope can be heard in the following suggestion: The word God signals as an ambiguous *openness*. However, it is also by way of the *ambiguity* of this openness that the father of faith does not drown in a bottomless abyss of utter despair. In the *ambiguous* openness emerges an impossible simultaneity: 1) a dreadful abyss of openness in which can be heard the anonymous laughter of an absurdity without redemption, and 2) a wondrous openness in which sense is possible after all and despite

³⁹⁶ FT 23, emphasis added/SKS 4, 119: ”Ærværdige Fader Abraham! [...] Du, der først fornå og vidnede om hiin uhyre Lidenskab, der forsmaaer den forfærdelige Kamp med Elementernes Rasen og Skabningens Kræfter for at stride med Gud, Du der først kjendte hiin høieste Lidenskab, det hellige, rene, ydmyge Udtryk for det guddommelige Vanvid, der blev beundret af Hedninger [...].”

³⁹⁷ FT 16-17: ”[But] Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness [...].”/SKS 4, 113: ”[Men] Abraham var større end Alle, stor ved den Kraft, hvis Styrke er Afmagt, stor ved den Viisdom, hvis Hemmelighed er Daarskab, stor ved det Haab, hvis Form er Vanvid [...].”

³⁹⁸ And is not the craving of guarantees or need of certainty something that faith no longer seeks, or, perhaps, forgets in its passion?

everything, an exorbitant surprise and generosity beyond hope and expectation (beyond even the ‘unexpected’, cf. FT 46).

Following this reading, faith is the mad answer to this ambiguous openness: I have faith that *it is impossible* and that *it is possible*. Here faith does not provide a passage from the first part to the second part, so that faith would be an overcoming of the impossible, a saving path to a possible that – released from the impossible – steadies into a conceivable possible, an achievable possible, a reasonable possible.³⁹⁹ Nor is faith a wavering movement between the two parts, as though faith were not quite able to choose whether to go with the one or the other: as a schizo-phrenic (understood in the sense of a split mind and not in the sense of a clinical diagnosis) oscillation between the parts. Faith is not, in my reading, a sort of *indecision* that cannot make up its mind, so to speak. Faith has no doubts: it *is impossible and it is possible*. Two parts out of keeping and yet at the heart of faith as an ambiguous relation that is kept in tension, two parts that are out of tune and unreasonably so, as a paradox gone mad.

Grammatically speaking, a parataxis (Greek, *para-* (beside) + *taxis* (arrangement)), next-door but not attached, where the lack of coordination and subordination make for an odd arrangement from which sense does not come

³⁹⁹ Here, the two terms, ‘the impossible’ and ‘the possible’, are not split between the two steps in what is often called the double movement of faith, so that ‘the impossible’ would be the recognition of the infinite resignation, and ‘the possible’ would be the belief of the leap of faith. To heighten the risk and the wonder of leap, my suggestion is to maintain – with *de silentio* – that the infinite resignation is not (‘itself’) a movement of faith, but a movement without which faith would not be a leap: “Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith. FT 46/”Dog den uendelige Resignation er det sidste Stadium, der gaaer forud for Troen, saaledes at Enhver, der ikke har gjort denne Bevægelse, ikke har Troen; thi først i den uendelige Resignation bliver jeg mig selv klar i min evige Gyldighed, og først da kan der være Tale om i Kraft af Troen at gribe Tilværelsen.” SKS 4, 140. This is not to say that there is no double movement in the sense in which it is often understood, but to suggest that it is by way of the infinite resignation that one comes to stand before an abyss, and that it is by way of faith that one leaps into the absurd: “Consequently, he acknowledges the impossibility, and in the very same moment he believes the absurd, for if he wants to imagine that he has 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.” FT 47/”Han erkjender aaltsaa Umuligheden og i samme Øieblik troer han det Absurde; thi vil han uden med al sin Sjæls Lidenskab og af sit ganske Hjerter at erkjende Umuligheden, indbilde sig at have Troen, da bedrager han sig selv, og hans Vidnesbyrd har intetsteds hjemme, da han end ikke er kommen til den uendelige Resignation.” SKS 4, 141.

about as a joint venture, but rather glimmers in the very mismatch, the foolishness of an oxymoron, as I have elsewhere suggested.

And so here, with the foolishness of an oxymoron and a paradox gone mad, we will take leave of the story of Abraham, leaving him and his hand on a knife at the peak (*paa Spidsen*).

The passion called faith turned out to be the mad answer to an ambiguous openness, an openness that I found to be the sense of the word I have trailed through different movements, a trail that took its point of departure from the formula “*God withdraws behind a contradiction.*” To this study, the sense of the word God in *Fear and Trembling* is not a withdrawal, and it is in particular not a withdrawing movement *behind* anything, as though this sense could be located by a proposition, or as if it were hidden at the rear of a contradiction, a secret sheltered in the shadows, as though it could be brought to light from that hiding place behind which it lingered. It signals otherwise than as secrecy. I found the word (and the sense of it) to come into the story as a shattering address, a devastating entrance that pushed Abraham to the edge of an abyss. A peculiar word at play in the story of a father-to-be, in the writings of de silentio, and in the very flow of words in language, and thus, not a word that hides itself or has retreated from the world. A word that wink at us from a language that cannot quite get a grip on it, and yet, cannot quite get rid of it either. God, so to speak.

Summary – part one

To the question of this study,

how does the word God come about in Fear and Trembling and the Philosophical Fragments,

the suggestions of Part one were that the word God comes about in *Fear and Trembling*:

- as a shattering in-coming: a disastrous movement in a dreadful moment
- in an involved intrigue of movements and relations
- as a mad paradox, in-ordinate and too much
- as an ambiguous openness

These are the suggestions made along the way of a reading that did not go directly to its subject matter (the word in question). Taking detours and trailing movements, the reading of Part one took some turns of its own; subtle shifts in the trajectory of the writing that took place unannounced so as not to spoil the plot to the reader.

To sum up the movements of Part one, I will occasionally take up formulations from the reading to underline that this outline is a restatement of some significant suggestions of the part.

The summary falls into four parts:

- 1) Outline of the sections ‘A thread of heroes’ and ‘The old man and a misunderstanding’: A very human situation – an abyss of groundlessness
- 2) Outline of the section ‘How to become a father of faith’: A movement of becoming
- 3) Outline of the section ‘Movements of God’: Relations and directions of a movement (withdrawal)
- 4) Outline of the section ‘A word hard to track down’: Answering to an ambiguous openness

1) ‘A thread of heroes’ and ‘The old man and a misunderstanding’: A very human situation – an abyss of groundlessness

Part one began with a thread a heroes and the impotent admiration of a devoted poet. Going for a while with the tale of a tragic hero (Agamemnon), the reading came across *an existential situation* that does not differ from the situation of Abraham in terms of dread or disaster. In the tales of a tragic hero and of a father

of faith, the reading found *a shared situation* of two fathers facing a horrifying demand – without any foundation to base their decision on.

Justification may be given within a system but the system finds itself on preconditions that are (ultimately) unfounded, and so, to make a decision is also to take upon oneself the lack of justification. Thus, the study found in *the existential situation of groundlessness: a responsibility inescapably involved with dread and culpability*. The difference between Agamemnon the tragic hero and Abraham the father of faith is not so much the situation, then, as it is their *way of relating* to this situation. Agamemnon – who seeks vindication and tries to rationalize his actions – is *sidestepping the dread of responsibility*, and that is not the way to become a father of faith.

Taking leave of the tragic heroes but not of the thematic threads of justification and responsibility, the reading turned its focus on *the story of Abraham*, trailing two questions in relation to that plot, namely:

how does one become a father of faith, and what is this passion called faith *about*?

A stop by an old man indicated that these questions are not so easily answered. The four imagined storylines of the old man (in the *Stemming of Fear and Trembling*) express how *not* to become a father of faith. In the mind of the old man – whom we might call a poet of obsessive admiration – the story of Abraham becomes tales of sacrifice; plots on how to lose a son or a father, or trust, or the joy of life. The old man and the preacher in *Fear and Trembling* do not get the *paradoxical relations* at play in the writing of de silentio. The old man *confuses* matters, as if the dreadful (following the call to sacrifice a son) *is* the wonder (to receive a son in faith) of the story, as if the former *leads to* the latter, and the preacher mindlessly presents the story as *simply* beautiful so that the anxiety – without which ‘Abraham is not who he is’ – is lost. The story of Abraham hinges on a paradox; an odd, impossible, and unresolved relation that does not let sense travel undisturbed between its terms.

2) 'How to become a father of faith': A movement of becoming

The reading of Part one found *the in-coming of the word God* (which in *Fear and Trembling* is also the in-coming of the words of God) to be a peak in the story of Abraham⁴⁰⁰ as well as a dramatic turn of the plot.⁴⁰¹ In one disastrous moment, 'everything is lost'; *meaningfulness* is blown to pieces, and the fundament of *the all* is shattered: an abyss of groundlessness is opened. This dreadful movement of a moment is described by David Kangas in a formula that was taken along to the following section: 'God withdraws behind a contradiction'.

To become a father of faith is in *Fear and Trembling* linked up with the facing of a disastrous situation, a terrible contradiction, an abyss of groundlessness. The reading of Part one found the movement of becoming a father of faith to be related to a dreadful paradox, or, put otherwise, the reading found that to become a father of faith, one has to *relate to* the impossible paradox *in faith*, which in *Fear and Trembling* is to take the *plunge into the absurd*.

And so, the movement of the word God (as a shattering in-coming) and the movement of becoming a father of faith meet at the edge of an abyss; they are somehow *involved in an intrigue of movements* that will reappear in the reading of Part two.

The reading of Part one found *the in-coming* (of the words) of God to be an anxiety-opening disaster that turns the life of Abraham into a paradox. He cannot (hereafter) explain himself, he cannot justify himself – as his life hinges on a mad absurdity. To the reading of Part one, then, the storyline of Abraham is not a lesson in obedience. How could it be – when the call he answers to is a dire collision, an outrageous contradiction?

At this point in the study (which is also at the edge of an abyss), Part one weaved its way in and out of some concerned readings of the story of Abraham (Golomb/Buber, Steinberg, Bodoff, Podmore, and Evans), all of whom addressed

⁴⁰⁰ "Now all the frightfulness of the struggle was concentrated in one moment," FT 19.

⁴⁰¹ "So everything was lost [...]"; *ibid.*

the contradictions of that narrative (in the subsections ‘A Levinasian hesitation’, ‘A concern of the ethical’, and ‘Trust me! Promise!’). Like this study, these concerned readings found a disturbing moment in the plot of the *Akedah* (‘the binding of the son’). However, the readings – concerned also with *consistency* – all seemed to suggest that the narrative as well as (the word) God are and remain reasonable, coherent, or (ethically) justifiable *after all*. The dread and the anguish of the paradox are thereby dissolved, which is also to say that the paradox is explained and resolved by these interpretations. Yet, this study asked: why are all these explanations necessary – if not because consistency and justification have been called into question by a story such as that of Abraham?

On the edge of an abyss, in a life that hinges on a paradox, faith is not *based* on something, nor does faith solidify into conviction or belief. In the reading of Part one, faith was found to be an *adventurous* journey into the open, a plunge into the absurd, and a movement of *risk*.

Faith is to look the impossible in the eyes, to acknowledge that the binding of a son might be for no reason, to take upon oneself the terrible incertitude of a call that may or may not have been voiced. Without a flash of madness and a pulsing non-sense, the hope of faith would merely be confident optimism.

To this study, *Fear and Trembling* does not just show us *what* the passion called faith is about; it tells us *why* faith as a passion is called for.

As a shattering of the all, *the in-coming of God does not make sense*: it comes as an unsettling and impossible paradox. *Abraham becomes a father of faith by way of his answering to this disturbing in-coming*; he becomes a father of faith by the way he relates to *the ambiguous openness* he is given over to after the shattering moment: he relates as if sense if possible after (the) all.

3) ‘Movements of God’: Relations and directions of a movement (of retreat)

The second-last section of part one explored the *relations* and *directions* of the movement involved in the motional intrigue found in *Fear and Trembling*.

Taking its point of departure from the Kangas formulation, ‘God withdraws behind a contradiction’, the reading trailed two different movements of retreat:

- Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* and absolving (Kangas)
- absenting and intervalling (Nancy)

With the movements of absolving, Part one found a figure of *dialectical* relations, involved movements that keep *a dynamic of interchange* in play.

To me, a moment of disturbing dread – a flash of madness or a glimmer of nonsense – is lost in relations of exchange and correlation. The *defiant impossibility* of a paradox is somehow dissolved in dialectical movements that reconcile oppositional terms into pairs of interaction.

As the reading of Part one found the paradox to be an ambiguous openness in the writing of *de silentio*, I were looking for relations where the involved terms are not joined by way of concurrence.

With the movement of absolving (Kangas/*Gelassenheit*), the reading also found a faith that in a way is *about* – nothing. As with the sidestepping hero of the tragic tales, it comes down to *a way of relating*.

Faith as a relation to what absolves (itself) is no airy matter, but a profound faithfulness to that very absolving. Like the movement of irony (in the subsection ‘Movements of irony’) that keeps nothing or negativity at play, the faith that is about nothing is no less passionate than the kind of faith that hinges on a paradox. And yet, the reading asked whether the movement of absolving is not also to answer *for* nothing.

To this study, one does not become a father of faith by answering for nothing. Given the existential situation of groundlessness, Abraham answers also for answering – without reasons and without verifications as to whether a call was heard at all. And moreover, in answering, Abraham also answers *to* and *for* someone, namely Isaac the son, promise and joy incarnated in a bundle of flesh, blood, and bones. To answer for answering is to take upon oneself a burden of culpability as well as the weight of a body, a load of mortality and love that comes with a life of relations. Abraham alone must bear the responsibility (of answering) but Abraham is not alone in matters of life. And so, with the weight and the

warmth of a body, the reading found a binding gravity in the suggested intrigue of involved movements: of a call, perhaps, heard, and an answering also for answering.

With the movement of absenting (Nancy), the reading found a motional plot that does not come about in a figure of interchange. With absenting, there is not a line of oscillation between absence – presence, a passage of sense travelling back and forth. The retreat of absenting is, rather, an ever-opening dividing line of intervalling *entre deux*, as the title of Nancy's ultra-short essay reads, translated into 'Between story and truth'. The reading of Part one suggested that the movement of absenting is not about a retreat of absence in the form of a linear withdrawal, but rather in the figure of a line-in-between, incessantly (re-)opening the absence of presence in any sense. The line of separation between story and truth will reappear in the reading of part two, even if only for a moment.

Looking for a movement that does not travel by route of oscillation, a movement that is not governed by a scheme of oppositional pairs, the reading found in Nancy's suggestion of absenting the surprising figure of a *line-in-between*.

With Crithley's quest for 'a reconstruction of the meaning of meaningfulness' (in the subsection 'The pull of binary structures and the need of meaning'), the study found yet another strategy for finding a way in-between (in this case between meaningfulness and flat nihilism), a strategy for a sense to pass *entre deux* without giving in to either ends of the oppositional pair. I found Crithley to cleverly suggest a way for a deconstruction of the meaning of meaningfulness that does not succumb to either transgression or restoration. His bid – not quite unlike that of Nancy – is given in the shape of a line: a borderline of separation, a balancing act of distinction, we might say. The deconstructive quest is not to *overcome* nihilism, to defeat it or demolish it; rather, it is to work on the limit of it: it is a question of *delineating* it.

The search for movements otherwise than routes of oscillation or dynamics of interchange was not made in an attempt to reject or overcome such binary

structures of correlation. Attempts of rejection or of overcoming would as counter-movements precisely follow the logic of oppositional pairings. The study was, rather, in search of a sense that does not play *entirely* by the rules of oppositional schemes or dialectical figures. I were looking for a way of a relation that does not *quite* follow the order of logic.

What was at stake was the sense of contradiction, or the *relation* of a paradox.

To the reading of Part one, the word God came into the storyline as a shattering movement, a dreadful collision (*God tempted* which in this study is read as: *God > < tempted*), disastrous and utterly unreasonable. Far from a balanced act, the word God was in the very in-coming disturbingly *out of line*.

4) 'A word hard to track down': Answering to an ambiguous openness

The section 'Movements of God' began its journey with the formula of Kangas: 'God withdraws behind a contradiction', and the section was in many ways a meditation on the terms of this formula – considering the movement of *withdrawal* and the relation of *contradiction* – in an attempt to get closer to the sense of the first term of that formula, namely: the word *God*.

In the last section of Part one, the reading closed in on that word, and in this focalization, it parted ways with the formula, although a last reference concerning the prepositional term 'behind' was still to be made.

In Part one, the word God was not about withdrawals or retreat; rather, that word came about in the storyline of *Fear and Trembling* as a shattering *in-coming*, in a flash of madness. It came about in a moment (*i eet Øieblik*), a wink only, and yet, it changed the whole story, or the story as a whole. From that moment on (from that in-coming), Abraham's life hinged on a paradox, the sense of his life was hereafter in question.

As a turn of the plot and as a peak of the story, the in-coming of the word in question of this study was not about nothing, but about a *prodigious* paradox, in-ordinate and too-much. In-ordinate also in the sense of not (*in-*) being set in order (*ordinare*). The paradoxical relations of *Fear and Trembling* do not follow the scheme

of a customary contra-diction if the latter is understood as a figure of logic working within the order(-liness) of oppositional configurations. There is a defiant moment in the paradoxical relations of *Fear and Trembling*, a mischievous *incongruity* that gives way for a sense that twinkles (only) in this unruly mode of anarchy, of disruptive *ambiguity*. Such defiance to sparkle in the odd relations of an *oxymoron* and of a *parataxis*.

To this study, then, the sense of the word God does not need to be safeguarded by a retreat from language (hint: it is not withdrawn or hidden *behind* anything). I found the word God to come *into* the story as a prodigious address, a devastating *in-coming* that pushed Abraham to the edge of an abyss. The word was found *in* a story, *in* the writing, and yet, out of tune, out of line, and out of place,

A suggestion of the reading was that the in-coming of this word does not make sense, and that de silentio stays faithful to the in-ordinate openness of that word. He does not try to make sense of it, he does not try to make the story reasonable, but lets the ambiguous openness stay – open and ambiguous.

It is by way of the *ambiguity* of this openness that the father of faith does not drown in utter despair, that the plunge into the absurd is not a descent into a void of hopelessness. By way of ambiguity, an impossible non-simultaneous simultaneity opens: 1) a dreadful abyss of openness, and 2) a wondrous openness of the possible. Faith might be the mad answer to this ambiguous openness, but it is also an awesome welcome of the surprising wonders of life.

And so, to conclude this summary:

The passion called faith was in *Fear and Trembling* all *about* a peculiar word, namely God. Faith as a passion is called forth – and called for – by the *in-coming* of this word, and Abraham became a father of faith by *answering* to this call.

PART TWO

HOW TO BECOME A FOLLOWER BY FAITH

- A MOMENT OF (THE WORD) GOD -

PROLOGUE TWO: P.S. – PERHAPS SO

Once again, we are to open a work or a text through a literary reading. Once again, the work has a literary flavour to it, though it centers on a one main story as compared to the abundance of narratives in *Fear and Trembling*. Once again, we are to meet a pseudonymous writer whose wit and tricks are no less ingenious than those of de silentio. Though perhaps a work a little bit less widespread and in demand, this pseudonymous voice is no less clear and, perhaps, even slightly more pronounced in the quite heterogeneous choir of pseudonymous personages in the Kierkegaardian oeuvre, though all of them seem to raise their voices as though they were the sole soloist (whether or not they recognize the other voices, and whether or not they consider these voices to be backup-singers or rather background noise). The work that we are about to enter is (in its full title): *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy* (1844)⁴⁰² by Johannes Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard.

As to the pseudonym, Johannes Climacus can be said to shine a little brighter than many of the other pseudonyms, given not (only) the weight and influence of his works in the history of reception, but (also) given the very occurrence of his double signature⁴⁰³ in *Philosophical Fragments* and the later (in its full title): *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments: A Mimetical-Pathetical-Dialectical Composition. An Existential Contribution* (1846).⁴⁰⁴ The latter title is mostly shortened

⁴⁰² *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophi*.

⁴⁰³ As well as his 'appearance' in *Johannes Climacus or de omnibus dubitandum est* (1843). Later, Anti-Climacus appears as the signed pseudonymous writer of *The Sickness unto Death (Sygdommen til Døden)*, 1849) and *Practice in Christianity (Indøvelse i Kristendom)*, 1850).

⁴⁰⁴ *Afsluttende videnskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler. Mimisk-pathetisk-dialektisk Sammenskrift, Eksistentielt Indlæg*.

to the more manageable *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (CUP), or, just the *Postscript*, whereby the direct reference to the earlier work is lost, whereas the title of the former work is often shortened to the *Fragments*, as if the “bit of philosophy” (*en Smule Philosophi*) announced in the uncut heading might as well be discarded. However, when following the Danish title, *Philosophiske Smuler*, carrying the signature of J.C. in the Preface, the *Fragments* could also be abbreviated (as it is done in the SKS commentaries⁴⁰⁵) as: *PS*.

PS, or P.S. As the afterthought added at the end of a letter, not quite an afterword, but rather: some words after a written text (*post-script*), an additional remark made after the signature (in this case of J.C.), a scribbled note thrown in after the main part, or a comment that follows a concluded (though not necessarily conclusive) section.

This would go for the two Appendices (*Tillæg*)⁴⁰⁶ of the *Fragments*, added as supplements to the chapter on the *Absolute Paradox* (FT 37/SKS 4, 242) and the *Interlude* (FT 72/SKS 4, 272), respectively. And it could also be said to go for the parts where the imaginary⁴⁰⁷ interlocutor is given room for objections; the dialogical monologues that follow the more argumentative (and quite scheming) segments unfolding the *Thought-Project* of Climacus.

As a P.S. (*PostScript*), the *Philosophical Fragments* could then be considered as additional remarks to which the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (CUP), would be – the additional remarks (postscript). And yet, *Philosophical Fragments* is sometimes read as *merely* a preface to the *Postscript*, as an ingenious practice that sets up some questions to be further explored in the *Postscript*, the latter being greater in both the scope of its project (*‘An Existential Contribution’*) and the number of pages. As a prologue or postscript, *Philosophical Fragments* seems to be an extra (Latin: *outside*): a piece before or after the main event, a supplement, or, a fragment. Or, fragments in the plural, to be fair, letting both pieces of Climacus count.

⁴⁰⁵ SKS K4, 171-196.

⁴⁰⁶ PF, 49; 86/SKS 4, 253; 287.

⁴⁰⁷ PF, 21: ”This, as you see, is my project! But perhaps someone will say, “This is the most ludicrous of all projects [...]”

But then someone might ask: where is the original text, the script, or perhaps, the Scripture, to which these fragments (the *P.S.* and the *Postscript*⁴⁰⁸) would refer? Or is there, perhaps, nothing but fragments? Fragments that may be related, yet, do not merge into a (new) unity.⁴⁰⁹ If we were to gather these fragments into a collective term, or a shared noun, we could, perhaps, call it: a fragmentationing, signalling that it is a structural mode of relations between complex parts rather than one of organizational union.

But then again, is not the *Philosophical Fragments* such a gathering, a fragmentation of pieces that somehow destabilizes the piece (*Piece*)⁴¹⁰ of the *Fragments* (or, perhaps

⁴⁰⁸ SKS 7, 12: ”Hvad her bydes, er igjen en Piece, proprio marte, proprio stipendio, propriis auspiciis.”

⁴⁰⁹ It may be worth noting, not least as a respectful nod to those who (in company with the imagined interlocutor of the *Fragments*) find such references of importance, that the very idea of “fragments”, or perhaps better, “fragments” as a philosophical notion has a long history to which the *Fragments* of Climacus add yet another piece. I am not to trace that history in this study; I will only highlight, briefly and in a footnote, what Rodolphe Gasché calls ‘the Romantic fragment’ in a foreword to the collection (with a peculiar title quite recognizable to readers of Climacus, namely:) *Philosophical Fragments* by Friedrich Schlegel (Gasché 1991, viiii). According to Gasché, the (early) Romantic fragment is “a genre by itself, characterized by a concepts of its own” (ibid., viiii), and can be distinguished from the “classical, pre-Romantic concept of the fragment” (ibid., viiii) which is described as “a piece left over from a broken whole” (ibid., viii), and, as a leftover piece, it “receives its very meaning from that ensemble that is thus posits and presupposes” (ibid., viii). The Romantic fragment is not to be seen as opposed to “a system” or “a totality”, rather, as they themselves are not incomplete (that is, they do not depend on an original whole from where they are fractured) but are described, by Schlegel in *Athenaeum Fragment* (Schlegel 1991, 206), as miniature systems, “complete in themselves” (Gasché 1991, xii). By this ‘completeness’, they render any unity impossible (even in their very longing for unity), as they conceptualize a sort of “essential incompleteness” (ibid., xxxi): “Consequently, the totality that is sought by the fragment is an always singular totality, a totality that is therefore necessarily plural, and thus incomplete” (ibid., xiii). I find the *Fragments* of Climacus to be close to the Romantic notion insofar as fragments are understood to be at once related and opening ‘a world of their own’, and insofar as they are understood to be defying the unity (in the sense of wholeness or oneness) of structural interrelationship in their very plurality. Quoting Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (in the acknowledgement of their analysis of the notion of fragment in the collaboration, *Literary Notebooks*), Gasché notes that the “Romantic fragment aims at fragmentation for its own sake”. We may say, in relation to the Climacus-Kierkegaardian fragments, that more than aiming at anything, the fragments – in and by their heterogeneity – question whether a totality is possible at all, that is, without confirming or rejecting that question altogether (which the Romantic fragments by way of their “essential incompleteness” tend to do).

⁴¹⁰ PF 5: “What is offered here is only a pamphlet [...] and will not become anything more even if I [...] were [...] to continue it with seventeen others. It has as little chance of becoming something more as a writer of half-hour pieces has of writing something else even if he writes folios.”/SKS 4, 215: “Det, her bydes, er kun en Piece [...] og bliver ikke til mere, selv om jeg [...] vilde continuere

better, destabilizes the peace of the *Fragments*)? A division that is beautifully indicated in the SKS edition of the *Fragments* by graphic marks (as demarcation lines as well as trinities of stars ***), and a plurality (also of questions put forward and dislocated) that makes it very difficult to any reader to determine what this compilation is *really* about, which, happily, is reflected in the heterogeneity of readings that the smaller piece of Climacus' pamphlets has spurred.⁴¹¹ Readings to which this study is but a supplement, readings from which I have learned so much, and readings that – when pieced together – express the prolificacy of a work rather than a general discourse.

To this study, the *Philosophical Fragments* is (or, are) such an odd dialectical double-ness: a piece of fragmentation that is separate yet not isolated as a system “complete in itself”,⁴¹² related yet not (necessarily) by way of continuation or coherence.⁴¹³ As a P.S., it comes after a script (other stories and other texts), in addition to and also apart from it: interrelated by texture, and in this way, in context. And so, every piece of the Kierkegaardian oeuvre, every work and every journal entry, can be said to be inter-related, to each other and to the many other texts and papers (of other times and other traditions and other writers) to which they are prologues and postscripts, and in the con-text of which no work can enclose itself on itself. And yet, every work opens a world of its own, a voice (whether pseudonymous or not) of its own, and a language of its own. In this way, regarding the oeuvre as a fragmentation of pieces, each work or text by Kierkegaard is (also but indeed not only) a postscript to every other work:

den med sytten andre; bliver ikke til mere, saa lidet som Den, der skriver Halvtimeslæsning, skriver Andet, selv om han skriver Folianter.”

⁴¹¹ A variety that is shown by the compilations of articles on *Fragments* in, for example, the *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 2004, Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004, and in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary* volume 7 on *Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus*, Mercer University Press 1994.

⁴¹² See note 410.

⁴¹³ Curiously, but perhaps not at all coincidentally, many readings of the two pieces of Climacus are concerned with either one work or the other, though the reader is aware of and acknowledging the connection (as it is stated in the title of the *Postscript*).

P.S., there is more to be said, or, P.S., there are other ways to say it (though 'it' would refer to the fragmentation and would thus signify a plurality of significations to be said otherwise).

This second part of my study is, in more than one way, nothing but a P.S. Some additional remarks, not only to the *Fragments*, and to the scholarly readings thereof, but also a P.S. to the first part that forms the main share of the study.

As a P.S., this second part will be shorter in length than the first one, but, then, how could it be otherwise as we are here not following a man on his dreadful journey (to become a father of faith) but will be concerned mainly with: a moment (*et Øieblik*). Reading the *Fragments*, we will, in other words, take a shorter route than in the reading of *Fear and Trembling* where the trail got prolonged by tortuous detours and distractions from other storylines. Perhaps some will find this second reading too much of a shortcut in comparison, feeling that principal issues and considerable themes are not considered or not so much as noticed, and, furthermore, that some matters are even misread. They will not be wrong. I will be exploring only a moment (*et Øieblik*) and the possible sense of one single word (God), and yet, I will not even have examined any of those sufficiently, a completeness that is precisely questioned in this prologue. I will read with a literary intuition and a Levinasian rhythm, and, thus, I will be blind to (other) findings that may seem obvious to others. So be it. I can only remark:

P.S. there is more to be said, and, there are other ways (and other writers) to say it.

One final comment to be added before the reading takes off:

To this study, there runs – throughout the work we are about to open – the echo of another additional remark, teasingly saying: P.S., *perhaps so*. But then (once) again, is this un-settling openness (of a 'perhaps so') not a point of any P.S.? As the added remarks *after* the signature in a letter, *after* the end of a section, the P.S.

makes it difficult to say when the end, then, is, or, put otherwise, it questions the end as ultimately definitive or conclusive.⁴¹⁴

The suggestion of a *perhaps* is not my invention,⁴¹⁵ but a point found in the writings of Levinas (others may find it elsewhere). It is a suggestion that surfaces more than once in his works,⁴¹⁶ but curiously to this study, the most pronounced expression appears in an essay that addresses the matters of both Kierkegaard and the word God, namely, in the essay entitled “Phenomenon and Enigma” (orig. 1965).⁴¹⁷ Under the section title, “A New Modality” (*Une nouvelle modalité*), in a passage that is heavy with matters that I am to trail in the following sections, Levinas writes:

Apart from the salvation drama whose play in existence Kierkegaard, a Christian thinker, fixed and described, his properly philosophical work seems to us to lie in the formal idea of a truth persecuted in the name of a universally evident truth, a meaning paling in a meaning, a meaning thus already past and driven out, breaking up the *undephasable simultaneity* of phenomena. The God “remaining with the contrite and humble” (Isaiah LVII, 15) [...] is a node of a plot separate from the adventure of being which occurs in phenomena and in immanence, a new modality which is expressed by that “if one likes” and that “perhaps,” which one must not reduce to the possibility, reality, and necessity of formal logic, to which skepticism itself refers.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ Would this not also be the point of Derrida’s suggestion: “Dare I add my voice to this concert of hypotheses and virtual utterances? I would perhaps, then, orient things otherwise. For example, toward an irreducible modality of the “perhaps.” Which would cause the authority [*instance*] of the “last word” to tremble.” Derrida 2002, 344. Cf. Derrida 1998, 498.

⁴¹⁵ As it is not quite the invention of anyone, which is a point played up in the *Fragments*, and one to which this study will return.

⁴¹⁶ Also Levinas 1998b, 156; Levinas 2004, 244.

⁴¹⁷ Levinas 1998, 61-73; Levinas 1982, 203-216.

⁴¹⁸ Levinas 1998, 67; Levinas 1982, 209: “Par-delà le drame du salut dont Kierkegaard, penseur chrétien, a aperçu le jeu dans l’existence qu’il fixée et décrite, son œuvre proprement philosophique nous semble résider dans l’idée formelle d’une vérité persécutée au nom d’une vérité universellement évidente, d’un sens pâlisant dans un sens, d’un sens ainsi déjà passé et chassé, rompant la *simultanéité indéphasable* du phénomène. Le Dieu « demeurant avec le contrit et l’humble » (Isaïe 57, 15) [...]; Nœud d’une intrigue qui se sépare de l’aventure de l’être courue dans le phénomène et l’immanence, modalité nouvelle qui se dit par ce « si l’on veut » et ce « peut-être » et que l’on ne doit pas ramener à la possibilité, à la réalité et à la nécessité de la logique formelle, auxquelles le scepticisme lui-même se réfère.

As we shall later return to this essay and this passage, I here only wish to note that the modality of the *perhaps* is somehow involved in a plot “separate from the adventure of being”; a plot or intrigue through which the sense of (the word) God comes about. Strangely, the suggestion seems to be that a passage of (the word) God is opened by the polite expressions of “if one likes” and that of a “perhaps.” It is easy to underestimate the significance of such a “new modality” as it does not operate by way of power or command, but is (rather) opened by an understated generosity,⁴¹⁹ and yet, it is by way of this attentive receptiveness, this way of being open, and letting matters be undetermined, that authority and mastery is called into question. The odd suggestion of Levinas seems to be that the gracious gesture of “if one likes” gives way for an openness that “must not be reduced to the possibility, reality, and necessity of formal logic,” and that allows for a plot otherwise than simultaneity and immanence. Pushed to the edge of its sense, and Levinas is for sure not one to back away from hyperboles, there is a disturbing vulnerability to such gestures, the bleak risk of an openness that offers no footing or safety, but lets anyone who would make such a gesture exposed to an openness of incertitude. This would be the gravity of a *perhaps*. There is, however, also a lightness to this mode, I think, a playfulness, even. An almost frivolous manner that takes its twinkle from irony, and says: “if one likes,” with a wink or an equivocal smirk.⁴²⁰ The sense of the *perhaps* (or the *perhaps* in this sense) reverberates in this ambiguity of a gravity of risk and a frivolity of twinkle, of different but not separate responses to the horror of an anonymous laughter that can be heard from the bottom of an unfathomable openness. One can, I suggest, hear both tonalities in the sort of *perhaps* that testifies to the ambiguous openness of ‘absolute uncertainty’,⁴²¹ an openness that comes as menace and generosity in the same moment and yet not simultaneously.

⁴¹⁹ As gracefully formulated elsewhere by Levinas: “the positive generosity of Uncertainty.” Levinas 1998c, 56.

⁴²⁰ I find the description of Climacus by M. Jamie Ferreira to be felicitous when redirected to the sense of such *perhaps*: “All in all we have a lighthearted joker who is in deadly earnest.” (Ferreira 2009, 77). I am not convinced as to whether Climacus of the *Fragments* can be characterized as either light-hearted or deadly earnest, but I too find him to be quite the joker with a matter at stake.

⁴²¹ Levinas 1996, 69.

But here we are ahead of ourselves, as we are still in the prologue and only on our way to the reading that we are, at last, about to enter.

A READING OF PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS – PART TWO

Opening questions

With the *Philosophical Fragments*, we are once again met by the voice of a Johannes, and once again we are, perhaps, to read the re-telling of a scriptural story, though our second Johannes coyly defers to make this link, or to make this connection *directly*.

However, differences (that may fade along the writings) are also perceivable from the outset of the two works, the *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de silentio and the *Philosophical Fragments* by Johannes Climacus (edited by S. Kierkegaard). Whereas the first work is announced as a *Dialectical Lyric*, the second is called *A Fragment of Philosophy*. Where *Fear and Trembling* lets an opaque narrative *in miniature* follow the title and author name,⁴²² the title of the *Fragments* is succeeded by a series of concerned inquiries.⁴²³ And whereas de silentio opens *his* story with a formula to entice imagination – *Once upon a time there was a man* (FT 9/SKS 4, 105) – Climacus launches his project with the direct and compact query:

Can the truth be learned? With this question we shall begin.⁴²⁴

And so, the thought-project of Climacus sets off with a question that establishes an epistemological investigation more than a literary adventure; a question that takes more interest in the insight(s) of knowledge than of poetic imagination(s).

⁴²² "Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote."

⁴²³ "Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?"

⁴²⁴ PF 9/SKS 4, 218: "Hvorvidt kan Sandheden læres? Med dette Spørgsmaal ville vi begynde." The Danish adverb *Hvorvidt*, lost in translation, carries an ambiguity that might turn out to be of importance.

My literary study trailing the movement of a peculiar word is, it seems, on alien grounds.

From the initial question – “Can the truth be learned?” – begins a discourse on learners and teachers (in Chapter I), systematically divided into two parts, a part A and a part B, where the first part introduces a so-called Socratic position, and the second part explores what we might term a non-Socratic position.⁴²⁵ In part A, we meet the “midwife examined by the god himself” (FT 10/SKS 4, 219), namely, Socrates, who *in* his very teaching somehow withdraws *as* the teacher, having shown that his companion-in-dialogue merely needed “to be reminded in order, by himself, to call to mind what he knows” (FT 9/SKS 218). Thus reminded, the learner has not learned the truth, but has learned that he or she already had the truth: “The truth is not introduced into him but was in him” (FT 9/SKS 4, 218). Thus follows that (keeping to the line of thinking in part A):

Viewed Socratically, any point of departure in time is *eo ipso* something accidental, a vanishing point, an occasion. Nor is the teacher anything more, and if he gives himself and his erudition in any other way, he does not give but takes away. Then he is not even the other’s friend, much less his teacher.⁴²⁶

Viewed Socratically, then, the teacher is either only an occasion, a vanishing point, or he is not even the teacher; either way, he seems to vanish – *as the teacher*, but that is not the matter in question to Climacus who is more concerned with another point that seems to disappear in the position of part A:

My relation to Socrates [...] cannot concern me with regard to my eternal happiness, for this is given retrogressively in the possession of the truth that I had from the beginning without knowing it. [...] The temporal point of departure is a nothing, because in the same moment I discover that I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that

⁴²⁵ As suggested by Ferreira (Ferreira 2009, 71).

⁴²⁶ PF 13/SKS 4, 220: ”Socratisk seet, er ethvert Udgangspunkt i Tiden eo ipso et Tilfældigt, et Forsvindende, en Anledning; Læreren er ei heller mere, og giver han sig og sin Lærdom hen paa nogen anden Maade, da giver han ikke, men fratager, da er han end ikke den Andens Ven, mindre hans Lærer.”

moment is hidden in the eternal, assimilated into it in such a way that I, so to speak, still cannot find it even if I were to look for it [...].⁴²⁷

When I already from the beginning have the eternal truth, it matters little when or occasioned by whom or what I discover this possession, and then the moment of this discovery evaporates, it ceases to be a “temporal point of departure.” How or why, one might ask, is this point of departure of relevance to the question as to whether one can learn the truth? A slight displacement of interest seems to have occurred, a concern that is both *yet* to be pronounced and *already* expressed. On the one hand, it is yet to be pronounced since the subtle displacement of the project is (yet to be) formulated in the ensuing part B where the (temporal) point of a moment (*Øieblikket*) becomes the heart of the consideration; the matter is now that “the moment in time” (*Øieblikket i Tiden*) “must have decisive significance” (*maa have afgørende Betydning*), a significance that is yet to be explored, also in this study. On the other hand, it is a point already introduced in the series of questions on the title page of the *Fragments*, up front and even before the beginning, so to speak:

Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?

This nexus of questions revolves around the kind of ‘historical point of departure’ (*historisk Udgangspunkt*) that is lost in the so-called Socratic position where the insight of the truth is a matter of recollection.⁴²⁸ Given the particular placing of these questions, it might (or might not) be worth to take some time to examine their focal point, namely, the notion of a *historical point of departure*. It is a point that

⁴²⁷ PF 12-13/SKS 4, 221: ”Mit Forhold til Socrates [...] kan ikke beskæftige mig med Hensyn til min evige Salighed, thi denne er givet retrogradt i Besiddelsen af den Sandhed, hvilken jeg fra Begyndelsen havde, uden at vide det. [...] Det timelige Udgangspunkt er et Intet; thi i samme Øieblik som jeg opdager, at jeg fra Evighed har vidst Sandheden, uden at vide det, i samme Nu er hiint Øieblik skjult i det Evige, indoptaget deri, saaledes, at jeg, saa at sige, end ikke kan finde det, selv om jeg søgte det [...]”

⁴²⁸ A difference between part A and part B can be said to follow the distinction made by Climacus in formulating his project: PF 21: ”Whereas the Greek pathos focuses on recollection, the pathos of our project focuses on the moment [...]”/SKS 4, 229: ”Medens da den græske Pathos concentrerer sig paa Erindringen, concentrerer vort Projekts Pathos sig paa Øieblikket [...]” This difference has significance also to the project of my study.

will have decisive significance with regards to the main question of this study: How does the word God come about in a context? Indeed, it has everything to do with the *coming about* of this word, an event that also in this work (as in *Fear and Trembling*) brings about difficult questions and an odd sense of wonder.

I will return to the question that initiated the project of Climacus (that is, “Can the truth be learned?”), but in the following passages, I will explore the moment in time as a historical point of departure. However, before this inquiry sets about, some explanatory remarks is to be made:

N.B. – on the movements of writing

The *Fragments* of my reading is a complex, twisty, and tricky work that lets a great deal of its points come about through subtle turns of the plot, ingenious schemes of equivocality, mischievous misleading, and a cheerful sense of mockery which is difficult to convey in a study that (at least) must try to meet the demands of academic conventions. Be that as it may, jokes are seldom funny when spelled out in clarification any ways.⁴²⁹

However, in an attempt to spotlight the carefully composed intrigues that makes the *Fragments* so hard to handle (as one piece and, in particular, as a straightforward piece), I venture to give just one example: In chapter IV (*The Contemporary Follower*), accentuating the significance of what is called ‘the condition’ (for ‘understanding the truth’, PF 15), a condition that must be given by the teacher in the moment in order for the learner (and the moment) not to sink back into recollection (and eternal truth), Climacus writes: “It is easy to see [*det sees let*], then, [...] that faith is not an act of will” (PF 62).⁴³⁰ In the following section, the *Interlude*, around 20 pages later, when making a distinction between faith (*Tro*) and “Greek scepticism,” Climacus writes: “In contrast, it is now readily apparent (*det*

⁴²⁹ Following a literary intuition, I find that a playful mockery and the equivocality of a tone might carry significant sense, and so, we might pass over more than a humorous punchline if these movements of a writing is ignored.

⁴³⁰ SKS 4, 264: ”Det sees da let [...], at Troen ikke er en Villies-Akt [...].”

viser sig nu let) that belief is [...] an expression of will” (PF 83).⁴³¹ There is a shade of mockery in the formulation: “it is easy to see” (as few matters are ‘easy’ in the writing of Climacus), but, more significantly, there is a profound point in the ambiguity: faith is not an act of will, *and*, faith is an expression of will. A complex intrigue of passivity and (ad)venture, of being given *and* giving oneself over, is woven with this ambiguity; an *involved* relation that is gracefully expressed in the formulation that we also met in *Fear and Trembling*: (namely) that faith is a *passion*.

The entangled relations and movements of the *Fragments*, whereby terms and notions get their shadows and dynamics, undertones and openness, and whereby explicit statements are made unstable or uncertain to the point of being re-defined, all pose a great challenge to the reader. An enjoyment (mostly) while reading, but such trouble when one is to write about that reading. Writing one of the words loaded with import in the context of the *Fragments* (and there are quite a few of those), one feels instantly obliged to explain the difficulty of that word, or to trail its development through the *Fragments*. It would make for an exhausting task, and a tiresome read, and, moreover, one would most likely get lost in the chase for a comprehensiveness which hardly can be the point of a work entitled *Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy*.

This study has found no way out of that trouble. In what follows, I will jump right into a passage from chapter IV (*The Situation of the Contemporary Follower*), and thus be skipping the twist and turns, introductions and alterations, of three chapters and one appendix.

However, though textual shortcuts will be made, I will try not to jump to interpretative conclusions. Since the inquiry into the notion of a historical point of departure will lead us to the situation of the contemporary follower, I will walk for a while with this fellow, that is, I will follow him or her for a while, notwithstanding that Climacus has some significant reservations regarding his or her status as contemporary, as is well-known to readers familiar with the *Fragments* (to new readers, I apologize for this major spoiler). It might seem a bit pointless,

⁴³¹ SKS 4, 282: ”I Modsætning hertil viser det sig nu let, at Troen [...] er [...] en Villiens-Ytring.” The translation here says ”belief” rather than ”faith”, a decision that might have been made in order to distinguish between belief (as *Tro*) and faith (as *Tro* in ‘an eminent sense’).

then, to go along with a hypothetical proposal that turns out, in the end, to be called into question, yet, I hope to show that the very *calling into question* might have a point. In the (still) hopeful words of Climacus: “We shall not be in a hurry, and even though some may think that we are wasting time instead of arriving at a decision, our consolation is that it still does not (*endnu ikke*) therefore follow that our efforts are wasted.”⁴³²

A historical point of departure

But now, back on track, trying to trail the notion of a historical point of departure. A pursuit that is also the search for the sense of a word that comes about in this moment.

Since the first textual stop in this quest will be at a point halfway through the *Fragments*, a brief contextualization might be in order:

Through *A Poetical Venture* (chapter II), featuring a love-struck king and a lowly maiden, Climacus has written forth the suggestion of a god who out of love appears in the world like the lowliest: “Thus does the god stand upon the earth like unto the lowliest” (PF 31).⁴³³ There he stands (as Climacus writes, PF 32/SKS 4, 238), and from there, I jump to chapter IV, where my pursuit of a notion begins:

So we now have the god walking around in the city in which he made his appearance (which one is inconsequential); to proclaim his teaching is for him the one and only necessity of his life, is for him his food and drink. To teach people is his work, and to be concerned about the learners is for him relaxation from his work. He has no friends and no relatives, but to him the learner is brother and sister. It is easy to see that very soon a rumor will be fabricated that will trap the curious crowd in its net. Wherever the teacher appears, the

⁴³² PF 25/SKS 4, 232-233: “Vi ville nu ikke forhaste os, og om det end synes Nogen, at vi spille Tiden, istedenfor at komme til Afgjørelsen, saa er denne vor Trøst, at det deraf endnu ikke følger, at vor Uleilighed er spildt.”

⁴³³ SKS 4, 238: ”Saa staaer da Guden paa Jorden, den Ringeste liig ved sin almægtige Kjærlighed.”

populace flocks about him, curious to see, curious to hear, craving to be able to tell others that they have seen and heard him.⁴³⁴

There he goes, the god. Walking around in the city, surrounded by learners and a curious crowd. What a wonder! The god has come into time, has appeared in the world, and now walks the face of the earth. What a time to be alive!

Here, if anywhere, we have a time in history to remember, a historical point of departure: the moment of the god's coming into the world, into time. This coming into time of the god opens for a situation that is addressed in the title of chapter IV, *The Contemporary Follower*, and (following an *Interlude*) considered further in chapter V, *The Follower at Second Hand*. The hypothesis of the situation is in short: when the god has come *into* time, as is the poetic suggestion of the *Fragments*, it must, then, be possible to be (and not to be) a *contemporary* of the god. At this point, however, while we are still letting the god stroll around the undisclosed city, Climacus intervenes with a caution:

Right here we shall make sure that it becomes clear that a historical point of departure is an issue (*Spørgsmaal*) for the contemporary follower as well, for if we do not make sure of this here, we shall face an insurmountable difficulty later (Chapter V) when we deal with (*naar der handles*) the situation of the follower whom we call the follower at second hand. The contemporary follower, too, obtains a historical point of departure for his eternal consciousness, for he is indeed contemporary with the historical event [...].⁴³⁵

An odd accentuation is made in this notification. Why must it be made clear that a historical point of departure (*et historisk Udgangspunkt*) is an issue (*Spørgsmaal*) for

⁴³⁴ PF 57/SKS 4, 260: "Saa lade vi da Guden gaa omkring i den Stad, i hvilken han er fremtraadt (hvilken det er, er ligegyldigt); kun hans Læres Forkyndelse er ham hans eneste Livsformødenhed, er ham hans Spise og Drikke; at lære Menneskene er hans Arbeide og at bekymre sig om de Lærende er ham Hvile fra hans Arbeide; Venner har han ikke og ikke Slægt, men den Lærende er ham Broder og Søster. Det lader sig nu let forklare, at der snart sammenvæves et Rygte, som fanger den nysgjerrige Mængde i sit Garn. Overalt hvor Læreren viser sig, flokkes Hoben om ham, nysgjerrig efter at see, nysgjerrig efter at høre, begjærlig efter at kunne fortælle Andre, at de have seet og hørt ham."

⁴³⁵ PF 58/SKS 4 261: "Vi ville strax her passe vel paa, at det vorder tydeligt, at der ogsaa for den samtidige Discipel er Spørgsmaalet om et historisk Udgangspunkt; thi passe vi ikke paa her, da bliver Vanskeligheden paa et senere Sted (Cap. V) ikke til at overvinde, naar der handles om den Discipels Forhold, hvilken vi kalde Discipelen paa anden Haand. Et historisk Udgangspunkt for sin evige Bevidsthed faaer jo den Samtidige ogsaa; thi han er jo netop samtidig med det Historiske [...]."

the contemporary follower *as well*? Is it not the contemporary follower who, if anyone, “obtains a historical point of departure”? It is, after all, he or she who is “indeed contemporary with the historical event.” It could even be said that he or she, *as* the “indeed contemporary,” has quite the upper hand in relation to the so-called follower at second hand who is not present at the time of this historical moment, and, who, as a later follower, precisely, follows *after* the event.

We read:

The contemporary learner possesses an advantage for which, alas, the subsequent learner, just in order to do something, will very much envy him. The contemporary can go and observe that teacher – and does he then dare believe his eyes? Yes, why not? As a consequence, however, does he dare believe that he is a follower? Not at all, for if he believes his eyes, he is in fact deceived, for the god cannot be known directly (*thi Guden lader sig ikke umiddelbart kjende*). Then may he close his eyes? Quite so. But if he does, then what is the advantage of being contemporary?⁴³⁶

In this passage, saturated with sly irony, the import is given only along the way and only indirectly. Though we are, at first, told that the contemporary learner possesses an advantage, this advantage is precisely what is doubted in the end. A *movement* of *de-terminative* writing that, to me, is so characteristic of the *Fragments*. Resonant with question marks, the citation redirects our attention by feeding our inquiry with novel, or different, clues to consider. It seems that to be a follower (of the god) is not just to follow him around, so to speak, it may involve a daring or a risk of some kind (‘however, does he dare believe that he is a follower?’), and, moreover, it has become quite uncertain whether there is any advantage of being a contemporary *at all* (‘but then what is the advantage of being contemporary?’) since the god cannot be known directly (*lader sig ikke Umiddelbart kjende*). One can,

⁴³⁶ SKS 4, 264-265: “Den samtidige Lærende, han er nu i Besiddelse af en Fordel, ak, som vist den Senere, for dog at gjøre Noget, høiligen vil misunde ham. Den Samtidige, han kan gaae hen og betragte hiin Lærer – og saa tør han troe sine Øine? Ja hvorfor ikke, men tør han derfor ogsaa troe at han er Discipelen? Ingenlunde, hvis han troer sine Øine, da er han netop bedraget; thi Guden lader sig jo ikke Umiddelbart kjende. Saa kan han jo lukke sine Øine? Ganske rigtigt, men, hvis saa er, hvad gavner det ham saa, at han er samtidig?”

in other words, be the most devoted contemporary learner, tagging along the god with fervent attention, and yet not be a follower:

If there was a contemporary who had even limited his sleep to the shortest possible time so that he could accompany that teacher, whom he accompanied more inseparably than the little fish that accompany the shark, if he had in his service a hundred secret agents who spied upon that teacher [...], so that he had a dossier on that teacher down to the slightest particular [...], because his zeal made him regard even the slightest particular as important – would such a contemporary be a follower? Not at all. If someone charged him with historical unreliability, he could wash his hands, but no more than that.⁴³⁷

Even if the contemporary documented every detail that could be observed regarding the god, he or she would not be a follower. Such contemporary would be a well-founded and dependable witness with regard to the historical report of the whereabouts and appearance of the god. And yet, not even the “most reliable version” of what the god did or said or looked like, would make of the contemporary a follower:

It is at once apparent here that the historical in the more concrete sense is inconsequential; we can let ignorance step in here, let ignorance, so to speak, destroy one fact after the other, let it historically demolish the historical – if only the moment still remains as the point of departure for the eternal, the paradox is still present.⁴³⁸

It turns out (although, apparently we should have noticed it at once) that the historical *in the more concrete sense* has little or no importance for whether or not one is a follower: “[So], it is easy for the contemporary learner to become a historical eyewitness, but the trouble is that knowing a historical fact [...] by no means

⁴³⁷ PF 59-60/SKS 4, 262: “Dersom der var en Samtidig, som selv havde indskrænket sin Søvn til den korteste Tid for at følge hiin Lærer, hvem han fulgte uadskilleligere, end den lille Fisk som følger Haien, dersom han holdt hundrede Spioner i sin Tjeneste, der overalt belurede hiin Lærer, [...] saa han vidste hiin Lærers Signalement indtil det Mindste, (...) fordi hans Iver lod ham endog betragte det Ubetydeligste som vigtigt, var en saadan Samtidig Discipelen? Ingenlunde. Han kunde vaske sine Hænder, hvis Nogen vilde sigte ham for historisk Upaalidelighed, men mere heller ikke.”

⁴³⁸ PF 59/SKS 4, 262: “Det viser sig strax her, at det Historiske i concretere Forstand er ligegyldigt; vi kan lade Uvidenheden indtræde i Forhold dertil og lade Uvidenheden ligesom tilintetgjøre det ene Stykke efter det andet, historisk tilintetgjøre det Historiske; naar blot Øieblikket er tilbage som Udgangspunkt for det Evige, er Paradoxet tilstede.”

makes the eyewitness a follower.”⁴³⁹ Being an eyewitness, present and seeing things with one’s own eyes, does not make the learner: a follower, because the historical facts are inconsequential (*ligegyldigt*) to the understanding of a god who comes into time.

It all comes down to a moment (*Øieblikket*).

Even if we were left with no facts, or if we let the historical (*det Historiske*) be demolished (*tilintetgjort*) piece by piece, if only the moment (*Øieblikket*) remains as a point of departure for the eternal, it is still possible to be met or faced with the paradox: of a god coming into time. But here someone might pause and ask: If the historical matters so little, to the point of being negligible (*ligegyldige*), must we not, then, say that the inquiry (of this section), trailing the notion of a *historical* point of departure, has come to a dead-end? Or put more bluntly: Is or is not the moment a historical point of departure?

Climacus: “*what* historical (something)?”⁴⁴⁰

As a strange point of the *Fragments*, Climacus insists on showing how difficult it is to give a simple reply to such questions regarding the historical (*is it or is it not historical, then?*), that is, when the moment (*Øieblikket*) is taken as a point of departure. From that moment on (or, perhaps better, in that moment), the paradox is on. And with the paradox (of a god who comes into time), the historical turns into a question (of its own, so to speak, as also the § 2 of the *Interlude* points to), or, we may say, to go with the intuition of this study: an ambiguity comes into play.

In my reading of the *Fragments*, we are here at a decisive point. By bringing the notion of the historical into consideration, Climacus cleverly opens what we could call the versatility of a homonym: ‘historical’ and ‘historical’ might not necessarily mean quite the same in the writing of the *Fragments*. In this way, an

⁴³⁹ PF 59/SKS 4, 261-262: ”Historisk Øienvidne altsaa har den samtidige Lærende let ved at blive, Ulykken er imidlertid, at det at vide en historisk Omstændighed, [...] ingenlunde gjør Øienvidnet til Discipel [...]”

⁴⁴⁰ PF 103/SKS 4, 300: “hvilket Historisk?”

equivocality reverberates in every occurrence of that word in the text (*what historical?*).⁴⁴¹ But moreover (and more significantly to my study), through the determination of (the apprehension of) the historical, Climacus lets an enigmatic sense slip into the text, a sense that I am yet to explore, but might never get a hold on.

But (for) now, back to the question: *what* historical something? Or, is the moment a *historical* point of departure?

Well, as the moment (in the *Fragments*) is the moment of the god coming into time, it is not *simply* a historical point in time, just as this event is not a *simple* historical fact (PF 92/SKS 4, 290). If it is *simply* a historical point in time, we would be left with nothing were we to let the historical be all demolished. And yet, it is “indeed *also* historical” (PF 100/SKS 4, 297, emphasis added), as Climacus insists. This *complex* moment is in the *Fragments* called an absolute fact (PF 99/SKS 4, 297), but, to push matters a bit (yet, I believe, not beyond the writings of Climacus), we could also call it a *paradoxical* fact as it is the moment of an impossible contradiction: “the eternalization of the historical and the historicizing of the eternal” (PF 61/SKS 4, 263).

The inquiry into the notion of a historical point of departure has come to: a paradox. Once again, we may say, as this is not the first time an exploration of this study has come to a paradox, which, however, is not to have come to a conclusion. One does not come to an end with a paradox (as it is suggested by this study). Though some might find the tension of a paradox to be a contradictory interchange fixed in an endless oscillation of undecidability (for some, between opposite terms), and others might find it to be: a dead-end, this study finds it to be an ambiguous openness that gives way to other questions and other plots. A paradox is, in this way, a point of departure for novel adventures, without straight directions or straight lines to follow.

⁴⁴¹ That is, in the re-reading of the work when the versatility has come to the fore. Whereas the *Fragments* oftentimes excels in indirect movements and complex hints, the matter of the historical is addressed more than once, and most directly in the *Interlude*.

As this study takes great interest in the movement(s) of (the word) God, I shall return to this paradox (of a god coming into time) as well as the notion of a point of departure. In the following passages, however, I am going to zoom in on the notion of the historical that turned out to be a question on its own.

In other words, I will once again approach the word in question indirectly. Yet, once again, I hope to show that an indirect route might (nonetheless) revolve around the word in question.

The versatility of a homonym: the historical

The term *the historical* is rather pronounced in the *Fragments*: it appears already at the title page, it is vital in the lengthy discourse on followers (chapter IV and V), it takes centre stage in a paragraph of the *Interlude*, and, moreover, it is significant to the sense of the paradox and (thus to) the moment to which it all comes down, and, thus, to the word in question of this study. Yet, as I have already suggested, ‘the historical’ is a term that sparkles, or bewilders, in its equivocal versatility. How are we to understand the ambiguous statement (regarding the moment of a god coming into time): that historical facts are quite inconsequential (*ligegyldige*) to the sense of this historical fact (*hiint historiske Faktum (der er vort Digts Indhold)*, PF 87/SKS 4, 285)? What historical, we may once again ask (with a formulation of the *Fragments*), or, to put it into a more courteous question: How are we to understand the sense or the imports of this versatile term?

As a rare gesture of guidance, Climacus seems to offer some help on this matter in the brief paragraph titled “The Historical” (§2), a one-page piece in the *Interlude*, written in a less playful, but no less tricky, way than the rest of the *Fragments*. Here, Climacus describes (without attempting to prove or authenticate it) the historical as that which 1) has come into existence (PF 75/SKS 4, 275), and 2) is the passed

(*det Forbigangne*) (PF 76/SKS 4, 275).⁴⁴² With this two-fold account, Climacus brings into play a complexity that has decisive import also to this study.

1) *Tilblivelse*

First point first. The seemingly strangest part of the two-fold description of the historical is its moment of coming into existence (*Tilblivelse*). As a transitional moment that cannot be recorded or accounted for, it comes about with a hesitation concerning the happening of its own event:

it is certain and trustworthy that it has occurred. But that it occurred is, in turn, precisely its uncertainty [...]. Only in this contradiction between certainty and uncertainty, the *discrimen* [distinctive mark] of something that has come into existence and thus also of the [passed], is the [passed] understood.⁴⁴³

The moment of *Tilblivelse* is a de-stabilizing factor,⁴⁴⁴ and as a moment of the historical, it unsettles this notion from within, so to speak, making it open to question, or making of it a question: the historical is that which has come into existence, but that it occurred is, in turn, precisely its uncertainty. Climacus here pushes the notion of the historical beyond a discourse of authenticity, not because the historical is ‘in fact’ fabricated or fallacious, but because the certainty of its facticity is destabilized by the uncertainty of its own origin (that is, by the moment of *Tilblivelse*). Following this challenging understanding of the historical, we may now say that the historical *in the more concrete sense* (concerning matters of solid facts)

⁴⁴² Here the English translation reads: *the past*, which is certainly more correct than my suggestion, *the passed*, a term that is linguistically improper, but stays faithful to the motional denotation and metaphorical connotations of the Danish word, *det Forbigangne*.

⁴⁴³ PF 79/SKS 4, 279: “[...] thi det er vist og tilforladeligt, at det er skeet, men det at det er skeet er netop atter dets Uvished. Kun i denne Modsigelse af Vished og Uvished, hvilken er det Tilblevnes discrimen og saaledes ogsaa det Forbigangnes, er det Forbigangne forstaaet [...]”

⁴⁴⁴ PF 81: “Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive. This alone indicates that the historical cannot become the object of sense perception or of immediate cognition, because the historical has in itself that very illusiveness [*Svigagtighed*] that is the illusiveness of coming into existence. In relation to the immediate, coming into existence is an illusiveness whereby that which is most firm is made dubious.”/SKS 4, 280: “Den umiddelbare Sandsning og den umiddelbare Erkjenden kan ikke bedrage. Allerede derved viser det sig, at det Historiske ikke kan blive disses Gjenstand, fordi det Historiske har hiin Svigagtighed, hvilken er Tilblivelsens, i sig. I Forhold til det Umiddelbare er nemlig Tilblivelse en Svigagtighed, hvorved Det, der staaer fastest, bliver gjort tvivlsomt.”

has little significance in relation to the *moment in time* of *decisive significance* (PF 13/SKS 4, 222), that is, *the moment* (*Oieblikket*), marked so profoundly by the ambivalence of *Tilblivelse*. In relation to this moment, it matters little to know the facts *in the more concrete sense*: did the god prefer fig over date, how was the fashion of beards at that time, and did anyone ever visit the precise place of Korazin, and if so, was it, *in fact*, only a two-hour stopover. In the *Fragments*, we are told that what matters, concerning the *moment-in-time*, is the historical *in its more complex sense*. From the double constellation of the historical, from the point of *Tilblivelse* pulsating as a disturbing openness at the heart of the historical in its complex sense, comes the tricky question: (it happened,) *but did it happen?*

2) The passed (*det Forbigange*)

And now, the second part of the composition: the historical is *the passed* (*det Forbigangne*). This part seems rather straightforward, and is, indeed, not interrupted from within by a mischievous pulse of uncertainty as with the case of *Tilblivelse* (although, as a part of the two-fold composition of ‘the historical’, and thus in close encounter with this latter part, there is no rest for the passed either). Plainly as it comes, it lacks the ambiguous twinkle that makes the first part so vibrant. And yet, one must not be deceived. Here, the complexity of the point is inscribed in the very simplicity of its line. The passed is what it is, and is not what it is not: it comes and goes *as* the passed. Sure, one might say, what else should or could it be. But the trickiness might come to the fore if we suggest that the passed (*det Forbigangne*) is not actually a moment of presence that – as time has gone by – sort of rolled into being the passed. Or, put otherwise, the passed is not a point in time that over time inevitably, or, necessarily, becomes the past. The passed comes as the passed (it is perpetually the passed, PF 79/SKS 4, 278), and it is present or actual (only) as the passed.

It is from this strange complexity of a notion of the historical that Climacus writes: “The historical is that the god *has come into existence* (for the contemporary), that he has been once present by *having come into existence* (for one coming later). But precisely here is the contradiction.” The sense of the god can be actual or present

to the follower (only) in this way of coming into existence *as (a) passed*, and this is the (paradoxical) situation to any follower. A strange suggestion of the *Fragments* seems to be that there is no contemporary to this event (of the god coming into time) *because* it is a historical fact. That is, when both of the terms, ‘historical’ and ‘fact’, are understood *in their more complex sense*, that is, in their unsettled significations, disrupted by the moment of *Tilblivelse* and (thus) open for questions.

To become a follower – or once again: the question of faith

From this attempt to sort out a convoluted notion (that of *the historical*), we are not going forward but a bit backwards, returning to a passage on the contemporary follower that earlier puzzled us, but might, now, hand (over) its meaning less reluctantly. The passage read (here shortened): “Right here we shall make sure that it becomes clear that a historical point of departure is an issue (*Spørgsmaal*) for the contemporary follower as well” (PF 58). I suggested it to be somewhat odd that Climacus considered it of such importance to make sure that a historical point of departure is an issue for the contemporary follower *as well*. However, as we have seen (or, as I have tried to show), it is indeed important that the issue of a historical point of departure becomes – an issue (*Spørgsmaal*), that the historical (as a notion) becomes an issue, and that the situation of the contemporary follower (hereby) becomes an issue. I wish to spend a little (more) time with the contemporary follower, although his or her situation has turned out to be quite doubtful. Or, more to the point, I wish to spend a little more time with the contemporary follower now that it has turned out that his or her situation is rather doubtful, in the hope that the issue of the historical might, in a backwards manner, become slightly more lucid.

The complication of the contemporary situation rings in all its ambiguity in the following sentence from the chapter in which it is developed and problematized: “[t]he contemporary follower, too, obtains a historical point of departure [...] for he is indeed contemporary with the historical event.” (PF 58) Here, we could imagine someone taking a stand, objecting that if the contemporary follower is, in fact, *contemporary* to this event, it would precisely not be a *historical* event to him or her, but just an event to which he or she happens to

be present (in time though not necessarily in place). But that someone would then have taken the event to be a simple moment, that is, as a moment that simply is in time as present (only at that time). One could also argue that the event is a *historical* event (precisely) to the one writing the sentence thousands of years after the happening, that is, to Climacus (but not the contemporary), but then the event is taken to be a historical event in the *simple* sense, that is, as something that once was a present but now has become a past and thus historical. Were this the case, it would indeed be an advantage to be a contemporary (to this event); over and above that it would even be possible to *be* a contemporary (to this event). But the event at issue (of the god coming into time) is a *historical* fact (PF 87/SKS 4, 286) to any of us, or, perhaps better, the sense of it must be understood in its *complex* historical eventing: as that which has come into existence *as* the passed.⁴⁴⁵ That goes – to end up where I began this section – for the ‘contemporary’ *as well*. It must become an *issue* (*Spørgsmaal*) to him or her as well.

‘It must be made sure that it becomes an issue for the contemporary *as well*, Climacus insists (in chapter IV), and then spends the following chapter (V)⁴⁴⁶ showing that there can be no immediate contemporary, or, that there can be no contemporary in a *simple* sense. In the ever so ironic way of the *Fragments*, in the very argumentation (there can be no advantage nor a contemporary follower), Climacus equivocally suggests that one might even say that it can actually be a *disadvantage* to be a contemporary as one could then mistake the sense of the event with the sensations of the event:

Immediate contemporaneity is by no means a decisive advantage, if one thinks it through [...]. Immediate contemporaneity is so far from being an advantage that the contemporary must expressly wish its termination lest he be tempted to

⁴⁴⁵ PF 88: “Every time the believer makes this fact the object of faith, makes it historical for himself, he repeats [or, reopens] the dialectical qualifications of coming into existence.”/SKS 4, 286: ”Hver Gang den Troende lader dette Faktum blive Gjenstand for Troen, lader det for sig blive historisk, gjentager han Tilblivelsens dialektiske Bestemmelser [Modsigelsen af Vished og Vished].”

⁴⁴⁶ The *Interlude* does not count numerically in the order of chapters in the *Fragments*, but matters greatly sensewise to this study that takes the Interlude to be at the heart of the *Fragments*, or, perhaps even: to be the heart of the *Fragments*.

run around to see with his physical eyes and to hear with his mortal ears – all of which is wasted effort – a lamentable, yes, a perilous chore.⁴⁴⁷

The danger or peril of the contemporary follower is precisely his situation: to believe one to be contemporary to the event (in an immediate or simple sense). When it comes to the moment as a historical fact in its most complex sense, there can be no such situation as an immediate contemporaneity. There is not first a contemporary follower and then later a follower at second hand. There is just: the follower. Or, a follower is all one can be or become, also in the sense of following (from and after) the event (of *Tilblivelse*), of (always) being *after* the fact, of following a passed moment, so to speak. And also, at all times and every time, following a *question*.

We have already encountered this question as a whisper in relation to the historical. It comes to full resonance with the moment in time (the in-coming of the word God).

To let this question come to words, and in an attempt to sum up the sense trailed in the foregoing sections, I will (quite uncharacteristically of this study) venture to set up a disposition in three orderly points. As a three-point sketch of significations that Climacus develops and *de-terminates* in the course of a book (or in the shattering of a fragmentation), it is, to be sure, a simplification of matters, but off we set anyway. We are going for the intensification of a moment in time and the stakes of a question, and we are heading towards a passion that this study already knew the name of.

So, first, the three points as headings only, and then with some additional remarks:

⁴⁴⁷ PF 106/SKS 4, 302: ”Ja saaledes er det; den umiddelbare Samtidighed er ingenlunde en afgjørende Fordeel, naar man gennemtænker den [...]. Den umiddelbare Samtidighed er saa langt derfra [at være en Fordeel], at den Samtidige netop maa ønske dens Ophør, at han ikke skal fristes til at ville løbe hen og see med sine sandselige Øine og høre med sit jordiske Øre; hvilket Alt er spildt Uleilighed og en sørgelig, ja en farefuld Møie.”

- 1) A SIMPLE HISTORICAL FACT – the past
- 2) A COMPLEX HISTORICAL FACT (or, the historical in the more complex sense) – the passed that has come into existence
- 3) A PARADOXICAL MOMENT (a historical fact in the *outmost* complex sense) – the eternal that has come into existence as the passed

1) A SIMPLE HISTORICAL FACT – the past:

Here we deal with an understanding of the past as that which was, or, that which was (once) a present moment but is now a moment of the past.

2) A COMPLEX HISTORICAL FACT – the passed that has come into existence:

Here the historical is understood as a complex of 1) the passed (*det Forbigangne*),⁴⁴⁸ and 2) what has come into existence (*er blevet til*). I have suggested that we understand the passed as the perpetually passed, that is, as a moment that was not first a present and then eventually became a past, just as the coming (*det Tilkommende*)⁴⁴⁹ is not, I suggested, a moment that eventually become a present. Rather, it is coming perpetually *as* the coming (*det Tilkommende*). In this way, these moments, or, *movements* rather, to follow the Danish connotation, can be said to keep the present *open-ended*.

As that which has come into existence, the historical bears with it a certain incertitude, namely, the uncertainty of *Tilblivelsen*. It is from this uncertainty (a moment in an unsettling dialectical movement of *Tilblivelsen*), that a question is heard, as a whisper after any fact: it happened, *but did it happen?* It occurred, *but did it occur?*

Now, to answer to this subversive moment, a response that can match it must be found:

⁴⁴⁸ PF 86-87: “[O]ur assumption that the god *has* been.”/SKS 4, 285: ”[V]or Antagelse, at Guden *har* været.”

⁴⁴⁹ As with the notion of the *Forbigangne*, I have made another decision than the Hongs translation with regard to the notion of the *Tilkommende*. Whereas the Hongs have chosen: [the future], I have once again wanted to keep the motional connotation in play. I find neither of the translations to be superior, but I do find the difference to be significant.

It is clear, then, [*Saameget er da klart*], that the organ for the historical must be formed in the likeness to this [*Tilblivelsens Svigagtighed*], whereby that which is most firm is made dubious, must have within itself the corresponding something by which in its certitude it continually annuls the incertitude that corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence [...].

This is precisely the nature of belief [*Tro*], for continually present as the nullified in the certitude of belief is the incertitude that in every way corresponds to the uncertainty of coming into existence.⁴⁵⁰

The organ for the historical, that is, the organ that answers to the incertitude of *Tilblivelse*, indeed, that *can* answer to this incertitude, is: faith (or belief). When incertitude whispers: but did it occur? Faith reply: 'I believe it' [*jeg tror det*]. It may very well be naïve, but faith is not blind. It does recognize the uncertainty, and it does not deny it. It does not fervently retort: surely it did (occur), and I have the evidence to proof it. It answers: I believe it, *well aware* that it does not have any evidence. In the word of Climacus: "The conclusion of belief is no conclusion but a resolution [*Beslutning*], and thus doubt is excluded." Doubt is not refuted, then, but countered by an act of will. Or, as we are told in the *Interlude*: "Belief is opposite of doubt. Belief and doubt are not two kinds of knowledge that can be defined in continuity with each other, for neither of them is a cognitive act, and they are opposite passions" (PF 84/SKS 4, 283.) Opposite passions, belief and doubt, neither of them brings home cognitive results; neither of them is minded on acquiring (new) knowledge. However, though they may not be *cognitive* acts (requiring knowledge), I find them both to be *conscious* acts:

Belief is sense for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that wants to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge. The doubter, for example, does not deny his own existence, but he

⁴⁵⁰ PF 81/SKS 4, 280-281: "Saameget er da klart, at Organet for the Historiske maa være dannet i Lighed med dette, maa have det Tilsvarende i sig, hvorved det bestandig i sin Vished ophæver den Uvished, der svarer til Tilblivelsens Uvished [...]. Af en saadan Beskaffenhed er nu netop Troen; thi i Troens Vished er bestandig tilstede som det Ophævede den Uvished, hvilken paa enhver Maade svarer til Tilblivelsens."

draws no conclusions, for he does not want to be deceived [...], but by the power of the will he decides to restrain himself and hold himself back [...].⁴⁵¹

Doubt refuses to cover up the openness of uncertainty, it is a protest against conclusions and settlements, and this holding back is no less dedicated than the giving over of a believer; it even sounds slightly more demanding ('by the power of the will'), and yet also a bit more concerned: The doubter restrains him- or herself in order not to be deceived. Here an anxiety surfaces, indicating that something significant might be at stake in the undertaking of an answer, a risk of some kind. We are here still with the question of the historical (in its more complex sense) that, according to the *Fragments*, on all occasions comes with this request for an answer, asking: will you believe it?

3) A PARADOXICAL MOMENT (a historical fact in the most complex sense) – the eternal that has come into existence as the passed:

Now, the *moment in time*. This is not a simple moment, nor is it historical in a simple sense: "But that historical fact (the content of our poem) has a unique quality [*har en egen Beskaffenhed*] in that it is not a direct historical fact but a fact based upon a self-contradiction [...]."⁴⁵² The contradiction of the moment of this historical fact (*hiint historiske Faktum*) is that we here deal with the eternal and the historical in the most impossible way, in the most *questionable* way, namely as an entanglement of thoroughly incompatible and utterly incommensurable terms: as the intrigue of 'the externalization of the historical' and 'the historicizing of the eternal' (PF 61/SKS 4, 263). We are here faced with a paradox, and a paradox at its own limits (*i sit yderste*), or, as I have suggested elsewhere: as an oxymoronic relation, thoroughly incommensurable terms that let sense come about in a flash of madness, a relation that is not a 'direct' (*ligefremt*) connection. With the paradox, it

⁴⁵¹ PF 85/SKS 4, 283: "Tro er Sands for Tilblivelse og Tvivl er Protest mod enhver Slutning, der vill gaae ud over den umiddelbare Sandsning og den umiddelbare Erkjendelse. Den egne Tilværf.Ex. nægter Tvivleren ikke, men han slutter Intet; thi han vil ikke bedrages [...] men i Kraft af Villien beslutter han a t at holde inde og holde sig tilbage [...]."

⁴⁵² PF 87/SKS 4, 285: "Med hiint historiske Faktum (der er vort Digts Indhold) har det nu en egen Beskaffenhed, da det ikke er et ligefrem historisk Faktum, men et Faktum baseret paa en Selvmodsigelse [...]."

is no longer a question of certainty/uncertainty as we are no longer dealing with the historical in its simple form, what the *Fragments* also designates ‘the directly historical’: “whose contradiction is only that it has come into existence, whose contradiction is only that of coming into existence [...]”⁴⁵³ The moment of the paradox is not *only* the moment of *Tilblivelse*, but the moment of the *god* coming into *time*, or as Climacus writes: “this *absurdity* that the eternal is the historical.”⁴⁵⁴ This is the moment in its outmost *paradoxical* sense. The question is no longer the mischievous whisper that comes with the dialectics of *Tilblivelse*: ‘it occurred, *but did it?* Are you sure?’ Here, with the moment in its utmost paradoxical sense, trembling with oxymoronic unreasonableness, the question is almost an outcry: ‘but this is absurd. *Are you mad?*’ When the moment is an absurdity, then to answer it would be: absurd. And yet, this is what faith does. Faith is the mad passion that answers to (*svarer*) a paradox, or we may say that the organ that answers to (*svarer til*) a paradox is precisely faith: “But then is faith as paradoxical as the paradox? Quite so. How else could it have its object in the paradox and be happy in its relation to it? Faith is itself a wonder, and everything that is true of the paradox is also true of faith.”⁴⁵⁵

At this point, or with this moment, a difference between belief (*Tro*) and faith (*Tro*) seems to open (once again). Perhaps the term *Tro* has a versality to it too, then. The possible difference between *belief* and *faith* comes to the fore, I think, with an explanation offered by Kirkconnell on the notion of belief. He writes: “Doubt is the passion of uncertainty, just as belief is the passion of certainty.”⁴⁵⁶ Of course,

⁴⁵³ PF 86/SKS 4, 285: “[D]et ligefrem Historiske, hvis Modsigelse kun er, at det er blevet til, hvis Modsigelse kun er Tilblivelsens [...]”

⁴⁵⁴ PF 62/SKS 4, 264: “[D]ette Absurde [...], at det Evige er det Historiske.” Emphasis added.

⁴⁵⁵ PF 65/SKS 4, 267: “Men saa er Troen jo lige saa paradox som Paradoxet? Ganske rigtigt; hvorledes skulde den ellers i Paradoxet have sin Gjenstand og være lykkelig i sit Forhold til den? Troen er selv et Under, og Alt hvad der gjelder om Paradoxet gjelder ogsaa om Troen.”

⁴⁵⁶ Kirkconnell 2010, 35. I do not agree with this formula, but as it is I who have invited him to speak without really asking him, it would be rather impolite to cut him off before he has even made his case. However, I will sneakily make a note as to why I do not concur with Kirkconnell regarding his formulation: PF 84: “Belief is a passion of certainty.” In the *Fragments*, the description reads: “Belief is a sense for coming into existence” (SKS 4, 283: “Tro er Sands for Tilblivelse”). As a sense for *Tilblivelse*, belief is, to me, a sense for, or an appreciation of, the tricky dialectics of certainty *and* uncertainty. But this minor divergence in interpretations has little import to the difference I hope to highlight above, namely that between belief and faith.

Kirkconnell reflects, there is always some degree of uncertainty in connection to belief: “No matter how carefully one may weigh the probabilities, there is still some measure of uncertainty left, some risk of error, which one must deal with. [...] As soon as one begins drawing any conclusions about the real world of existence [what doubt desists], one risks error.”⁴⁵⁷ But then again, he continues, doubt may also entail some sort of mistakes despite, or rather because of, all its cautions: “But on the other hand, belief is sometimes right, and withholding of assent [that would be the strategy of doubt] mistaken and even wilful stubbornness.”⁴⁵⁸ This account of belief is, I think, quite on the mark. There will always be a measure of uncertainty left, ‘no matter how carefully one may weight the probabilities’, but belief copes, so to speak, finding the degree of incertitude to be bearable. We could imagine a belief – untied from the notion of the historical and the moment of *Tilblivelse* to which it is ingeniously linked in the *Fragments* – that is asked, ‘Do you think there will be served lunch tomorrow at the gathering, it does not say so in the invitation?’ Belief, quickly weighing the probabilities and measuring the possibilities, replies: ‘I believe so’. Or, the palaeontologist, having meticulously studied the found fossils and researched the archives of former findings, being asked, ‘So, this is really how a velociraptor looked like?’ To which the palaeontologist replies: We believe so. In all likelihood. For all we know. In my opinion. Though in no way ignorant of the measure of uncertainty, belief gathers itself into conviction, finding itself to stand: not on an incontestable fundament but (still) on reliable grounds.

Faith, however, does not stand on any grounds.⁴⁵⁹ If asked: why so? why faith? – faith can only ever answer: for no reasons. Based on nothing – but a paradox. To faith, it is not a question of ‘some measure of uncertainty’ that ‘one

⁴⁵⁷ Kirkconnell 2010, 35.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ As it turns on a paradox: PF 98: ”But, humanly speaking, consequences built upon a paradox are built upon the abyss, and the total content of the consequences, which is handed down to the single individual only under the agreement that it is by virtue of a paradox, is not to passed on like real estate, since the whole thing is in suspense.”/SKS 4, 295: “Men Conseqventser, der ere byggede paa et Paradox, de ere jo, menneskeligt talt, byggede paa Afgrunden, og Conseqventsernes Totalt-Gehalt, der kun overgives den Enkelte under den Overenskomst, at det er i Kraft af et Paradox, er jo ikke at tage hen som urørligt Gods, da det Hele er svævende.”

must deal with'; for all that, it is no longer a question of certainty/uncertainty (as suggested above),⁴⁶⁰ but a matter of absurdity. When asked: are you mad? – faith might reply, with all the ambiguity that comes with that term: *perhaps so*.

To this study, faith is a passion of risk,⁴⁶¹ or a sense for adventures (understood in the particular sense of this study): it is to go into the unknown, it is to leave behind the land of the fathers, the grounds of the reasonable, and the enclosure of self-preservation (or self-justification). That is, faith *by virtue of the absurd*, as we have read elsewhere. It might be a sort of madness – but this madness is also the wonder of faith. Whereas the controlling passion of doubt (as it is portrayed strangely one-sidedly in the *Interlude*) is determined on refraining from conclusions, afraid of ending up a fool, faith answers to the absurd paradox: 'I am going with you, foolish as it may seem, mad as it may be'. It says so in the same way that a lover might say: 'I am fool but I am a fool for love' – in a tonality that comes very close to defiant delight. But might not such a lover precisely end up a fool (in the sense of having been fooled)? *Perhaps so*.

A passage here opens *by virtue of the absurd* between a journey into the mountains of Moriah and a moment in time (and, thus, between the two parts of my study). A link already made by several readers and writers, as it is also a relation between two distinctive writers both of whom goes by the name (of) Johannes, two of the, arguably, most favoured of the pseudonymous voices.

⁴⁶⁰ Faith is not concerned with being right or wrong (but perhaps with being true?). Whereas belief might find itself vindicated at some point when it is discovered that coconuts were in fact known to Europeans in the Mesolithic period of the Stone Age, faith does not yearn for verification or acclaim.

⁴⁶¹ A passion *of* and *not* for risk. Faith does not seek out risks but it does not try to escape them either. On the risk that comes with a paradox: PF 87: "But that historical fact [...] is not a direct historical fact but a fact based upon a self-contradiction (which adequately shows that there is no distinction between an immediate contemporary and someone who comes later, because, face to face with a self-contradiction and the risk entailed in assenting to it, immediate contemporaneity is no advantage at all)."/SKS 4, 285: "[Men] hiint historiske Faktum [...] er baseret paa en Selvmodsigelse (hvilket er tilstrækkeligt til at vise, at der ingen Forskjel er mellem den umiddelbart Samtidige og den Senere; thi ligeoverfor en Selvmodsigelse, og den Risiko der er forbunden med at give den Bifald, er den umiddelbare Samtidighed slet ingen Begunstigelse."

To Ferreira, that link is also one of notional comparability:

Fragments also relates to *Fear and Trembling* in particular insofar as it develops its notions of “paradox” and of believing by “virtue of the absurd.” Silentio’s conclusion there – that ‘faith begins precisely where thought stops (FT, 53) – is clarified and qualified in *Fragments*, where the activity and dynamics of thinking are much more to the forefront.⁴⁶²

I find this point of connection – that ‘faith begins precisely where thought (*Tankningen*) stops (FT 53) – to be so peculiar because the *Fragments* gives such a surprising account of this halt. Though the paradox in the *Fragments* is no less tremendous than that of *Fear and Trembling*, and one might expect – for that very reason – quite the clash between thought and the ungraspable paradox, Climacus curiously depicts this encounter as a happy moment, almost suspiciously cheerful:

How, then, does the learner come to an understanding with this paradox, for we do not say that he is supposed to understand the paradox but is only to understand that this is the paradox. [...] It occurs when the understanding (*Forstanden*) and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something, the something in which this occurs [...] is the happy passion [...] which we [...] shall call [...] *faith*.⁴⁶³

No clashes and no defeats here. Thought (*Tankningen*) is far from shaken or overturned in this scenario, frankly, it is not even upset. As a happy encounter, this coming to an understanding (*Forstaaelse*) seems to be an odd hybrid between an UN meeting and an affectionate rendezvous,⁴⁶⁴ all merry handshakes, tender

⁴⁶² Ferreira 2009, 68.

⁴⁶³ PF 59/SKS 4, 261: ”Hvorledes kommer nu den Lærende i Forstaaelse med dette Paradox, thi vi sige ikke at han skal forstaae Paradoxet, men kun forstaae, at dette er Paradoxet? [...] [D]et skeer naar Forstanden og Paradoxet støde lykkeligen sammen i Øieblikket; naar Forstanden skaffer sig selv til Side og Paradoxet giver sig selv hen; og det Tredie, hvori dette skeer [...] ville [vi] nu kalde [...]: *Tro*.”

⁴⁶⁴ Prior to this account, Climacus also gives another description of the encounter between understanding [*Forstanden*] and the paradox. Here understanding – due to its own passion – is continually drawn towards the paradox: PF 44: ”The paradoxical passion [that wills the collision and its own downfall, 38-39] is, then, continually colliding with this unknown [...]. The understanding does not go beyond this; yet in its paradoxicality the understanding cannot stop reaching it [...]”; and a couple of pages later: ”The understanding certainly cannot think it [the paradox], cannot hit upon it on its own, [...] and merely detects that it will likely be its downfall.”

surrender, and deferential agreements on a borderline. One might imagine an intellect (*Forstanden*) that meets up with the paradox on the limit - which is also in some sense its own limit – and there comes to a halt, not because it *cannot* proceed, but (in the encounter with the paradox) because it *will* not proceed. One might imagine a mind that comes to a stop at the edge of the abyss of the absurd, where its special adviser, reason, whispers: ‘this is madness, madam’, or ‘this is utterly out of bounds, sir.’ We have seen such sidestepping before (cf. Agamemnon). Here the intellect (*Forstanden*), reasonable and calculated, comes to an understanding (in the sense of agreement) with the paradox, saying: ‘So, here, we part ways’, that is, ‘where you go, I *will* not follow’. From this moment on, faith will take over, saying, ‘I will follow’.⁴⁶⁵ From this moment, ‘thought stops’, as de silentio wrote, but from here another way of understanding (*Forstaaelse*) might carry on, as both the *Fragments* and *Fear and Trembling* can be said to suggest. One might imagine the intellect saying: ‘Good luck, then,’ and faith, going with the paradox that has given itself (*givet sig hen*), replying, ‘This has got nothing to do with luck (but a lot to do with passion)’.⁴⁶⁶ Or, one might imagine the mind bidding faith, ‘Fare well’, and faith answering, ‘Adieu’. A greeting (*adien*) that should be heard in all its possible ambiguity.⁴⁶⁷

But this would, of course, only be scenarios of our imagination.

However, my attempt at an orderly disposition seems to have come somewhat off target at this point. I was looking for the intensification of a moment in time and

⁴⁶⁵ The peculiar dialectics of will in relation to faith can perhaps be formulated as follows: one cannot will to have faith, which is also to say that one does not come to (or come up with) faith by will, however, one cannot go with faith without will (without resolution), which is also to say that one is a follower by way of a *Villiens-Yttring* (“an expression of will”, PF 83/SKS 4, 282). One cannot will faith, and one must will faith, the *Fragments* suggests in a dialectical relation that is not contradictory.

⁴⁶⁶ On understanding and understanding; Welz: “Here it becomes clear that the God-relationship is misunderstood if it is taken to be only an intellectual relation. It concerns human existence in all its dimension. Correspondingly, the problem of understanding that is linked to the paradox of thought thinking the unthinkable resides not only on an epistemological plane.” Welz 2015, forthcoming, 3.

⁴⁶⁷ “Wherever and whenever ‘God’ is named and conceptualized, or even invoked or addressed, the gesture of this speech act is immediately broken. It is folded to the point of collapsing in on itself and reverting into its ‘opposite. [...] This is what the *adien* enables us to articulate in its complexity. The expression combines all the ambiguity and coherent incoherence of evoking at once a gesture toward ‘God’ (*à Dieu*), a *leave-taking from* ‘God’ (*adien*), and a ‘Non-God,’ a being haunted by the other of ‘God’ (of this one God, or of this God as one and the One): *a-dieu* signals the other of the Other as the fracturing and the dissemination of the One.” de Vries 1999, 28.

the stakes of a question, and I was searching for the passion that this study already knew the name of.

By now, I have found that the moment in time, at its most intense, at its most passionate, is the *paradoxical* moment of the god coming into existence, or as the *Fragments* framed it: this absurdity that the eternal is the historical. With this absurd moment, we are somehow outside the bounds of the mind (*Forstanden*): “The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of the understanding,”⁴⁶⁸ as it is formulated in *Fear and Trembling* which we are revisiting only in passing. A passion otherwise than that of the intellect (*Forstanden*) was found, another organ was encountered; one that answers to the absurdity of a paradoxical moment, namely: faith.

To this study, faith is (or, is also) a passion of risk, that is, faith is the passion that answers (to) the risk of a paradox. When it all comes down to a *paradoxical* moment, the stakes have been intensified beyond the point of the reasonable. While belief deals with the uncertainty of probabilities, faith faces the ambiguous openness of a perhaps in all the gravity and the jest of that term, where a hollow laughter can be heard from the bottom of an unfathomable abyss (or, it might come from the infinity of upper atmospheres, who knows, really?). This would be the difference between belief estimating itself to have a fair chance (of being right), and the madness of taking a son and a knife on a journey of slaughtering, walking as if everything is possible⁴⁶⁹ *by virtue of the absurd*.

The story of Abraham (as it is retold in *Fear and Trembling* and read in this study) does not make sense, the setting and plotline are outrageous, or as de silentio

⁴⁶⁸ FT 46/SKS 4, 141: ”Det Absurde hører ikke til de differentser, der ligge indenfor Forstandens eget Omfang.”

⁴⁶⁹ That is, that one will ’get Isaac’: FT 49: ”It takes purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity [...]. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith, By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac.”/SKS 4, 143: ”Der hører et reent menneskeligt Mod til at give Afkald paa hele Timeligheden, for at vinde Evigheden, [...] men der hører et paradox og ydmygt Mod til nu at gribe hele Timeligheden i Kraft af det Absurde, og dette Mod er Troens. Ved Troen gav Abraham ikke Afkald paa Isaak, men ved Troen fik Abraham Isaak.”

accentuates: they are preposterous. Hearing this narrative, reason backs away in offense: ‘but this is absurd’ (or ‘this is madness’)! To which the paradox replies: ‘Indeed’. However, to back away is not to come to an understanding (*Forstaaelse*) at the edge of a line, and the encounter between offended reason and the paradox remains an unhappy non-meeting. Though offended reasonable thinking seems so close to a shared understanding (also in the sense of *agreement*), this is only an acoustical illusion. It turns out, as Climacus has told us, that the offended intellect (*Forstand*) was only echoing the paradox.

The odd suggestion of the *Fragments* is, in the reading of this study, that the greatest difficulty of the paradox (in the sense it gets in the *Fragments* and *Fear and Trembling*) in relation to *understanding* does not turn on the *complexity* but the *absurdity*. We might say that the intellect is *compelled* by the complexity of the paradox but *repelled* by the absurdity of it. The paradox is, in this sense, a moment of *decisive signification*, not in the sense of having a conclusive or determining sense, that is, not in the sense that says: ‘this settles it, then’. Rather, the paradox unsettles it all (or, the all): It is there as a question mark (in the writing) *by virtue of the absurd*, or, it is a question mark by virtue of its absurdity.

In the resonance of this question mark, we may say that it is a moment of *decisive signification* insofar as it calls for a resolution (in the sense of *Afgjørelse*): ‘will you follow me?’ The paradox is, in this understanding, not a question posed to the intellect, that is, a question posed as a problem (to resolve or to be comprehended), that is, ‘can you follow me?’ – but calls for an understanding (in the sense of agreement or a pledge) of another kind, a passion of another *sensibility*, I suggest.

If an absurdity did not resonate in this very moment, there would be no reasons for the intellect to part ways with it. However, precisely because it (the paradoxical moment) it is without reasons, because it is out of tune in the sense of not-logically-sound, it is (only) the passion of faith that answers to it. A straightforward (*ligefremt*) contradiction would still ‘lie within the proper domain of the understanding’ (FT 46/SKS 4, 141). After all, a straightforward paradox – not opened by virtue of the absurd – is still a figure of logic.

Questioning the questions

When the moment in time is understood at its most complex, it turned out to be a *question* (mark) by virtue of its absurdity. The paradox of a god coming into existence is (in my reading) not a moment to remember (say, in a nostalgic relishing) but a moment of resolution (*Beslutning*) or commitment (*Afgjørelse*); a dare, we may say, to those with a sense for adventures, or an ambiguous openness (dreadful *and* wondrous) for those with a passion of risk.

It is this question mark that must be answered (in an *Afgjørelse*) to become a follower, or as I have earlier suggested: one becomes a follower, at all times and every time, following a question, which is also to say that one *is* not (simply) a follower, one *becomes* a follower – by faith, the passion that answers to a paradox gone mad.

This also goes for the contemporary follower, understood in the simple sense of the historical, who must become a contemporary follower in the complex (paradoxical) sense of contemporaneity – by a resolution of faith:

In the immediate sense, no one can become contemporary with this historical fact [...], but because it involves coming into existence, it is the object of faith. It is not a question here of the truth of it but of assenting [...].⁴⁷⁰

It is not a question of the truth, then, because truth is “a matter of cognition” (PF 85/SKS 4, 284) (*I get it*), but a question of assenting (*I will follow*).

How about the very ‘Thought-Project’ of Climacus, then, that commenced the *Fragments* with the question: “Can the truth be learned? With this question we shall begin.”⁴⁷¹

When it comes to the moment in time, it is not a question of the truth, the *Fragments* suggests. And, moreover, it is not a question of learning, as that would

⁴⁷⁰ PF 87/SKS 4, 286: Umiddelbart kan da Ingen blive samtidig med dette historiske Faktum (cfr. det Foregaaende); men det er Troens Gjenstand, da det angaaer Tilblivelse. Der er her ikke Spørgsmaal om Sandheden deraf, men om man vil give det Samtykke [...].”

⁴⁷¹ PF 9/SKS 4, 218: ”Hvorvidt kan Sandheden læres? Med dette Spørgsmaal ville vi begynde.” The Danish adverb *Hvorvidt*, lost in translation, carries an ambiguity that might turn out now to show its point.

also be ‘a matter of cognition’. To come to an understanding (*Forstaaelse*) with (and note: not *of*) the paradox, it is not about learning, but about following; it is not about the truth of it, by of assenting. By way of ambiguity, the discourse on teachers has also made it unclear, or equivocal, whether it was in fact about teachers. As we have already seen, Socrates was the kind of teacher ‘who *in* his very teaching somehow withdraws *as* the teacher’, and with regards to the god as the teacher? Well, in the very passage subtitled ‘The Teacher’, Climacus teasingly writes that a teacher who ‘provides the condition for understanding’ “is not a teacher,” (PF 14/SKS 4, 223) and later: “Now, what should we call such a teacher, for we surely do agree that we have gone far beyond the definition of a teacher” (PF 15/SKS 4, 224). This is not to say, that the case on teachers is thereby closed. Climacus does not withdraw or unsay the term of the teacher, but put it in question by way of ambiguity.

But if it is not a matter of the truth, nor of learning, must we not say that the Thought-Project of Climacus has all been in vain? What a futile mockery. What an unabashed hoax. Unless. Unless “the difficulty consisted in perceiving that one cannot question in this way.”⁴⁷²

The questioning of the question, or the question of the difficulty of questioning, runs as an undercurrent throughout the *Fragments* (of my reading). It calls the series of concerns from the title page into question, because (as I have suggested) one cannot *simply* ask about a historical point of departure when the historical itself is an issue. It moreover seems to be a question whether the concerns of these title-page-questions are of any interest to anyone. Climacus, for one, appears to be remarkably *unconcerned* with the topic (and question) of eternal happiness, and the depiction submitted by Levinas (cited in the prologue of this part) of Kierkegaard as a ‘Christian thinker’ who fixed ‘the play of salvation drama in existence’, finds little resonance in the *Fragments* of my reading.

We can also trace this undercurrent (the questioning of questions and the question of questioning) in the problem of how one comes to question at all. A

⁴⁷² PF 89/SKS 4, 287: “Dette følger dog ikke; thi sæt Vanskeligheden laae i at indsee, at man ikke kan spørge saaledes. [...]”

questioning that was posed indirectly in the remark made at the very beginning (or, before the beginning) of the Thought-Project: “The question is asked by one who in his ignorance does not even know what provided the occasion for his questioning in this way.”⁴⁷³ The problem is, in other words, that “– if I already have the question, then in some sense I already have the answer,”⁴⁷⁴ and then it is not a question. But then again, if I do not know what the question is, how do I come to ask it? The strange wager of the *Fragments* seems to be that the (word) god comes with the question, or, that the (word) god has come into existence *as* a question. A striking question that did not bring along any answers. In its coming about, it does not make sense; rather, it calls for an answer, or it calls forth an answer in the sense of a resolution (*Beslutning*).

The undercurrent of questioning has been at flow throughout this reading, even if not explicated directly (*ligefremt*). Part two began with the section titled ‘Opening questions’, and I have in the following passages tried to tell by showing how the *Fragments* is a piece of writing (or pieces of a writing) that opens questions in the course of a text. Open questions of a writing that makes the reader ask *what* the project of Climacus is about, *how* we are to understand a term such as ‘the historical’, and *whether* our understanding of understanding must not be called into question in the face of a paradox.

By following the question put forward by Climacus regarding the term ‘the historical’ (*what historical?*), this study has found an unsettling factor of *Tilblivelse* (asking: *did it occur?*) at the heart of the moment (*Øieblikket*) as well as an impossible paradox (‘the eternal is the historical’) so out of line that it is no longer a question of the truth of it, but of answering (to it). And so, this study, attentive to the questions opening in a text (an attentiveness I pledged to follow already in the prologue of Part one), has once again come to a call (heard or not heard) for answering. Answering to a paradox, however, is a questionable affair, as one has no reasons for answering, no evidence to build one’s case on, no ground(s) to base

⁴⁷³ PF 9/SKS 4, 218: ”Spørgsmaalet gjøres af den Uvidende, der end ikke veed, hvad der har givet Anledning til at han spørger saaledes.”

⁴⁷⁴ Ferreira 2009, 71.

one's conviction on. One becomes a follower or a father of faith only on one's own risk. One answers also for answering, as I have put it.

Before bringing this section to an end, a brief remark on the series of question from the title page to which a return was promised.

In a twisty way so characteristic of the *Fragments* (of my reading), a sort of answer is namely provided to these inquiries at the very end of the work. Here, in a passage dripping with irony and, I suggest, twinkling with ambiguity, Climacus writes:

As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that despite the historical – indeed, precisely by means of the historical – has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than merely historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical.⁴⁷⁵

So, we are told, it is Christianity that holds the answers to these concerned questions, or, it is Christianity to which these questions are of concern. Which is also to say that it is from Christianity that these questions come. It can be asked whether the keenness to answer these questions might not have gone a little overboard when Christianity here offers *itself* as the point of departure, but that is not for this reading to resolve.

To end this section, I will sum up: in relation to the moment in time, it was not a question of the truth of it but a question of resolution (*Beslutning*); it was not a matter of learning but a matter for the passion of faith.

Yet another Levinasian concern – about the 'in-'

In his *Philosophical Fragments*, a piece of crumbles, Johannes Climacus takes on a major event in the narrative(s) of God as did also the other Johannes. Whereas

⁴⁷⁵ PF 109/SKS 4, 305: "Som bekjendt er nemlig Christendommen det eneste historiske Phænomen, der uagtet det Historiske, ja netop ved det Historiske, har villet interessere ham anderledes end blot historisk, har villet begrunde ham hans Salighed paa hans Forhold til noget Historisk."

Johannes de silentio retold the story on how to become a father of faith, Johannes Climacus explored how to become a follower by way of faith. The Kierkegaardian chronology here faithfully follows that of the scriptures of Christianity: one becomes a father of faith while the coming of the Son is yet a promise.

I found the entry of (the word) God into the story of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* to be a decisive moment, to borrow an expression from Climacus: a shattering event. We may say that the *Fragments* is no less concerned with the moment of an in-coming of the (word) God into a text, and, more so, into time and into the world: into existence. To clothe this in-coming in its “historical costume” (PF 109/SKS 4, 305), we could even say, following the Gospel of John, that it is the coming of the Word (*Logos*) into the world (John 1:10), what in Christian theology is called: the incarnation (“The Word becoming flesh’, John 1:14).

While the story of Abraham is a founding tale (in its variations) for all three of the so-called monotheistic traditions or religions, the event or dogma of the Incarnation is a founding tale only in Christianity. Here, a parting of ways takes place, or we could say, with all the allusions that may come with such an expression: with the Incarnation, Christianity initiated a plotline that critically put it at the *crossroads* with the other traditions.

And so, while the inspirational pulse of this study has so far been beating perseveringly (though not altogether untroubled) as an undercurrent of my readings, it might now be time to let the disparity surface more distinctly. After all, Levinas, from whom this study has taken so many clues, referred to his involvement with the Jewish tradition in both writings and conversations, and can thus be said to part company with the *Fragments* on this particular point of in-coming. Although this study is not a comparative reading, this section will pay a visit, not to the writings of Levinas, but to a concern of his, a worry that is related to the sort of in-coming presented by Christianity with the doctrine or dogma of Incarnation.

However, before I let this concern be voiced, another *nota bene* shall be made.

N.B.

This study, following what I have called a literary intuition, has wandered off from its natural habitation in the search of a peculiar word in some pseudonymous works, and it has at times found itself on alien land, having crossed borders of disciplines that are still under negotiation; age old demarcation lines between fields of study or faculties that can be difficult to uphold or even determine, yet, they are fervently guarded by some, and no less impassionedly doubted by others.

Aware of such discussions, some remarks to trace out the course of this study through disputed lands will nevertheless be ventured.

As I am not investigating the movement in-coming as a dogmatic notion (that is, as the Incarnation), this study offers no discussion of the concept of revelation or epiphany, nor will it address topics of doctrinal import in relation to incarnation, for example, questions regarding Trinitarian issues. Not because those themes are not of great significance to a reading of the *Fragments*, they are indeed, but because they are not the matter of this study.

Nor will the problematics of phenomenology (in all its varieties) be developed or addressed, notwithstanding the appearance of terms that might invoke an interest from these areas. Again, this is not to say that questions of, say, intentionality and consciousness are not of great importance to an investigation of the *Fragments* (not least when the voice of Levinas is invoked), they are indeed, only, this study is tracing other paths and, perhaps, another sensibility.

And, so, upon these remarks, trying to clarify the focus of this study rather than defining the borderlines between fields of study, we are off to a writer who does not answer to the name of Johannes.

At the crossroads

The aim of this section is to let a concern of Levinas be voiced, an unease and a question that has to do with the movement of *in-coming* that I have found in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments* in relation to the word God. The section begins at the crossroads where the tradition(s) of Christianity (to which the

Fragments at the end makes a link) and the Jewish tradition(s) (which Levinas in his writings and discussions connects to) part ways.

Emmanuel Levinas's relation to Christianity is a curious one.⁴⁷⁶ For some scholars,⁴⁷⁷ he is very much involved with the tradition of Christianity, not least owing to his philosophical education, what we might call a continental tradition, that does not identify as Christian, as it does not identify as religious, but that can (still) be said to be *born out of* the tradition of Christianity as the cultural framework of a continent, insofar as the accentuation in that formulation lies on *out of* more than the *born*. For other scholars,⁴⁷⁸ Levinas is a Jewish thinker through and through, making that tradition the decisive framework or underlying premise of his writings. Most scholars, however, seem to think of Levinas as an ethical thinker, or more to the point, as a thinker of the ethical, and from this perspective, both the tradition of Judaism and Christianity are seen as more or less important dimensions that at times surface, bringing a certain nuance or resonance to the writings that (thus) cannot be separated entirely from a dimension of religion (to the nuisance, contentment, or merely lack of interest or enthusiasm to the readers with an ethical orientation), yet, neither is the notion of the ethical shackled to or restrained by any religion in particular, or in a broader sense. All of these positions have a case, I think, that is, all of them can find some attestation to their standpoint in the writings of Levinas that cannot be determined in any simple manner. Without trying to locate the exact position of his works, I find that Emmanuel Levinas's relation to Christianity is a curious one, thereby suggesting that a relating is indeed at play in (some of) his works.

⁴⁷⁶ An issue that is discussed, explored, and/or elucidated by several scholars, most illuminatingly, I think, in the publication, *The Exorbitant – Emmanuel Levinas Between Jews and Christians* (Hart and Signer 2010); but also addressed in *Emmanuel Levinas – Fragen an die Moderne* (Freyer & Schenk 1996); in *The Face of the Other and the the Trace of God – Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Bloechl 2000); and in *Die Gottesfrage in der Philosophie von Emmanuel Levinas* (Fischer & Sirovátka 2013).

⁴⁷⁷ Michael Purcell and Merold Westphal can be mentioned as two pronounced voices that do not erase the line between Levinas and the Christian tradition, but make it a very thin one, or, perhaps better: make it one of conversation.

⁴⁷⁸ Richard A. Cohen and Michael A. Signer might be mentioned here, both of them emphasizing the flow of the Jewish tradition in the thinking of Levinas as well as the distinction between that tradition and Christian theology, yet, without building walls to obstruct a possible dialogue.

This curious relating is at play in a paper titled “A Man-God?”⁴⁷⁹ presented at the Week of Catholic Intellectuals (in Paris, April 1968) to which Levinas had been invited. Here he addresses the very stumbling block dividing Christianity and Judaism: what Levinas calls the notion of a ‘Man-God’. Finding this figure to have roamed the imagination of religious tales for ages, Levinas de-situates the notion from a strictly Christian framework, noting that “the appearance of man-gods, sharing the passions and joys of men who are purely men is certainly a common characteristic of pagan poems.”⁴⁸⁰ This appearance comes with a price, however: the man-gods pay for their manifestation – and their merry participation in the vibrant and sullied affairs of men and women – with the price of losing their divinity, which, to Levinas, here, is to lose the *distance* or *difference* altogether between man⁴⁸¹ and god. To prevent this loss, and to save the gods from sullyng themselves with human desires and petty passions, “philosophers expel the poets from the City to preserve the divinity of the god’s in men’s minds.”⁴⁸² Getting rid of the man-gods that mess around with earthly matter, man-gods all-too-human, we may say, the philosophers think of a dignified divinity that is not engaged in the matters of the earth: “Plato’s God is the impersonal Idea of the Good; Aristotle’s God is a thought that thinks itself. And it is with this divinity which is indifferent to the world of men that Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*, that is to say, perhaps, philosophy, ends.”⁴⁸³ And thus, ending up with this indifference, the philosopher’s god has lost the *proximity* between man and god. Without yet addressing the subject of *the* Man-God, that is, the incarnated God of Christianity, Levinas has widened the topic of the colloquium to the problem of man – god, that is, the *relation* between man and God, between God and the world. To Levinas, this relation is not one of absorption nor of indifference, but a relation of radical difference *and* radical

⁴⁷⁹ Published under the title *Qui est Jésus-Christ?* in Éditions Desclée de Brouwer (1968), but in this study referred to as the essay ‘Un Dieu Homme?’, printed in Levinas, *Entre nous : Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre*, Paris: Bernard Grasset 1991, pp. 69-76, and in translation: *Entre nous, On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, New York: Columbia University Press 1998c, pp. 53-60.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Or, woman and god, we may add.

⁴⁸² Levinas, “A Man-God?”, *Entre Nous*, 54/70.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

proximity, a relation of non-in-difference, as he also phrases it.⁴⁸⁴ But here we are ahead of ourselves.

Returning to somewhere in Paris, in April 1968, where Levinas is invited to talk about the theological notion of an incarnated God, we find (that is to say, I find) a savvy speaker who does not embrace the subject with diplomatic courtesy but gets his way with a discourse that smoothly translates the matter into distinctly Levinasian points.

At the first page of the paper, Levinas remarks with content that the “notion of Man-God [...], followed as it is by a question mark on the programs of this colloquium, is recognized as a problem (*reconnue comme problem*).”⁴⁸⁵ He continues: “[T]he problem of the Man-God includes the idea of a self-inflicted humiliation on the part of the Supreme Being, of a descent of the Creator to the level of the Creature [...].”⁴⁸⁶ This ‘self-inflicted humiliation on the part of the Supreme Being’, a kenotic movement of de-basement of sorts, is “pushed to its ultimate degree in the Passion, the idea of expiation for others, that is, of substitution.”⁴⁸⁷ And so, the problem of the Man-God is pushed from a movement of descent framed in unmistakably ontological terms⁴⁸⁸ to an idea of expiation *for others*, that is, a figure of substitution, as Levinas suggests, whereby he arrives at ideas that he is quite at home with.

Here, in his apt ‘translation’ of a theological notion into Levinasian suggestions, I find that (at least) two other and interrelated operations of de-orientation are at play. Firstly, the movement of descendance, as a drop from one level to another, is somehow redirected to a movement *for others*, whereby the accentuation of the movement has been displaced subtly from the *verticality of a trajectory* to the *passion of a relation*. Secondly, what we might call the sensitivity of the

⁴⁸⁴ For example in *Altérité et transcendance*, Fata Morgana 1995, 105.

⁴⁸⁵ “A Man-God?”, *Entre Nous*, 53/69.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 53-53/69.

⁴⁸⁸ In his article, “Levinas’s Gift to Christian Theology,” Robyn Horner suggests that this connection might be inherent to a discourse: “In other words, in Levinas’ view revealed theology brings with it the assumptions of ontology.” Horner 2010, 137. I wish to suggest, with Levinas, that this can also be said to be a tendency wherever language (that is, any language game) is at play.

movement, passing through the point of the Passion, has been rephrased from a ‘self-inflicted *humiliation*’ (de-basement) to the less destructive but no less profound suggestion of a boundless *humility* (in ‘the idea of expiation for others’). With this re-formulation, Levinas can assert: “I think that the humility of God, up to a certain point, allows for conceiving the relationship with transcendence in terms other than those of naiveté or pantheism [...].”⁴⁸⁹ With the idea of humility, that is, with the “idea of a truth whose manifestation is not glorious or bursting with light,” the idea of a truth that manifests itself in its humility, we might have come to a movement that, by ‘its way of being’ (*sa façon d’être*), as Levinas writes, or its way of transcendence, we could add, does not succumb to absorption nor indifference: “To manifest itself as humble, as allied with the vanquished, the poor, the persecuted – is precisely not to return to order.”⁴⁹⁰ This unbounded and immeasurable humility – allied with the vanquished, the poor, the persecuted – cannot be assimilated into the order of the world, Levinas proposes, as it is utterly in-appropriate by way of the company it keeps and the exigency of its destitution: “through this solicitation of the beggar, and of the homeless without a place to lay his head – [...] humility disturbs absolutely; it is not of the world.”⁴⁹¹ We could say that “this defeatism” (*ce défaitisme*) is a way of defiance, a formulation to which Nietzsche might have had a wry comment to spare, but we could also go with the phrasing of Levinas who seldom backs down when it comes to excessive expressions: “To present oneself in this poverty of the exile is to interrupt the coherence of the universe. To pierce immanence without thereby taking one’s place within it.”⁴⁹²

A new idea and a new modality

Curiously to this study, Levinas goes on to assert that: “It is doubtless Kierkegaard who best understood the philosophical notion of transcendence contributed by the biblical theme of God’s humility.” Kierkegaard, as understood by Levinas who

⁴⁸⁹ Levinas, “A Man-God?”, *Entre Nous*, 54/70.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55/71.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

seems to have lost his sense for significant differences when it comes to the diversity of (gendered) pronouns and pseudonymity, submits an idea of a transcendent truth, or a true transcendence that comes about in a dialectical relation where the involved terms are deepened in the movement: “The grandeur of transcendent truth - its very transcendence - is linked to its humility.” The grandeur of such truth does not march around in triumphant pride nor does it shamelessly display itself center stage in a blaze of spotlight, but finds its profundity in a wound of suffering,⁴⁹³ and yet, one would be mistaken to take the modesty of such a humility to be without an edge to it: it ‘pierces immanence’ and ‘interrupt the coherence of the universe’. Levinas writes:

The force of transcendent truth is in its humility. It manifests itself as if it did not dare say its name; it does not come to take its place in the world with which it would be confused immediately, as if it did not come from beyond. Reading Kierkegaard, one may even wonder [...] whether the true God can ever discard His incognito, whether the truth which is said should not immediately appear as not said, in order to escape the sobriety and objectivity of historians, philologists, and sociologists who will deck it out in all the names of history, reducing its still small voice to the din of battlefields and marketplaces, or to the structured configuration of meaningless elements.⁴⁹⁴

The transcendent truth, or the persecuted truth⁴⁹⁵ that Levinas finds, reading Kierkegaard, does not turn into a force of demonstration, but remains a defiant resistance to the order of the world – by way of demureness to the point of *dis*-appearance: a movement of transcendence so bashful that it refrains from positioning itself, so humble that it does not even want to *present* itself, so modest that “it did not dare to say its name, and thus is always about to leave,”⁴⁹⁶ a humility “so great that it does not dare show itself,”⁴⁹⁷ as Levinas writes in an essay on Kierkegaard titled “A Propos of ‘Kierkegaard vivant’”, and continues: “Or, if

⁴⁹³ “*Belief is linked to a truth that suffers*. The truth that *suffers* and is persecuted is very different from a truth improperly approached. It is so different that in Kierkegaard's eyes it is through suffering truth one can describe the very manifestation of the divine: [...] to a humiliated God who suffers, dies and leaves those whom he saves in despair.” Levinas 1996, 69.

⁴⁹⁴ Levinas, “A Man-God?”, *Entre Nous*, 56/72-73.

⁴⁹⁵ Levinas 1996, 77.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ Levinas 1996, 78.

you like, its presentation is equivocal: it is there as if it were not there. Such is, in my view, the new philosophical idea contributed by Kierkegaard.”⁴⁹⁸ At this point, with the equivocality of a presentation, the writing of Levinas and his reading of Kierkegaard seem to converge, if only for a moment. With the courteous *if you like*, the gracious gesture that lets the ‘new philosophical idea by Kierkegaard’ be presented, the ‘new modality expressed by *if one likes* and *perhaps*’⁴⁹⁹ reappears, presented in the Prologue of this part. A new modality that lets a persecuted truth ‘be there *as if* it was not there’ because the expressions of politesse lets a disturbing ambiguity resonate long after they are said, making what is said be heard in the resonance of equivocal openness. *As if, if one likes, perhaps*, modest sayings, not even proper sentences, and yet they disturb the order of immanence and presentation.

Reading Kierkegaard, Levinas wonders whether the piercing movement that ‘takes place without taking up place’ must not be communicated so that the ‘truth said should immediately appear as not said’, or so that the God that is said to appear should immediately appear as not said, or be said to not have appeared.

As if it was not said, or as if it was *unsaid*. Or, as it is shrewdly phrased by Levinas with subtle equivocality: ‘it should *appear* as not said.’ Though this study has indeed tried to play up the ambiguity at play in such a phrasing, I will in this case not follow the clue of Levinas. It is only a difference of accentuation, but a divergence nevertheless. Having trailed movements of withdrawal in Part one, I came to suggest that the word God comes about in a movement otherwise than that of retreat (that is, in the context of the works read in this study). Rather than taking up the direction of *un-saying*, of retiring and departing and, not least, of disengaging, I have pointed towards a movement of in-coming and the possible non-in-difference that might pulsate in the interference and entering of such a movement even if it never arrives as such.

This study explores the way(s) in which a peculiar word *comes about* in a text. I am re-searching the excessive sense of a word (in-ordinate and unruly) that is signalled in a vibrant and complex writing rather than pointing towards what

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Levinas 1998, 67.

cannot be said, and/or what must not be said. It is, perhaps, the difference,⁵⁰⁰ slight and indeed unsettled, between 1) a manoeuvre of unsaying (*dedire*) the betrayals of language, and 2) a mischievous writing in which the sense of a peculiar word winks. It is, perhaps, the difference between 1) an Infinity that needs or requires ambiguity⁵⁰¹ to prevent its sense from being belied in (the inevitable) thematization of language,⁵⁰² and 2) the sense of a word that comes about *in* a writing *as* ambiguous openness. It is, perhaps, the difference between 1) a writing that remains faithfully concerned with safeguarding the sense of Infinity so that it is not assembled or put on display,⁵⁰³ and 2) a writing that is not on guard but rather seeks to make as much trouble as possible.

Still, these are differences of accentuation only. Whether a movement of withdrawal or of in-coming, both infinity (as signalled by Levinas) and the word God (as suggested in this study) are involved in a plot of ambiguity or ambivalence that leaves a mark on existence:

It is through its ambivalence which always remains an enigma that infinity or the transcendent does not let itself be assembled. Removing itself from every memorable present, a past that was never present, it leaves a trace of its impossible incarnation and its inordinateness in my proximity with the neighbour, where I state, in the autonomy of the voice of conscience, a responsibility, which could not have begun in me [...].⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ A marginal difference of directions (between withdrawals and in-comings) more than it is a strict divergence between lines of thinking (of Levinas and the suggestions of this study).

⁵⁰¹ OB 152/*Autrement* 238.

⁵⁰² OB 151-152: "Thematization is then inevitable, so that signification itself show itself, but does so in the sophism with which philosophy begins, in the betrayal which philosophy is called upon to reduce. This reduction always has to be attempted, because of the trace of sincerity, which the words themselves bear and which they owe to saying as witness, even when the said dissimulates the saying in the correlation set up between the saying and the said. Saying always seeks to unsay that dissimulation, and this is its very veracity."/*Autrement* 237: «Thématisation donc inévitable pour que la signification elle-même se montre, mais sophisme où commence la philosophie, mais trahison que le philosophe est appelé à réduire. Réduction toujours à tenter à cause de la trace de sincérité que les mots eux-mêmes portent et qu'ils tiennent dissimule le Dire en tant que témoignage, même quand le Dit dissimule le Dire dans la corrélation qui s'instaure entre le Dire et Dit. Dissimulation que le Dire toujours cherche à dedire – ce qui est sa véracité même. »

⁵⁰³ OB 154/*Autrement* 240.

⁵⁰⁴ OB 161/*Autrement* 251-252: «C'est de par son ambivalence qui reste toujours énigme que l'infini ou le transcendant ne se laisse pas rassembler. S'écartant de tout présent mémorable – passé qui ne

This study found a resonance of the Levinasian notion of proximity to ring in the writing of *de silentio*, in the relationality of life in which Abraham is already involved, and in the gravity of the other (bodies) that Abraham also answers for (in the section “The weight of a body – differences of gravity”). What is at issue in this section, however, at the crossroads of traditions, is how we are to understand what Levinas in the above quotation terms: the ‘impossible incarnation’.

It is this *impossible incarnation* that is at stake in the idea of a persecuted truth that was suggested by Levinas reading Kierkegaard. There may be differences in the direction of movements of transcendence and thus a possible difference in how we are to understand the *impossibility* of incarnation (or a Man-God). I shall return to this formulation of an impossible incarnation in a passage to come.

To Levinas, the “ambiguity of transcendence”⁵⁰⁵ and the modesty of a persecuted truth make it hard to say what really happened in the event of incarnation. One may even wonder whether it took place at all, or whether it has already left before it even entered, as it is ambiguously suggested:

In order that the extirpation from the order not to be ipso facto a participation in the order, this extirpation [...] must precede its entrance into order. It requires the inscription of a retreat in the advance and, as it were, a past that was never present. The conceptual figure delineated by the ambiguity – or the enigma – of this anachronism in which an entrance follows the withdrawal [...] – is what we call trace.⁵⁰⁶

And so, this is what we – and a gathering of Catholic Intellectuals in the spring of 1968 in Paris - are left with: an ambiguous trace, as unruly as it is enigmatic. As if the piercing movement of transcendence had left nothing but this opening: a razor-sharp cut of abysmal depth that does not show even in the brightest

fut jamais présent – il laisse la trace de son impossible incarnation et de sa démesure, dans ma proximité avec le prochain où j’annonce, dans l’autonomie de la voix de la conscience, une responsabilité – qui n’a pas pu commencer en moi [...]. »

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁰⁶ Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 57.

daylight. In the course of a paper, Levinas has reversed the problem of the Man-God and the doctrine of incarnation into a ‘philosophical notion of transcendence’ by way of humility and some open questions concerning appearance and the said. In other words, Levinas has let “a trace replacing full presence,”⁵⁰⁷ whereby the *matter* of the incarnation, as issue as well as substance, has been dissolved (in the context of the paper). To Levinas, the idea of an incarnated, revealed, or manifested god is no longer an idea of god: “*Dieu ne prend jamais corps. Il ne devient jamais, à proprement parler, étant. [...] Cette idée est en effet essentielle dans la lecture de mon livre : De Dieu qui vient à l'idée.*”⁵⁰⁸ There is no wavering on this point throughout his writings:

An keinem Punkt formuliert Levinas das Nein so deutlich wie hier. Wenn auch das Thema ‘inkarniertes Subjekt’ immer mehr ins Zentrum seiner Aufmerksamkeit rückt, so läßt er doch keinen Zweifel daran, daß dies nicht im Sinn einer *Inkarnations-Christologie* verstanden werden darf.⁵⁰⁹

And so, we are back at the crossroads. From where traditions – and writers – part ways, but also *at* the point of which ideas can be interchanged; new ideas or ways of thinking that let sense ring with ambiguity, that let transcendence come about in a movement otherwise than the hide-and-seek games of secrecy, and otherwise than through modalities still concerned with probability:

The idea of persecuted truth allows us, *perhaps*, to put an *end to the game of disclosure*, in which *immanence always wins out over transcendence*; for, once being has been disclosed, even partially, even in Mystery, it becomes immanent.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ Gibbs 2010, 51.

⁵⁰⁸ Levinas 1995, 171, emphasis added. He also makes his view on this matter explicit in the essay “Aimer la Thora plus que Dieu”: “Dieu se voilant la face et reconnu comme présent et intime - est-il possible ? S'agit-il d'une construction métaphysique, d'un *salto mortale* paradoxal dans le goût de Kierkegaard ? Nous pensons que là se manifeste, au contraire, la physionomie particulière du judaïsme : le rapport entre Dieu et l'homme n'est pas une communion sentimentale dans l'amour d'un Dieu incarné, mais une relation entre esprits, par l'intermédiaire d'un enseignement, par la Thora. C'est précisément une parole, non incarnée de Dieu, qui assure un Dieu vivant parmi nous. La confiance en un Dieu qui n se manifeste par aucune autorité terrestre ne peut reposer que sur l'évidence intérieure et la valeur d'un enseignement.” Levinas 1963, 221.

⁵⁰⁹ Wohlmuth 1996, 158.

⁵¹⁰ Levinas 1996, 78, emphasis added. A twin formulation can be found in the paper “A Man-God”: “The idea of persecuted truth allows us, perhaps, to put an end to the game of unveiling, in

With this tentative proposal of another truth or another *way* of a truth, the concern of Levinas surfaces.

To Levinas, the problem of a Man-God is that the sense of transcendence would be swallowed up by immanence in a manifestation of (full) presence. An incarnated god is given over to appearance and gives itself to be seen: “apparition in full light” (CPP 70). Hereby the sense of transcendence is, to follow Levinas, compromised (CPP 62). To reiterate: ‘once being has been disclosed, it becomes immanent’. And once immanent, it is absorbed. Otherness, or transcendence is incorporated into the same, into the immanence that *always wins out over transcendence*.

The concern of Levinas is here dealing with what we might call (that is to say, what I suggest to term) the pulse of an imperious imperialism of immanence, ‘always winning out over transcendence’. The triumph of such an imperialistic immanence has made it more and more common in (so-called) modern time to come across confident statements like: ‘immanence is all there is’, or, ‘there is nothing but immanence’. In a study where the topic of *the all* has indeed been at issue, we might ask whether the imperialistic sort of immanence does not tend toward a totalizing force; even if such immanence cannot be said to lay claim to completeness since the revitalized versions of immanence operate in ever re-opening dynamics of relationality and re-workings. Would not a flexible and open-ended immanence in motion⁵¹¹ be on the course to new conquest when dealing with a disoriented and questionable transcendence that (no longer) can say where it came from or where to it is heading? Translated into the context of this study, we may ask whether the *in-* of the in-coming (of the word in question) is one of incorporation in the sense of subsumption; whether the coming about of this word is but a coming around – a sense *integrated* and *captured* in the outline of a story.

which immanence always wins out over transcendence; for, once being has been unveiled, even partially, even in mystery, it becomes immanent.” Levinas 1998c, 56.

⁵¹¹ “One does not break out of the bounds of [...] immanence. For it is not a bounded space but a relation to the boundless.” Keller 2007, 142.

The moment in time

Returning to my reading of the *Fragments*, we can now ask whether or not Climacus in his writing lets the word God be absorbed into being. We find in the *Poetical Venture* (of the *Fragments*) a movement of descent not unlike that of the man-gods of the pagan poems invoked by Levinas: a descent into the world of man, to engage fully with the affairs of men, and not just the matters of any man, because this movement is not only a descent with regard to the direction of a course, it is also a degradation in terms of status, a move of humiliation to become equal to the very lowliest (*Ringeste*), in accord with the ‘biblical theme of God’s humility’: “Therefore the god must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings – look, behold the man!”⁵¹² Does not a God that comes down to the earth and into existence, that is given over to the suffering of carnal hardship in the *form* of a servant – does not such a God also come into *presence*?

As a decisive clue for his many exercises (projects, ventures, and quirky caprices), Climacus is re-searching a moment in time (*Øieblikket i Tiden*), and since this is the moment in which the God is said to come into existence, the question of this passage – does the god of the *Fragments* come into presence – all turns on the *in* of this clue, that is, the moment *in* time.⁵¹³

However, the moment in time turned out to be a complex matter: a paradoxical relation of the eternal and the historical, or as Climacus formulates it: “this absurdity that the eternal is the historical.”⁵¹⁴ An absurdity that is easily overlooked from a point in history where the dogma of incarnation is old news. I have paid

⁵¹² PF 32/SKS 4, 239: “Men Tjenerens Skikkelse var ingen paatagen, derfor maa Guden lide Alt, taale Alt, forsøge Alt, hungre i Ørkenen, tørste i Qvaler, være forladt i Døden, absolut lig den Ringeste – see, hvilket Menneske [...]”

⁵¹³ PF 13/SKS 4, 222.

⁵¹⁴ PF 62/SKS 4, 264: “[D]ette Absurde [...], at det Evige er det Historiske.”

particular attention to the odd formulation ('that the eternal is the historical') because it is a re-formulation of the event. And just as the re-formulation made by *de silentio* in *Fear and Trembling* ('God tempted', and not 'God tested'), it opens the plot of a storyline, or, we might say: it tells another story. I found in the folds of the intricate formula a strange tension that is also at the heart of the paradox: 'the eternal (as otherwise than time) is (in present tense) the historical (as the passed that has come into existence). This strange composition has been a clue to my study. Affairs are rarely straightforward in the piece of Climacus, and this case is no exception. A very peculiar move of the *Fragments* is the suggestion that the god does not come into existence (*bliver til*) in the present tense; rather, the coming into existence (*Tilblivelse*) of the God is described as an in-coming that perpetually has come into existence (*er blevet til*), or as I have formulated this paradoxical in-coming elsewhere: the eternal has come into existence *as* the passed (*det Forbigangne*). One cannot be contemporary (in a simple sense) to such a moment:

The historical is that the god *has come into existence* (for the contemporary), that he has been one present (*et Nærværende*) by *having come into existence* (for one coming later). But precisely this is the contradiction. In the immediate sense, no one can become contemporary with this historical fact [...].⁵¹⁵

There can be no *co-presence* to a moment that is *in* time *as* the passed, a moment that is present or actual (*nærværende*) only as 'the passed that has come into existence'.⁵¹⁶ This moment is not present in a simple (*ligefrem*) sense, then, or, we may say: the sense of this moment is not one of (present) presence. Nor is this contradictory moment a past in a simple sense, which grammatically is reflected in the repeated use of the present perfect tense (*fornutid*) 'has been/has come', indicating, grammatically speaking, a verbal action that has taken place in a time period yet to be finished or where the precise time of the action is unknown or not important, or where the import or implications of the verbal action is continuing into the

⁵¹⁵ PF 87/SKS 4, 286: "Det Historiske er, at Guden er *bleven til* (for den Samtidige), at han har været et Nærværende derved, at han *er blevet til* (for den Senere). Men heri ligger netop Modsigelsen. Umiddelbart kan da Ingen blive samtidig med dette historiske Faktum."

⁵¹⁶ A literal reading might here say: 'Well, the moment *is* present, then. That's what is stated.' However, it would in that case have failed to notice the (elliptical) movement *in* the sentence that unsettles the presence of that moment.

present. Close and yet at a distance, the sense of the moment is a *Nærværende* that 'has been' (*past participle*) by way of 'having come into existence' (*Tilblivelse*). Grammatical forms pointing towards a plot that takes place in temporal terms.

There is a doubled temporal defiance to the orders of presence and presentation in the paradoxical moment of the eternal and the historical. First, a defiance due to the complexity of the historical: the passed that comes as the perpetually passed and the duplicitous (*svigagtige*) moment of coming into existence (*Tilblivelse*) that cannot be retrieved, a transitional point that we can never get hold of. As the historical, as the passed and the coming, the paradoxical moment is never simply present, but is *in* the presence without *being* present in any immediate sense. A shy humility, Levinas might say, that does not even dare to present itself, but *also*, I suggest, an interference that cannot bear to keep away from coming. An entre-ference, to invoke its etymological root, or, perhaps, an entré-ference, a non-in-difference of sorts. Secondly, a defiance due to the unruly eternal: it is not so that an idea of the eternal coming into time is unsettling (only) because of the incertitude that comes with a *Tilblivelse*, that would apply for any transition of *Tilblivelse*. Rather, the idea of the eternal coming into time is a tremendous self-contradiction (*Selv-Modsigelse*) because the eternal *by definition* is other than time. The eternal is not on another end of the spectrum of the temporal, it is otherwise than the temporal, or, one might say, it is outside of time. As such, the eternal does not regard the temporal: "[F]or all knowledge is either knowledge of the eternal, which excludes the temporal and the historical as inconsequential, or it is purely historical knowledge [...]."⁵¹⁷ And yet, in the moment, the eternal, disorderly unsettling the definition of the eternal, comes into time, whereby the eternal becomes of decisive concern – in time. Which is also to suggest that the (notion of the) eternal has significance only in this coming into time.

The curious suggestion of the *Fragments* seems to be that the moment (*Øieblikket*) is of decisive significance also to the eternal (and thereby to the peculiar word in question of this study) that came into existence (*blev til*) in this

⁵¹⁷ PF 62/SKS 4, 263-264: "[T]hi al Erkjenden er enten Erkjenden af det Evige, der lader det Timelige og det Historiske være udelukket som det Lige gyldige, eller det er den reent historiske Erkjenden [...]."

very moment.⁵¹⁸ The sense (and non-sense) of the eternal would then, precisely, not be outside of time; rather, its significance would somehow open *only* in time, *in* existence and *in* this world. The eternal would *concern* time only in this (absurd) *in-coming*.

So, to answer the question, does the god of the *Fragments* come into presence? – we might say that the god *does* come into presence, but not *as* presence (in an immediate sense), not in the present tense. The moment *in* time is not *absorbed* by time, rather, it comes into time as a disturbance of the order of presentation and the peace of the mind.

Some additional remarks can now be made with regard to the word in question of this study. As a P.S. to the reading of *Fear and Trembling* (Part one), I have in this second part found the word God to come about in a movement of *in-coming* – into time. Whereas the reading of Part one pointed towards a *relational intrigue*, I will now (with the moment-in-time) add that that the sense of the word in question also comes about in a *temporal plot*. This does far from simplify or resolve matters. Indeed, I have in Part two made an effort to call attention to how an intricate plot of the *Fragments* is overlooked when terms such as ‘the historical’ and ‘the paradox’ are understood in a simple or straightforward (*ligefrem*) sense, taken as coherent or undemanding notions.

Taking up a formulation of Part one, we could once again say that the in-coming of the word God ‘takes place without taking up place’. As the (perpetually) passed, the sense of this word comes into existence *as* the passed, and the odd suggestion here is thus that the moment in time in the very in-coming is (the) *passed*. The moment in time is, then, indeed – as the Thought-Project of Climacus put forward – a *point of departure*, only this is a quite ambiguous point: the moment in time is a point of departure in the sense of a starting point for the eternal that in

⁵¹⁸ PF 13: ”If the situation is to be different, then the moment in time must have such decisive significance that for no moment will I be able to forget it, neither in time nor in eternity, because the eternal, previously nonexistent, came into existence [*blev til*] in that moment.”/SKS 4, 222: ”Skal det nu forholde sig anderledes, da maa Øieblikket i Tiden have afgjørende Betydning, saaledes at jeg intet Øieblik hverken i Tid eller Evighed vil kunne glemme det, fordi det Evige, som for ikke var, blev til i dette Øieblik.”

this motion comes into existence (*bliver til*), and yet, since this coming into existence is a motion of the passed (*det Forbigangne*), the moment in time is also in this sense a point of *departure*. However, as emphasized in this study, the passed (*det Forbigangne*) is here not understood as a departure in the sense of withdrawing or of taking leave, but rather as a sense that *passes*; an inordinate and unruly sense that might also be said to *surpass*. Way too much and barely happening, as I put it elsewhere.

And moreover, to keep the complexity of the moment at play, the point of coming into existence (as a sort of starting point) is a *point* that it turned out to be quite tricky to get a hold on since the motion of *Tilblivelse* had a mischievous illusiveness (*Svigagtighed*) to it. The moment in time, a movement more than a point, then, is never simply *there*, it is not *simply* present, but is at every moment somewhat *out of place*, or somewhat *out of tune*, as this study has phrased it elsewhere.

The *incongruity* of terms ('out of place and out of tune') is a distinctive thematic thread of this study; it was taken up in Part one in the search for ways of signifying otherwise than within correlative structures (in the section 'Relations otherwise than oppositional schemes') and in the suggestions of a possible sense of a peculiar word, in-ordinate and impossible: out of tune, out of line, out of place (in the section 'A word hard to track down'). What is at stake here (concerning incongruity) is the notion(s) of contradiction, or the notion of a paradox. I pointed in Part one towards a paradoxical relation that does not come about in the oscillation between dialectical terms. The suggestion was that of an *oxymoronic* relation (in the section 'An oxymoronic relation – a flash of madness') as well as that of a *parataxis* (in the section 'The impossible paradox and the ambiguous openness of a word'), a sort of a disjointed association not unlike the fragmentation of pieces, brought up in the prologue of this part.

In Part two (a supplementing P.S. to the main part), the thematic thread of incongruity of terms has been no less significant. We were also in the *Fragments* met with a paradox, namely in the absurdity of a formulation such as: the eternal is the historical. A line that does not make sense. A formula so unreasonable that its preposterousness resounds in the offense (*Forargelsen*) of a mishearing

understanding (*Forstanden*).⁵¹⁹ The moment in time (at its outmost complex) is a happening so out of line that it signals as a question by way of its absurdity. It is not posed as a problem to be solved by reason (*Forstanden*), but comes as a call for decision precisely because the incongruity of its terms (that is, ‘the historical’ and ‘the passed’) calls the happening (itself) into question. In a way, the latter sentence sums up my reading of the *Fragments* and what I have called a question of faith or an address of impossibility, and although I after passages of exploration of that point still seem unable to unfold my suggestion in a formulation of straightforward clearness and lucidity, I do hope that the point of it is not lost after all.

With the moment in time, then, the paradoxical relation is no less insistent and no less unruly than that of the paradox of *Fear and Trembling*. And so, whereas Levinas with his formulation from *Otherwise than Being*⁵²⁰ (as quoted in the section ‘At the crossroads’) of an ‘impossible incarnation’ indicates the impossibility of such an event, that is to say, an ‘impossible’ in the sense of *non-possible*, my suggestion is that the moment in time, as a movement of in-coming, is impossible in the ambiguous sense of an *in-possible*.

The suggestion of an *in-possible* (put forward in Part one) expresses yet another oxymoronic relation, namely that of a ‘possible’ (*det Mulige*) that comes about *in* the impossible, and – *as* the possible – remains impossible. To this study, the moment (*Oieblikket*) is *in* time *as* an in-possible, as the impossible affair of coming into existence without coming into presence, as the impossible formula that the eternal is the historical. It is to come into time as the sort of ambiguous openness that we found in ‘the possible’ (*det Mulige*) of *The Concept of Anxiety*: an openness that *is* not *quite* there, and yet, is not *not* there *at all* (‘A plot otherwise than sacrifice’). Put otherwise, my suggestion is that the moment – as the impossible paradox of a god coming into existence – is *in* time as the ambiguous openness of a possible (*det Mulige*), which is also to suggest that the paradoxical moment is an openness in time.

⁵¹⁹ PF 49ff, ‘Offense at the Paradox (An Acoustical Illusion)/SKS 4, 253ff, ‘Forargelsen paa Paradoxet (Et akustisk Bedrag)’.

⁵²⁰ OB 161/*Autrement* 252.

Perhaps the fullness of time (*Tidens Fylde*), referred to by Climacus in relation to the moment (PF 18/SKS 4, 226), is not to be heard as a completeness of time, as if time – with the coming of this moment – had come to its conclusion? Perhaps we could hear in the phrase of ‘the fullness of time’ a resonance of a disruptive possible (*det Mulige*), of what *is* not *quite* there, and yet, is not *not* there *at all*? As if the fullness of time was a moment filled with the promise of the possible, or, as if the moment, filled with the *openness* of the possible, was (also) an opening *of* time. A moment filled with the ambiguous openness of the possible would not be a moment stuffed with possibilities (*Muligheder*) from which one could pick and choose. To this reading, the possible (in the sense of an *in-possible*) does not solidify into particular possibilities, as if a range of possibilities was to be presented in front of you. You can (indeed) have certain possibilities, but you cannot *have* – own or control – the possible (*det Mulige*).

The fullness of time would in this way of a reading be a moment filled with the openness of an *in-possible* also in the wondrous sense that rings in the formulation of *de silentio*: that for God all things are possible (FT 46/SKS 4, 141). A line that in *Fear and Trembling* can be said – precisely and only – by virtue of the absurd.⁵²¹

What might we call such an in-coming of a god that comes into existence as the passed, such an in-coming that pierces immanence without taken up a place within it, to borrow an expression from Levinas, such an in-coming that comes about in a moment? Why not: a passing.

⁵²¹ FT 46-47: “But then the marvel happens; he makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get – that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible. The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. [...] Consequently, he acknowledges the impossibility, and in the very same moment believes the absurd, for if he wants to imagine that he has faith without passionately acknowledging the impossibility with his whole heart and soul, he is deceiving himself [...].”/SKS 4, 141: “[M]en da skeer Vidunderet, han gjør endnu en Bevægelse, forunderligere end Alt, thi han siger: jeg troer dog, at jeg faaer hende, i Kraft nemlig af det Absurde, i Kraft af, at for Gud er Alting muligt. Det Absurde hører ikke til de Differentser, der ligge indenfor Forstandens eget Omfang. Det er ikke identisk med det Usandsynlige, det Uventede, det Uformodede. [...] Han erkjender altsaa Umuligheden og i samme Øieblik troer han det Absurde; thi vil han uden med al sin Sjæls Lidenskab og af sit Ganske Hjerter at erkjende Umuligheden, indbilde sig at have Troen, da bedrager han sig selv [...].”

In a wink

This study has found the word God to come about as a movement of in-coming in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*. A movement of taking-place-without-taking-up-place, a blinking of sense that comes from who-knows-where, in a flash of madness, hardly there and way too much. An in-coming that takes place (*se passe*, as Levinas would write in the language he chose to be his) in a passing, in the wink of an eye (*et Oie-blik*, as Johannes de silentio and Johannes Climacus write in the spelling of their time). The link between the word(s) of the god(s) and the blink of the eye is an age-old connection, we are reminded by de Vries: “Hölderlin says that this figure [the signal and gesture of the *Winkel*] has from early on (*Von Alters her*) been the language of the Gods (*die Sprache der Götter*).”⁵²² The wink, perhaps a philosopheme,⁵²³ has thus travelled through language, passing in writings about the word God,⁵²⁴ from ‘early on’, and, still in movement, it (the wink as a travelling point) has also found its way into works of more recent date, notably, as his works are indeed noteworthy, in the writings of Nancy⁵²⁵ where the word God is written with a certain wink whenever the text passes by it, and, perhaps, in this passing, lets it go while letting a sense otherwise come to pass.

In his essay, ‘On a Divine Wink’,⁵²⁶ Nancy cleverly develops his bid on the sense of a *Wink*. With several nods to and winks at other discussions and thinkers and themes that are simultaneously central and peripheral to his inquiry, Nancy takes us (although we in other ways remain unguided) through a rich, dense, and yet playful text that lets the complexity of a *Wink* glint. The investigation sets about in close conversation with Derrida and Heidegger (mentioned in the order they appear in the text), yet, as I read it, a distinctive-though-not-necessarily-exclusive Nancean suggestion emerges during the course of the text. The *Wink* is perceptively associated with a *passing* understood both in 1) a tending-towards-the-

⁵²² de Vries 2012, 112.

⁵²³ Ward 2009, 175.

⁵²⁴ Also in ‘the last god’ (“Der letzte Gott”), Heidegger 1994, 409.

⁵²⁵ His essay, “On a Divine Wink,” precisely addresses the link between the figures of the wink and of passing. Nancy 2008.

⁵²⁶ Nancy, ‘On a Divine Wink’, 2008, pp. 104-120. I will in this section refer to the mentioned text, and not to a work or a way of thinking *on the whole*.

temporal sense, that is, as the passing in the blink of an eye (*clignement*), and 2) a tending-towards-the-spatial sense, that is in the ambiguous *passage du pas* (passing of the step), in the passing of a god that is ‘identical with his retreat’,⁵²⁷ and in the passing as spacing – the opening *entre deux*. In reference to Derrida and ‘the structure of *différance*’, Nancy accentuates what we might call the eclipse of a passing: “the absenting of presence at the heart of its present and its presentation.”⁵²⁸ There is, in other words, no presence present in this passing that never arrives. The *Wink winkt*, Nancy notes in a reference to Heidegger’s term *Ereignis*, adding that: “it consists, perhaps, in nothing but a wink.”⁵²⁹ And so, on the second last page of the essay, Nancy writes: “Such is the divine truth of the *Wink*: it stems from the fact that there is no wink of god, but that god *is* the wink.”⁵³⁰ There is nothing but this passing, we might say. There is but the gesture or the signalling of a passing, but there is no one who makes it. To push the reading of the essay a bit, I will tentatively suggest that the passing of ‘On a Divine Wink’ is (also) a sort of *out*-passing, going nowhere (else), but rather comes to pass and passes by in the very out-passing:

That is the divine trait or gesture: God is exceeded in his own passage. In fact, he comes there and leaves from there; he is the passing of it. God exceeded is not the supreme individual being, put to death. It is god who succeeds God, as Jabès wrote in another passage quoted by Derrida. But it is the succession that is divine. It is the passing [...].⁵³¹

There is no one of this passing. There *is* perhaps not even passing, at once excess of differing and lack of presence. With such a passing, where the exceeding is also

⁵²⁷ ‘On a Divine Wink’, 120: “*The passing of the god is identical with his retreat.*”

⁵²⁸ ‘On a Divine Wink’, 110: “At issue here are structure and movement; movement – the wink – as the structure of *différance*, whose motif or motivation is in the process of moving Derrida toward what always motivated him: the absenting of presence at the heart of its present and its presentation, and, correlatively, the spreading open of the sign at the heart of its relation to itself and then the hollowing out of a non-signifying passage at the heart or *joint* of the sign. The wink gives us the structure of *différance*, and more than the structure, it gives us its excess or lack of signification (it is ‘neither a word nor a concept,’ as Derrida will later say), and makes its eclipse shine forth.”

⁵²⁹ ‘On a Divine Wink’, 114.

⁵³⁰ ‘On a Divine Wink’, 119. And might we not in this sentence glimpse a wink, so that the terms ‘divine’, ‘truth’, and ‘god’ are all void of the present presence that was also absenting in the short article *Entre deux*?

⁵³¹ ‘On a Divine Wink’, 119.

and already a departure and absenting, there can be “no assignment of persons or things,”⁵³² we are told, yet, on this point, my study departs from the essay with which it shares so many terms: the word god/God, passing, wink, and an absence of present presence. To borrow an expression from the essay I am about to leave (but not to renounce), this study is “both close and far from” the gestures of such passing. A remark on how far (and yet close) I am from the wink of Nancy will be made in a section to come.

In this study, the *wink* has twinkled in the contradiction of voices heard or not heard, in the risk of *Tilblivelse* and promises, in the madness of love and absurdity, in gracious gestures of politesse, and in the unresolvable tensions of paradoxes: oxymoronic relations of what I have called the *in-possible*. But most of all, it has sparkled in two decisive moments in two different works, different and yet interrelated, but both of which give way to a *Vorbeigang* of an *Augenblick*.⁵³³

To my study, the word God has been deeply involved with these passing moments or moments of passing in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*. I have found the sense of that word to open (though not in the sense of being unfolded) in the very movements that pass in the wink of an eye. A movement otherwise than a withdrawal, and yet a movement that takes place without taking up place. In my readings, the moment has turned out to be, to speak with Climacus, the *point of departure* for the passing of (the word) God, that is, as a point of in-coming and taking leave, a starting point and a point for departures in the same moment, in a wink, so to speak. An openness more than a point, if you like, and perhaps in the outline of a cut, as the wound left by a movement that ‘pierces immanence without taking a place in it’, to speak with Levinas reading Kierkegaard.

The in-coming of the (word) God has, also in my reading, been a *Vorbeigang* in an *Augenblick*, that is, as the paradoxical movement of a god that comes into presence as the perpetually passed (*Forbigangne*), as a passing in a moment. Or, as we might say: in a wink. It is gone in the same moment in which it came about, it

⁵³² ‘On a Divine Wink’, 116.

⁵³³ Nancy 2008, 111.

is gone (or passed) in that same moment, which is also to say that in the moment it came about – it was gone. It comes as the passed, I have suggested in this study, and, perhaps, it was already gone?

An in-coming that passes in a moment, that is gone in the very moment it came, is a wink so fleeting that we might ask if anything happened at all.

A voice was heard coming from who-knows-where, and Abraham took off with his son and a knife. But did anyone speak? A god came into existence and into time, and crowds gathered to see him. But was anything revealed?

“A God was revealed on a mountain or in a burning bush, or was attested to in Scriptures. And what if it were a storm! And what if the Scriptures came to us from dreamers!”⁵³⁴ – as Levinas writes, calling to mind that a (word such as) God that comes about in the ambiguity of a wink does not follow orders (like those of logic, presence, and presentation), does not go along with the hide-and-seek games of secrecy and appearance, and does not come with any guarantees: “The Kierkegaardian God is not simply a bearer of certain attributes of humility; he is a way of truth which this time is not determined by a phenomenon, by the present and contemporaneousness, and is not measured by certainty.”⁵³⁵

Rumours have it

Did anyone call? Was anything revealed? Concerned questions that emerge in my readings of *Fear and Trembling* and *The Fragments*. Questions that opened *in* the texts, questions that opened the texts, and questions that this study found no *simple* answers to. All we are offered is a movement or a question of faith (here in the words of Climacus):

Even if the contemporary generation had left nothing behind except these words, ‘We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the

⁵³⁴ Levinas 1998, 66.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 67.

humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died' – this is more than enough.⁵³⁶

This “little announcement” is what the contemporary generation could give to the later generations, Climacus writes; indeed, it would be ‘more than enough’, as all anyone could say is: ‘I believe it’ which is “a very disquieting *aber* (but),”⁵³⁷ as it comes with no validity or authority. Not much to ground a religion on, one could say, and worried people has indeed said so:

Climacus’ claim that [...] it is ”more than enough” for a potential believer that there be the brief report that some people in history have ”believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died” (PF, 104) has been criticized for implying that there need not have been a Jesus Christ, but only the story of a Jesus Christ.⁵³⁸

‘But surely that cannot be what is meant’, someone troubled might object, because surely it must be said that the god was *in fact* present – *for sure*. And yet, Climacus writes: All we need is this story. And the *Fragments* of our reading whispers: All we have (all we are given) is this story. When the historical fact is given only as 1) the passed, and 2) as the unreliable and unreachable moment of *Tilblivelse*, all we have is the story about it, all we have is the rumours of it, as Catherine Keller playfully has put it.⁵³⁹ Or, in other words, repeating those of Nancy, we may say that all we are left with is “what one can say about it.”⁵⁴⁰ When the god comes into time as a defiance to simple presence, as the passed (*det Forbigangne*) and as the coming (*det Tilkommende*), must we not say, following Nancy,⁵⁴¹ that no story can be told *as* the truth for “no presence will be able to attest it”? We are left with a story given (only) in the ambiguous gesture of a *perhaps*. No affirmations. No guarantees. A question, really.

⁵³⁶ PF 104/SKS 4, 300: ”Selv om den samtidige Generation ikke havde efterladt Andet end disse Ord: ’vi have troet at Gud en Anno det og det har viist sig i en Tjeners ringe Skikkelse, har levet og lært iblandt os, og er derpaa død’ – det er mere end nok.”

⁵³⁷ PF 104/SKS 4, 301: ”[T]hi det Ord: jeg troer det [...] er et meget betænkeligt aber.”

⁵³⁸ Ferreira 2009, 77.

⁵³⁹ Keller 2007.

⁵⁴⁰ “Between story and truth,” Nancy 2000, 4.

⁵⁴¹ That is, in terms of formulations, but not necessarily in terms of sense. Whereas Nancy (in the cited essay) is writing forth a sense of spacing, this study is trailing sense vibrating in ambiguity. Sense that may be related yet not quite identical.

This is not to state that nothing happened, nor is it to say that we *cannot* know (whether anything happened), it is to suggest that is no longer a question of knowledge.

Someone winked at me, but was it at me, and was it even a wink, or just a blink of the eye? Someone told me to slaughter my son, but was a voice heard at all?

A strange and a rather audacious move of Climacus in the *Fragments* is the subtle way in which he seems to set apart the event of a god coming into time (*Guden i Tiden*) from a discourse on (the) truth (*Kan Sandheden læres?*). Well into the *Fragments*, in chapter IV to be more precise, Climacus asks: “How, then, does the learner (*den Lærende*) become a believer (*Troende*) or a follower?” (PF 64/SKS 4, 265)

Following this question, a shift of the plot of sorts, the *Fragments* seems less interested in the issue of truth, what we might call the Socratic question or the *Thought-Project* of Climacus, and more concerned with the paradoxical moment in relation to which he, Climacus – in the dense *Interlude* at the heart of the *Fragments* – writes: “It is not a question here of the truth of it but of assenting to the God’s having come into existence” (PF 87/SKS 4, 286). It is here – with the in-coming of (the word) God – not at question of the truth of it; it is here not a question of the truth in a certain sense, or, it is here not a question of a *certain* truth.

This brings us back (and in another way: forth) to the prologue of Part two and a quotation to which a return was indeed promised. The quotation, from an essay of Levinas titled ‘Enigma and Phenomenon’ (*Enigma et phénomène*) reads (a bit shortened):

Apart from the salvation drama whose play in existence Kierkegaard, a Christian thinker, fixed and described, his properly philosophical work seems to us to lie in the formal idea of a truth persecuted in the name of a universally evident truth [...]. The God ‘remaining with the contrite and humble’ [...] is a node of a plot separate from the adventure of being which occurs in

phenomena and in immanence, a new modality which is expressed by that ‘if one likes’ and that ‘perhaps’ [...].⁵⁴²

That which Kierkegaard brings along to philosophy, as regarded by Levinas, is most significantly the suggestion of a ‘persecuted truth’, what Levinas in the above quotation calls Kierkegaard’s ‘properly philosophical work’, and what he (Levinas) in *Proper Names* (in the second of two essays on Kierkegaard) also designates as ‘the new philosophical idea contributed by Kierkegaard’.⁵⁴³ A persecuted truth is “linked to its humility,”⁵⁴⁴ as mentioned earlier in this study (in the section ‘At the crossroads’): “Transcendent truth manifests itself as if it did not dare say its name ... as if it did not come from elsewhere.”⁵⁴⁵

A persecuted truth is not disclosed in its manifestation; it is not brought into light and it is not made evident. Its extreme humility does not allow it to show itself, at least not in any unequivocal way, and in this way (also of a wink), it does, perhaps, allow us “to put an end to the game of disclosure”⁵⁴⁶ and unveiling.

Levinas opposes the idea of a persecuted truth to idea of a truth triumphant, ‘rational or universal’,⁵⁴⁷ a truth that finds itself proven or beyond doubt. Truth triumphant would be the kind of truth that finds itself founded on reason or based on evidence; the kind of truth that might cause some people to advance in life “in triumph,” “singing and ringing,” (PF 108/SKS 4, 303-304) as it is mockingly depicted in the *Fragments*. This distinction made by Levinas between a persecuted truth and a truth triumphant is, to this study, also the difference between a humble truth and what I will call a *certain* truth, that is, a truth certain of itself, a self-assured truth.

With regard to the expressions of the new modality suggested by Levinas reading Kierkegaard, namely a ‘perhaps and ‘if one likes’,⁵⁴⁸ I suggest that these courteous gestures should be heard not solely as gracious politesse but also as the humble recognition of someone who faces the dire groundlessness of existence,

⁵⁴² Levinas 1998, 67/Levinas 1982, 209.

⁵⁴³ Levinas, “A Propos of ‘Kierkegaard vivant,’” in *Proper Names*, 78.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ “A Propos of ‘Kierkegaard vivant,’” in *Proper Names* 1996, 78.

⁵⁴⁶ Levinas, 1996, 78./*ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ ‘Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics,’ in *Proper Names* 1996, 67.

⁵⁴⁸ Levinas 1998, 67/Levinas 1982, 209.

someone who says: I do not speak (or answer) in the name of truth (triumphant), I do not stand on solid grounds, my life is not build on certainty and valid convictions, but hinges on a paradox. It is to testify to the openness in which every answer is given.

A risk and a responsibility would then come with such gestures. To acknowledge the groundlessness of existence would also be to take upon oneself the ambiguous openness that is (also) addressed in ‘that perhaps’. The gesture of a perhaps would, then, not only be the re-opening of every statement said; it would be to take up the responsibility for the statement as well as the re-opening, and for the lack of authorization to take on that responsibility.

It is with the *weight* of responsibility undertaken in an answer that a possible difference opens between this study and the essay of Nancy titled ‘On a Divine Wink’ which this study finds itself both close to and yet far from. I do not suggest that no sense of responsibility can be found in that essay. Far from it. I only wish to play up a turn of phrase, and in so doing, to accentuate a point already put forward in this study in relation to a *gravity* of responsibility.

“There is no assignment of persons or things,” Nancy wrote in his exploration of the passing of a wink,⁵⁴⁹ and this study is *almost* in tune with that statement. The in-coming of the word God does not (either) in this study bring along a task to be fulfilled or a duty to be accomplished. There is, in this way, no assignment. However, as the in-coming of (the word) God turned out to be *involved* in a plot or an intrigue of movements, an undertaking has indeed been suggested: a *tremendous* undertaking even, tremendous precisely *because of* the incertitude of a call that may or may not have been heard, and the incertitude of a moment of *Tilblivelse* that can never be verified or re-called. The undertaking of answering says: ‘I do not stand on solid grounds, *and yet*, I will make a stand for this, I will take a stand against that, and I will stand by you – and I will take on responsibility for the lack of grounds, calls, and reasons for any of those stands.’ There is no assignment of a call but there is an undertaking in answering (for answering).

⁵⁴⁹ ‘On a Divine Wink’, in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, 2008, 116.

Again, this is not to say that there is no responsibility, no relating, or no involvement, to be found in the writing of Nancy,⁵⁵⁰ as it happens, that might be all there is (without this all to ever form a totality): “For there is relation, there is only that. Its terms matter fairly little [...] – and only the relation that is divided/shared, in both senses of the word *partage*, between all the world’s existents, matters.”⁵⁵¹ There is a sharing of the world in the opening of a world. One might even say that the world is opened by (or is made up of) this very sharing, a sharing that in a way is nothing but this sharing between a heterogeneous plurality of relations. While this relationality, or this way of relating, could also be said to be a plot of involved movements (not unlike the intrigue of this study), there might be a difference of relating nevertheless, at least one of accentuation, and, perhaps, one of tones. The possible difference is one between 1) *sharing* (as well as caring), and 2) *bearing*. The *gravity* of answering is, in this study, also the weight, anxiety, and affliction of holding the life of the other(s) in my hands, to borrow (and re-formulate) a well-known formula from another Dane, namely Løgstrup.⁵⁵² To answer to and for the life of the other(s) is here not merely to be (structurally) *with* the others (sharing a world), it is to *bear* the life of the other(s), a life that is lived and (in more than one sense) expired in or as a body; the flesh and bone and bodily fluids and tissues that were to be stabbed in the sacrifice of a son. To bear the other is responsibility understood also as a *burden*, as an undertaking that weigh on me, that makes demands on me, and that I – in answering for answering – also take upon me as a task of sorts. Such responsibility might sound rather burdensome, on the verge of being oppressive, but who in the world, yes, *this* world of mortal existence and bodies

⁵⁵⁰ Here in the essays, ‘On a Divine Wink’ from *Dis-Enclosure* (2008), and ‘Compliments, Supplements, Fragments’ from *Adoration* (2012).

⁵⁵¹ Nancy 2012, 87. And later: “The living individual is never simply the individual *stricto sensu*, closed off in his independence. He is also – ‘I’ am, in each moment – made up of all the relations of which I am part, from my sensations to my thought, passing through my friendships, my readings, and so on, my entire imagery and all that makes ‘sense,’” 90.

⁵⁵² Løgstrup, 1997, 44: “The point of the unspoken demand, however, is that everything which an individual has opportunity to do and say in his relation to the other person is to be done or said not for his or her sake but for the sake of him or her whose life is in his hand.”/Løgstrup 1962, 56: ”Den udtalte fordring går [...] ud på, at alt hvad det indbyrdes forhold giver anledning til, [...] skal siges og gøres ikke for den enkeltes egen, men for den andens skyld, hvis liv er i den enkeltes hånd.”

and soil,⁵⁵³ who in the world has ever known of a love (or a life) that did not also bring along suffering and surrender? Who in the world has known of a love that did not demand (unreasonable) sacrifices? Who in the world has known of a love that did not carry with it some kind of duties?

In this study, the responsibility of answering has been linked up with movements of *becoming* (becoming a father of faith and becoming a follower), movements that in both parts of the study called for or involved a leap of faith. A plunge that I have suggested to be a *conscious* one, made with eyes wide open, facing the preposterousness and the absurdity of it. As this plunge is taken without reasons or grounds, it may seem a quite reckless or irresponsible motion, and yet, it has (in this study) been put forward as a *movement of responsibility*. An awake and clear-eyed movement, and, as it happens, a mad one as well. You must, in an odd way distinctive of both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*, be out of your mind and yet well aware of the absurdity to take that plunge.

Trans-*in*-scendence

Here, where this study comes to its close, or where it closes in on a conclusion of sorts, I wish to suggest a movement other than that of passing. Whereas passing indicates a transient, almost casual passage, my hope is to point to a movement that more distinctively reflects the ambiguity and affect (shattering/piercing) of the *in-coming* of the word that I have trailed in the readings of *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*.

My suggestion, tentative and unsettled, is that the sense of the trailed word (God) comes about in a movement of trans-*in*-scendence insofar as this suggestion is heard with all the equivocality that it brings along.

⁵⁵³ And yes, a worried reader may here include animals and stones, dead and/or living, of all or non-specified gender, race, species.

This suggestion is otherwise than but not in opposition to the movements of vertical orientation formulated by Jean Wahl: *transascendence* and *transdescendence*.⁵⁵⁴ As a supplement to these routes, the movement of trans-*in*-scendence gets its sense from the additional syllable: the *in*-.⁵⁵⁵ A prefix moved to the heart of a word, and signalling by way of equivocality: not, without, in, toward, within. An *in*- that, to my study, is a persistent questioning of its own term, unsettling its own movement: not-in? toward-within? not-toward? without-within? within-without? *The in*- twinkles as an ambiguous wink in the midst of a word. This ambiguity of the *in*- resounds in another suggestion of this study, namely: the in-coming as an entering without entering.

I also wish to suggest that a movement of trans-*in*-scendence signals otherwise than movements of withdrawal. As if trans-*in*-scendence by its very in-coming signified an interest a sort, a non-indifference. As if it came into time or into existence out of curiosity or concern, or, as the poetical venture of Climacus suggests: out of love. A regard that in its lightest form could be said to be nothing but a salut, 'a sign made in passing: "the passage of sense in its aerial sense of breath, of palpable, sensual light contact,"⁵⁵⁶ or it could be the traumatic blow to the life of a man and his family. We can never know if such a passage of sense was only a gust of wind. We can only ever answer to such a possible passing *as if* a call was heard, and as if it concerned me.

⁵⁵⁴ Referring here to Wahl 1944, 37. However: "Wahl had introduced both terms, "transascendence" and "transdescendence," in 1937 in "Subjectivity and Transcendence" to express a hierarchy within the movement of transcendence toward immanence: "perhaps the greatest transcendence, that is to say, falling back into immanence." Bernasconi 2005, 109. It can be asked whether Wahl does not unsettles rather than establishes a hierarchy by way of his 'grande transcendence' "back into immanence" which, to this study, can be understood as an opening of immanence as well as transcendence: "Il ya un mouvement de transcendance dirigé vers l'immanence; lorsque la transcendance se transcende elle-même. Peut-être la plus grande transcendance est-elle celle qui consiste à transcender la transcendance, c'est-à-dire: a retomber dans l'immanence." Wahl 1944, 38. However, this study might (furthermore) ask whether this movement is not another operation of opening whereby immanence once again 'wins over transcendence'. Llewelyn, for one, refers to this "seconde immanence" as: "Wahl's transcendent immanence," and translates the 'grande transcendence' as a "relapsing into immanence." Llewelyn 2009, 149.

⁵⁵⁵ A prefix that would "signify both the *non* and the *within*." Levinas 1996b, 136.

⁵⁵⁶ Nancy, Adoration, 80.

In the *Fear and Trembling*, I find the movement of trans-*in*-scendence in the entering of (the word) God into the story, a blinking flash of non-sense that came from *who-knows-where*, an appalling demand, ex-orbitant and in-ordinate, way too much, and yet, barely an event.

In the *Fragments*, I find the movement of trans-*in*-scendence in the coming into existence of the god, in a paradoxical moment, an absurdity, a moment in time, and yet never quite there, not at any time a (full) presence.

With the suggestion of trans-*in*-scendence, I also wish to outline a possible difference between interruption and irruption. Whereas the movement of interruption can be understood as discontinuation and disruption *within* a structure or a network, that is, as an *inter*-ruption, the movement of irruption can be understood as a sudden entering or a breaking into (Latin: *in* + *rumpere*). I find both of these two movements to pulsate in trans-*in*-scendence, only, the equivocality of the *in*- hinders any motion to become entirely occupied or absorbed in a *within*. The irruptive movement breaks up the *within*, we might say.

This study has found the irruptive pulse in the in-coming movement as a shattering and as piercing. Striking movements that affect by their entrance. In the readings of this study, the sense of (the word) God did not roam the narratives as a theme to be unfolded; it all came down to that mad and decisive moment where the (word) God breaks into the story (*Fear and Trembling*) or into time (*Fragments*). As if it came from elsewhere, as if it came from who-knows-where, or, as if it came from no-where. A strange wager of my suggestion is that trans-*in*-scendence is not absorbed in a *within*, yet, nor is the sense of this movement to be found in an *outer* space, another world, or an external sphere. If anything (should be said to shed some light on this ambiguity), we could, perhaps, say that trans-*in*-scendence, *by way of* its in-coming, signals *as* exteriority *in* time, *in* a story, *in* the world.

I have found such a sense of (equivocal) exteriority to twinkle defiantly in the sense of the word God: a sense that is in a story, in time, in language, yet, defiantly, as out of line, out of tune, out of place. I have suggested the sense of this word to signal as ambiguous openness in the writings read in this study: a sense that one

cannot get a hold of or define (conclusively), not because it withdraws into a cloud of unknowability, nor because it is veiled, secret, or ineffable, but because it is never *quite* there, and because it is never quite *there*. Out of tune, out of line, out of place, and in this way out of reach. It is there as if it were not there, Levinas suggested ‘apropos of Kierkegaard’,⁵⁵⁷ and we could say, not less ambiguously, that it is there and it is not there. An ambiguity that my study bears witness to, having trailed this sense throughout readings without ever getting a firm hold on it. In a study where the word in question has been pronounced only reluctantly. As if the sense of this word does not present itself courtly when it comes into articulation, even if the word is there, in the writing, circulating in our language. A word that, to my reading, does not resist our grasp due to self-effacing humility or ineffable supremacy, but by way of defiant ambiguity, by virtue of an unruly absurdity. A peculiar word that winks at us in the pseudonymous writings I have explored. God, if you like.

Summary – part two

Part two of the study found the word God to come about in the writing of the *Fragments*:

- as a coming into time
- as a historical point of departure
- as a decisive moment
- as a question by way of absurdity
- as an in-possible paradox
- in an intrigue of involved movements

Whereas Part one of the study trailed movements (also of a story), the reading of Part two revolved around a moment. Whereas Part one of the study made its

⁵⁵⁷ Levinas 1996, 78.

journey through shifts and turns, the reading of Part two moved along in elliptical coils, concerned as it was with the point of departure which it never quite left, although it (in other ways) never quite got there either.

The summary falls into three parts:

- 1) Outline of the section ‘Opening questions’: A historical point of departure – on the edge once again
- 2) Outline of the section ‘Yet another Levinasian concern – about the *in-*’: Absorption into immanence
- 3) Outline of the section ‘The moment in time’: Trans-*in*-scendence

To sum up the points of Part two, I will occasionally take up formulations from the reading to underline that this outline is a restatement of suggestions already made in the study.

1) Outline of the section ‘Opening questions’: A historical point of departure – on the edge once again

The reading of Part two began with the opening question of the *Fragments*: ‘Can the truth be learned?’

However, the reading found that a subtle displacement of interest took place in the inquiry, shifting the regard towards a moment in time (*Øieblikket i Tiden*), a *historical point of departure* that (following Climacus) must be of *decisive* significance. This moment was indeed also of concern to this study as it in the *Fragments* is the moment of the (word) God coming into time.

After some remarks concerning the mischievous way(s) of the writing of Climacus, the reading came to an odd formulation that in many ways turned out to be the opening question of this section. Climacus writes: ‘We shall make sure that it becomes clear that a historical point of departure is an issue (*Spørgsmaal*) for the contemporary follower as well’ (PF 58/SKS 4, 261).

The first section of Part two can be said to be an exploration of a great deal of the terms from this formulation: ‘the historical’, ‘a point of departure’, ‘an issue’, ‘the contemporary’, and ‘the follower’. Terms that are all significant in the *Fragments* as well as in this study; significant terms, yet perhaps not in an obvious way.

The reading of Part two found that the moment of the (word) God coming into time is not a *simple* historical fact. Indeed, Climacus – who has a way of making matters complex rather than crystal clear – states that ‘to know a historical fact does not make the eyewitness a follower’ (PF 59/SKS 4, 262), and that ‘the historical in the more concrete sense is inconsequential (*ligegyldigt*)’ (PF 59/SKS 4, 262). How, then, are we to understand the moment as a *historical* point of departure?

The historical turned out to be a rather complex term, or, to follow the writing of Climacus: it turned out to be *an issue*.

The complexity of this term was explored through the two-fold description put forward in § 2 of the *Interlude* (titled precisely ‘The historical’): 1) as that which has come into existence (a factor of *Tilblivelse*), and 2) as the passed (*det Forbigangne*).

1) *Tilblivelse*

The moment of *Tilblivelse* is a destabilizing factor that unsettles the historical from within: The historical is that which has come into existence ‘but that it occurred is, in turn, precisely its uncertainty’ (PF 79/SKS 4, 279). Climacus thereby (and in this context) pushes the notion of the historical beyond a discourse of authenticity, not because the historical is ‘in fact’ fallacious, but because the certainty of its facticity is destabilized by the incertitude of its own occurrence.

2) The passed (*det Forbigangne*)

To this study, the passed was not once a moment of presence that eventually (or by necessity) became the passed. In a deceptively straightforward line, I suggested that the passed comes *as* the passed.

I found the *complexity* of the historical to be significant, also because it showed *why* the situation of the contemporary follower is such an issue that the *Fragments* dedicates two chapters to pursue the matter.

To further explore the complexity of the moment (*Øieblikket*) as a historical point of departure, I submitted a three-points-sketch in which the notion of the moment was pushed beyond the reasonable. As the study found the *complexity* of the historical to be of significance to the moment, Part two tried not to lessen it but to bring out its verve. Even so, an attempt shall here be made to keep the sketch as accessible as possible.

1) A simple historical fact

A moment that was once present but became a moment of the past

2) A complex historical fact (§ 2)

Following the two-fold description of the historical in the *Interlude* (§ 2), the facticity of the moment is unsettled by the factor of *Tilblivelse*. An organ was found (in the *Fragments*) that answers to (*svarer til*) the incertitude of *Tilblivelse* (PF 81/SKS 4, 281). When the duplicity of *Tilblivelse* whispers: ‘but did it occur?’ – faith replies: ‘I believe it’.

In this passage, a suggestion was also made regarding the passion of faith. Climacus finds doubt and belief to be opposite passions. As insisted in Part one, such a connection is one of pairing. And so, while neither doubt nor belief, according to Climacus, is a ‘cognitive act’, they are nevertheless both, to this study, *conscious* acts. Doubt is described as a wilful protest against any conclusion: the doubter decides to ‘restrain himself’ ‘for he does not want to be deceived’ (PF 85/SKS 4, 283). Belief is a no less passionate decision: it is a resolution (*Beslutning*) to go with the moment of *Tilblivelse*, *well aware* of the incertitude.

3) A paradoxical moment

Here, with the moment in time, the reading came to a point where it was no longer a question of the historical as a 'direct' (*ligefremt*) fact, but a fact based on a self-contradiction (PF 87/SKS 4, 285). With the moment in time, it was no longer a question of certainty/uncertainty as we were no longer dealing with the historical in its dialectical mischievousness of *Tilblivelse*, but with the impossible event of the God coming into time, what Climacus terms: 'this absurdity that the eternal is the historical' (PF 62/SKS 4, 264). Here, it is not asked in an unsettling whisper: 'it occurred, but did it? Are you sure?' With the moment at its outmost paradoxical point (on the edge of an abyss), the question is almost an outcry: 'but this is absurd! Are you mad?' When the moment is an absurdity, to answer it (or to follow it) would be: absurd. And yet, this is what faith does. Faith is the mad passion that answers to (*svarer* as well as *svarer til*) an absurd paradox.

A difference between *belief* and *faith* emerged at this point in the reading. Although not unaware of 'a certain measure of uncertainty', belief still manages to gather itself into conviction, finding itself to stand on somewhat reliable grounds (in all likelihood, it is believable). Faith, however, does not stand on any grounds; it is based on nothing but a paradox.

Once again, this study found a situation of groundlessness, and once again, the study found faith to be a passion of risk or a sense of adventure. However, and this is a point of both parts of the study, the passion of risk (or the sense of adventure) is no naïve, happy-go-lucky, or reckless approach to life, nor is the plunge into the absurd a mindless, enthusiastic, or carefree dive.

Once again at the edge of an abyss (or a situation of groundlessness), the reading found a point of connection between the selected works of the study. The point of connection, put forward by Ferreira, was related to de silentio's formulation (a conclusion, according to Ferreira) in *Fear and Trembling*: 'faith begins precisely where thought stops' (FT 53/SKS 4, 147).

The suggestion of Part two in relation to this formulation was that thought or intellect (*Forstanden*) comes to a halt – not because it *cannot* proceed, but because it *will* not proceed. Meeting up with the paradox at a borderline (a line that is also the edge of an abyss), the intellect weighs the possibilities and calculates the risks

(as it is not afraid of risk to a certain degree), and then comes to an understanding (also in the sense of agreement) with the paradox: 'So here (at the edge), we part ways. I will not follow'. This reasoning may, as suggested in Part one regarding Agamemnon, be both passionate and well-reasoned; however, it is still a sidestepping (of the dreadful responsibility).

Faith is the passion that answers to the absurdity of a moment in which the eternal is the historical, in which the (word) God comes into time. It may be mad, yet, faith answers *well aware* of the absurdity, well aware of the impossibility.

A point of this study is that if an absurdity did not resonate in the moment of this in-coming, there would be no reason for the intellect to part ways with it (nor would there be any acoustical illusion or offence).

The moment is a *question mark by virtue of* the absurd. Calculations and reasoning do not make sense in response to such a paradox; it calls for a *resolution*: 'but this is mad. Will you follow?'

And so, I found that the moment was indeed a point of *decisive* signification as it calls for a resolute answer. As it happens, it is only by answering to this call that one *becomes* a follower.

In relation to this call for an answer (the moment as *an issue*), Climacus strangely writes: 'It is not a question of the truth of it but of assenting' (PF 87/SKS 4, 286). Quite a break from tradition, this formulation (a string to the thematic thread of truth) was of import also in the following sections.

2) Outline of the section 'Yet another Levinasian concern – about the *in-*': Absorption into immanence

In the middle section of Part two, an interlude in the meditation on a moment, we met up once again with a concern of Levinas; this time at the crossroads where the tradition(s) of Judaism and the tradition(s) of Christianity part ways. It all turned on the *in-* of an in-coming, or, to spell out the dogmatic notion which Climacus so noisily proclaims to desist from: the in-carnation (of the word of God).

Levinas in-directly addresses this notion in a short paper titled ‘A Man-God?’, presented at the Week of Catholic Intellectuals (Paris 1968) to which he had been invited.

With Levinas, we were looking for a relation or a relating between man and god(s) that would not end up in either absorption (whereby the difference of the relation is lost) or distant in-difference (whereby the proximity of the relation is lost).

To Levinas, the idea of a *humility* of God or of a persecuted truth might open a way of thinking transcendence otherwise. With the idea of a *humility* of God, a relation might be possible that does not end up in either of the above alternatives (absorption/in-difference), and in a formulation that goes well with the motional plot of this study, Levinas writes (on the humility that presents itself in a humble way ‘allied with the vanquished, the poor, the persecuted’): that it is ‘to pierce immanence without thereby taking one’s place within it’ (*Entre Nous*, 55/71).

Levinas suggests that: ‘It is doubtless Kierkegaard who best understood the philosophical notion of transcendence contributed by the biblical theme of God’s humility’ (*ibid.*), this idea of a persecuted truth, a truth so modest that it barely dares present itself. Indeed, Levinas writes: ‘Reading Kierkegaard, one may even wonder [...] whether the truth which is said should not immediately appear as not said’ (*Entre Nous* 56/72-73). Such a withdrawal of that which is said would namely safeguard the truth from manifesting itself whereby it would lose its transcendence. To Levinas, an incarnated God would be given over to appearance, and in this disclosure, the sense of transcendence would be swallowed up by immanence. Incarnation here spells incorporation in the sense of absorption – whereby (in a reformulation of the concern of Levinas:) immanence would once again win out over transcendence.

3) Outline of the section ‘The moment in time’: Trans-*in*-scendence

As a study attentive to question marks (as promised in Prologue one), the reading of Part two let a Levinasian concern be voiced in the midst of a meditation on a

moment in time. The concern was dealing with an imperialistic tendency of immanence, namely, that ‘immanence always wins out over transcendence’.

In the third and last section of Part two, I returned to the moment in time with the concern of Levinas resonating in the questioning of the reading:

How about the moment *in* time?

Is the sense of this moment *absorbed* by time? Is the *in*-coming of the word God also an assimilation of the sense of that word? Does the *in*-coming lead to an appropriation whereby the peculiar word would lose its *decisive* significance? Would it not thereby lose the *question mark* of its address?

I found (in the first section of Part two) the moment in time to be a complex issue: an impossible paradox, or, as Climacus formulates it: this absurdity that the eternal is the historical.

Like Part one of this study, the reading of Part two also accentuated the absurd: a *vibrancy* of sense opens *by virtue of* the absurd; an odd and defiant sort of sense (out of line and out of place) that is lost when the absurdity of the *in*-coming or a paradox is moderated or explained (away).

In the re-tellings of old tales, both de silentio in *Fear and Trembling* and Climacus in the *Fragments* write forth a silent collision that reverberates in mischievously straightforward lines such as: ‘the beautiful story of how God tempted Abraham’ (FT 9/SKS 4, 105), and ‘the eternal is the historical’ (PF 62/SKS 4, 264).

It is by virtue of the absurd that the moment *in* time is not absorbed *by* time. The *in*-coming of the word God does not make for a moment where the eternal is *simply* present in time. As a *paradoxical* moment (that the eternal is the historical), it is never present in any direct (*ligeftrem*) way, but is *in* time *as* the historical, that is, as that which has come into existence (did it not?), and as the passed (*det Forbigangne*). A curious suggestion of the *Fragments* seemed to be that the moment is of decisive significance also to the eternal (that comes into time in the moment). The sense

and non-sense of the eternal would somehow open only *in* time. Or, the eternal would *concern* time only in this (absurd) in-coming.

An absurd in-coming of the word God, or, as Levinas writes: an impossible incarnation. Part two did indeed find the moment of in-coming to be impossible – in the ambiguous sense of an in-possible (a term already suggested in part one), that is, as a possible (*det Mulige*) that opens (in the midst of) the impossible, and – as the possible – remains impossible.

The moment is *in* time *as* in-possible, as an *ambiguous openness* that somehow is there without being there, without solidifying into being *something* (other than the openness of an in-possible).

Perhaps we could understand the *fullness of time* not as (a) completeness but as a moment filled with the openness of an in-possible? An opening of the impossible but also *of time*. Such an opening *of time in* time would also resonate as a wondrous ring in the formulation of *de silentio* concerning the word in question of this study: that for God all things are possible; a line that in *Fear and Trembling* can be said precisely by virtue of the absurd.⁵⁵⁸

Having found the word God to come about in a movement of in-coming in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments* – an in-coming that takes place without taking up place, in a moment, in a flash of madness – the reading of Part two went on to address the figure of a *wink*.

This figure has been in play from the first moment of this study, in reference not only to the denotation of a moment (*et Øie-blik*) but also to the ambiguity that in this study is accentuated as the vibrancy of a writing.

The figure of the wink has been explored in an essay by Nancy whom the study once again passed by. From this fleeting meet-up, where paths crossed in the

⁵⁵⁸ FT 46-47: “But then the marvel happens; he makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get – that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible. The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the proper domain of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. [...]”

figure of a wink, the reading brought with it a formulation regarding the passing of a wink: 'there is no assignment of persons and things'.

Before a comment was made in relation to this formulation, I took up a thematic thread (regarding 'truth') in an elliptical movement that brought together strands of suggestions to which a return had been promised.

Referring back to the intervalling *between* story and truth (in the subsection 'A movement of the gods – Nancy and spacing' in part one), I revisited the strange move of Climacus (in the subsection 'Questioning the questions' in part two) whereby he subtly (but rather audaciously) seems to set apart the event of the God coming into time (*Guden i Tiden*) from a discourse on truth: when it comes to the moment, 'it is not a question of the truth of it', Climacus writes, 'but of assenting' (PF 87/SKS 4, 286).

Recalling the 'philosophical idea' of Kierkegaard (according to Levinas), namely that of a persecuted truth (in the section 'Yet another Levinasian concern – about the *in-*' in part two), the reading suggested (in a re-formulation of Climacus): it is not a question of a *certain* truth, or, it is not a question of a self-assured truth, a truth that comes in triumph (as opposed to the humble truth suggested by Levinas).

Thus, the expressions of a 'new modality' put forward by Levinas reading Kierkegaard (cited in Prologue two), that is, the *perhaps* and the *if you like* – should not be heard only as gracious gestures of politesse, but also as the additional remarks said by someone well aware of the openness of these expressions; someone who acknowledges that he or she does not stand on the solid grounds of a truth triumphant.

A responsibility would then come with these gestures of openness, a responsibility for the lack of grounds and the lack of certainty, that is, the unfounded situation from which one nevertheless answers.

With the topic of responsibility, a way back to the passing of a wink could be made. The formulation (of Nancy) that was left for a while read: ‘there is no assignment of persons and things’.

This study can be said to be very close and yet far from this line. There is no assignment from the wink of a passing, or the passing in a wink. There may not even have been a call (who *knows?*). However, and this is a significant point of both readings: there is an *undertaking* in answering (also for answering at all and in the first person). There is an undertaking, or a taking up of the burdens and duties, the suffering and wondrous joy that come with a life (already) *involved* with the others, a life where relationality does not only come as complexity and sharing but also as a burdensome bond in the load of a body.

In the last passage of Part two, I suggested that the in-coming of the word God could be understood as a movement of trans-*in*-scendence. With this suggestion, I wished to re-situate the movement of transcendence from the vertical routes of trans-*a*-scendence and trans-*de*-scendence⁵⁵⁹ to the ambiguous openness of a twinkling ‘in-’. The suggestion of a trans-*in*-scendence connects many of the points that I have made in relation to the word God: the ambiguous openness of the ‘in-’ lets the word God come about as involved, interfering, and in question.

⁵⁵⁹ As put forward by Wahl (Wahl 1944).

CONCLUSION

I. GENERAL REMARKS

a) How I found the word God to come about in the selected works

My suggestions as to *how* the word God comes about in *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments* are listed in the two summaries. They were not ranked because they take part in an interrelatedness of sense rather than constituting a register of separate features. Condensed and put into numerical, though not preferential, ordering, my findings in relation to the issue of the study are as follows:

I found the word God to come about in the selected works as 1) a mad paradox, 2) an in-coming of decisive signification, and 3) an ambiguous openness.

These three points are closely related, and can be said to be different aspects of the coming-about of a word, the complexity of which makes it hard to pin down to a single, exact, or full definition. A hardship that is indeed part of its coming-about. The findings will be outlined further in the section below ('Outcome of the inquiry').

b) A literary reading

I have in this study looked into the situation of a king from a Greek tragedy (Agamemnon, in the subsection 'The tragic hero'), trailed a father on the journey of his life (the Abraham narrative), visited the imagination of an old man and his delusional retellings (in the subsection 'The old man and a misunderstanding'), commented on the disposition of a translation ('of the fact', in the subsection 'A shattering moment'), touched on a literal manner (on textual evidence, in the subsection 'How (not) to label a thinker'), followed how a storyline intensifies to the point of outrage (to be God's chosen one, in the subsection 'Enters God'), found a movement of adventure in the oddity of a grammatical composition (an adverbial present participle, in the subsection 'At the edge of an abyss – to love *in*

faith), underlined the etymological denotation of an oxymoron (*'mōron'*, in the subsection 'Relations otherwise than oppositional schemes'), called attention to the others of a narrative (in the subsection 'The weight of a body – differences of gravity'), identified the importance of an adverb ('almost', in the subsection 'The pull of binary structures'), accentuated the etymological meaning of the absurd (*'ab-surdus'*/out of tune, in the subsection 'An oxymoronic relation'), brought out a gesture of telling (in the subsection 'A word in question'), highlighted the mischievousness of a writer (in the subsection 'N.B.'), explored the complexity of a composition (the historical, in the subsection 'The versatility of a homonym'), imaged scenarios of meetings at the edge of an abyss (of understanding, in the subsection 'To become a follower'), and found that to be left with a story might not be a loss after all (in the subsection 'Rumours have it'). All clues found by a study attentive to literary features; what I have called a literary reading.

In brief, however, my literary study has been a meditation on the stories that I found to open in the lines: 1) 'God tempted' (FT 9+19/SKS 4, 105+115), and 2) 'the God in time' (PF 111/SKS 4, 306). Short stories of dread and wonder. I found an abyss to open in the disastrous contradictin: God > < tempted, and I found a preposterous impossibility to open with the preposition 'in': God > in < time. Paradoxical plots that in this study were also expressed in the following formulations:

- 1) 'Everything was lost!' (FT 19/SKS 4, 115) + 'for God all things are possible' (FT 46/SKS 4, 141),
- 2) 'the eternal is the historical' (PF 62/SKS 4, 264).

Schematized in relation to the readings, it would look as follows:

1) Part one:	2) Part two:
A reading of <i>Fear and Trembling</i>	A reading of <i>Philosophical Fragments</i>
God > < tempted	God > in < time
'Everything was lost' +	'(this absurdity that) the eternal is
'for God all things are possible'	the historical'

c) The significance of style

I have with this study also suggested that the way of writing is significant to the subject matter of a work. I have tried to show how literary features spill over into profound points, and how attention to gestures of telling can open for perspectives that may otherwise not be remarked.

I chose a literary reading because I found it to resonate well with the imaginative writing of *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*. In these concluding remarks, however, I also wish to suggest that the style of these works might also convey *a point of view*. My suggestion is that the style – the lively storytelling, the poetical ventures, and the teasing winks – was not favoured on a whim. It was chosen as the (most) suitable way for the points of these works to be expressed. Does not the eventing of a complex and defiant word such as God call for a likewise imaginative and troublemaking style of language?

d) The word God comes about in relation to a context

Compositionally, this study was divided into two parts, each a reading of a pseudonymous work. However, the structural connections of the study were the thematic threads that weaved their way in and out of the readings. These thematic threads have taken up topics and issues such as belief/faith, possible/impossible, verification/truth, adventures/sidestepping, and becoming/answering. Someone might ask: 'What do these various themes have to do with the word in question of the study?' A lot, I suggested. These themes shaped and moved my inquiry as to how the word God comes about in *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*, and these themes were affected and sharpened by the coming about of that peculiar word: They were all (re-)defined on the edge of an abyss opened by the in-coming of the word God.

Put otherwise, the word God does not stand on its own; it comes about *in relation* to a context. I found the word God to have decisive impact on the situation into which it came about: as a shattering of 'the all' (Part one) and as an opening of time (Part two). And I found the sense of the word to be closely related to the

very coming about, as if the word is of significance or of concern only *in* its in-coming, *in* its address, or *as* disturbance.

II. OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

Condensed into three interrelated points, my findings in relation the issue of the study were as follows: I found the word God to come about in the selected work as 1) a mad paradox, 2) as an in-coming of decisive signification, and 3) an ambiguous openness.

1) A mad paradox: an open question

I found (in Part one) the word God to come about as a shattering movement ('So everything was lost', FT 19/SKS 4, 115), a disastrous moment that pushed Abraham to the edge of an abyss (opened by the coming about of the word God) which made his life hinge on a paradox. From this shattering moment, Abraham was hereafter a man in question. To hinge on a paradox is a thoroughly unsafe and unreasonable position. Abraham cannot explain himself (as a paradox does not provide explanations); there is no ground upon which Abraham could build a defence of his journey.

Although the shattering movement happens in a moment only, it changes the whole story or the story as a whole. In its coming about, the word God does not make sense, but opens for an in-ordinate paradox, preposterous and way too much. To end each Problema of *Fear and Trembling* with a paradox is, to me, not to have resolved a problem. It is to keep the question of the Problema open, and it is to keep the story of Abraham in question.

I found (in Part two) the word God to come about in the impossible event of a god coming into time, or, as Climacus formulated it: this absurdity that the eternal is the historical (PF 62/SKS 4, 264). Once again, the coming about of the word God happened in a moment, a moment that in the *Fragments* turned out to be a *complex* matter to the point of the *paradoxical*. The moment (of the god coming into time) is not a straightforward (*ligefremt*) historical fact 'whose contradiction is only that it has come into existence' (PF 86/SKS 4, 285). The moment of the god

coming into time is not a *simple* contradiction; it is not *only* the dialectical contradiction of *Tilblivelse* (it occurred, *but did it occur?*), rather, it is the oxymoronic incongruity that the eternal is the *historical*. An event so out of line that it signalled *by way of* absurdity.

I have accentuated the absurdity because the moment is not *simply* a contradiction or what we might call a model paradox. The moment is not a figure of logic to be pondered over; it is not a problem to be considered or a matter for reason. Or put otherwise, with the moment, it is not a question of the truth of it, but a question of relating to it.

I brought forth the complex and tricky notion of the historical which in *Fragments* was found to be a question (*what historical?*) and a complexity by which it defies the orders of presentation and manifestation in any simple sense (as *the passed* it is not simply present).

The coming about of the word God is in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments* not a *coherent* or *accessible* moment. It is an outrageously *absurd* event. There is *defiance* to the order(ing) of logic in the flash of madness that gleams in a paradox pushed to the edge (what I have also called a mad paradox); there is disobedience to indifferent rationality in the non-sense that vibrates in the word God. This is also why I trailed relations otherwise than the schemes of dialectical exchange and oppositional pairs (in the section ‘Movements of God – God withdraws behind a contradiction’). As a conventional (that is, oppositional) paradox, there would be no twinkling unruliness, no defiant anarchy, by virtue of which the word God remains an open question of concern. It is, in other words, by virtue of the absurd that the sense of the word God (as it comes about in *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*) is not put in order. The absurd is not an oddity that faith overcomes. The absurd is a *virtue* by which faith breathes.

I have in this study approached the word God as an issue, and I have found that it is indeed a word *in question*. This peculiar word comes about without making sense, as I have already pointed to above. It comes about as utterly unjustified (*Fear and Trembling*), thoroughly unverifiable (the *Fragments*), and outrageously unreasonable

(in both of the selected works). And though this study has been a meditation on two events in which the word God comes about, the study has also kept open the question: but did it (happen)? A question that is not posed *to* the word but *by* that word.

2) An *in*-coming of decisive significance: an intrigue of involved movements

I have found the word God to come about in a paradoxical moment, barely an event, or as I have phrased it in both of the readings: it takes place without taking up place, without being established, and without being put in place. Although this coming about all happens in a moment, in a passing, I have in both parts of the study accentuated the movement of *in*-coming as a disturbing movement that reverberates through the situation into which it comes about: preposterous, in-ordinate, and way too much. I thus distinguished it from the movements of withdrawals that I trailed precisely in search of differences (in the section ‘Movements of God – God withdraws behind a contradiction’); differences that do not disconnect or alienate movements, but opened a distinction between directions of withdrawal and *in*-coming.

I found the movement of *in*-coming to have decisive impact on the situations into which they came: as a shattering of the all (Part one) and as an opening of time (Part two). Or, as I have also put it: as the opening of an abyss (of groundlessness) and as the opening of the impossible (as an *in*-possible). These were not openings for the sake of opening, though. I found the *in*-comings of the word God to be for the sake of involvement; movements that came about out of interest, out of concern, or, out of love (as suggested in the *Fragments*).

As a vital point of this study, I found the word God to come about in an intrigue of involved movements. I found that it does not stand on its own, but takes place in relation to a context. To relate (back) to the above section (‘A mad paradox – an open question’), the *in*-coming of the word calls for a decision by virtue of its absurdity, and, moreover, it calls forth a movement of becoming. In Part one, I found the *in*-coming of the word God to call forth a movement of becoming a father of faith, and in Part two, I found the *in*-coming of the word God to call forth a movement of becoming a follower in faith (*troende*). Both

movements of becoming – which are also movements of faith – are closely related to the in-coming of the word God, only not by causality or necessity. Faith is (in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*) the mad passion that *answers* to an absurd paradox. In this answering, however, faith answers also for answering a call that we cannot know, prove, or verify happened at all or in the first place. Thus, I found the movement of becoming – which is also a movement of faith – to be a movement of responsibility, that is, in my readings: an answering also for answering (in the first place and in the first person, without reasons or grounds), a response to an openness that can only be answered by assuming responsibility.

3) An ambiguous openness

I found the word God to come about *as* an ambiguous openness, and I found it to come about *in* a mode of ambiguity, as a way of writing in both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*; a mischievous and twinkling writing, jesting and (yet) of great importance to those works and the sense of the word God. A literal reading that does not recognize the ambiguity of the writing will also fail to notice the openness of that word.

In Part one, I found an ambiguous openness in the impossible simultaneity of: 1) a dreadful abyss of openness in which an anonymous laughter of preposterousness can be heard, *and* 2) a wondrous openness of exorbitant generosity in which sense is possible after all and despite everything. Both the abyss and the wonder are opened by the in-coming of the word God.

In Part two, I found an ambiguous openness of the ‘in’ that winks at the heart of the formula ‘the moment in time’. The moment in time is the paradoxical event of God coming into the world. By virtue of the ambiguity of the ‘in’, the moment came into time without being (directly) present in time. Thus, the moment was not in time in the present tense, and could not be attested to in any direct sense. It could not be verified or authenticated, and so, it remained an open question as to whether it came about at all. To answer such a question is to give oneself over to

the non-concurrent simultaneity of openness: a dreadful abyss and an extravagant wonder.

The ambiguous openness of the 'in' resonates also in my suggestion of an *in-possible* (put forward in both parts of the study), namely, as the impossible opened by the possible (*det Mulige*) where the latter remains impossible *as* the possible. To say that 'for God all things are possible' (FT 46/SKS 4, 141) is not to say that all things are thereby conceivable, likely, or plausible. It is to say: it is impossible *and* it is possible, which in *Fear and Trembling* can be said (only) by virtue of the absurd. The in-possible is the wondrous openness of a possible that opens (*in*) the impossible, and that does not steady into a feasible or reasonable possible; an in-possible that 'one must not reduce to the possibility, reality, and necessity of formal logic' (Levinas 1998, 67), as Levinas writes in relation to a new modality expressed by the gestures of 'perhaps' and 'if you like'. Gestures that I have suggested point to (or bear witness to) the ambiguous openness of abyss and wonder that the word God brings about.

The ambiguous openness of the 'in-' is also brought into play in my suggestion of a trans-*in*-scendence: a way of in-coming that takes place without taking *up* place, where the in-coming itself is in question (did it happen?), and yet, where the sense of this movement opens only in this in-coming. With my suggestion of trans-*in*-scendence, I also wished to accentuate the interference of this movement, what I have also called the involvement of this movement, a movement that cannot be located or pinned down, and yet, a movement that signals only in this in-coming, in relation to the time or the world or the life which it pierces.

And lastly, I found the word God to signal as an ambiguous openness *in* the writing of *Fear and Trembling* and the *Fragments*, as a word that is found *in* the text, *in* language, and yet defiantly out of tune, out of line, and out of place. I differentiated the ambiguity of the word God from a vacillating ambivalence, or an undecided oscillation between terms, and pointed instead to a sort of inordinate openness: too much and exorbitantly generous. To me, the sense of the word God does not elude or retreat from language, but comes about as a mischievous, unruly,

- A Moment of (the Word) God -

and wondrous openness. A questioning and a mad paradox. A word that winks at us from a writing that does not try to put it in place or to make sense of it.

This study did not get a hold of the word God either, but I have, perhaps, suggested a way to speak *about* that word after (the) all. That is, to approach the word not as an indisputable authority, nor as an outdated antiquity, but as a word of decisive significance to the story in which it comes about. God, so to speak.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a reading of the pseudonymous works *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) from the Kierkegaardian oeuvre exploring the question:

How does the word God come about in the selected works?

In a literary study, I trail the sense of the word God in the *stories* that Johannes de silentio (in *Fear and Trembling*) and Johannes Climacus (in *Philosophical Fragments*) re-tell, namely the stories of how Abraham became the father of faith, and how the word God came into the world. In the re-imaginings of de silentio and Climacus, these eventful plotlines are paraphrased as: the beautiful story of how God tempted Abraham (FT 9), and as the eternal is the historical (PF 62). While we may not at first see the tension of these rewordings, well-acquainted as many of us are with those old tales, de silentio and Climacus bring out the contradictions, the drama, and the questions that arise from these plots that both turn on the moment in which the word God comes into the story.

I find the word God to come about in movements of *in-coming*.

In the *Fear and Trembling*, I find the word God to come into the story of Abraham as a disastrous call, a blinking flash of non-sense, an appalling demand ('take your son and sacrifice him'), ex-orbitant, in-ordinate and way too much (to ask for). With this shattering in-coming, an ambiguous openness came forth: the openness of an abysmal dread that trembles when the word God comes about as a call to sacrifice a son *and* the openness of the impossible wonder that resonates in a sentence such as: for God all things are possible (FT 46). Abyss and wonder, dread and joy. Relations that (in my reading) are not connected by way of dialectical pairings, but by virtue of the absurd.

In the *Fragments*, I find the movement of *in-coming* in the impossible event of God coming *into* existence: the paradoxical moment that is brought to its peak with the absurd formula: the eternal is the historical. As the historical, the eternal is

(already) *the passed* (*det Forbigangne*), and its coming into existence (*Tilblivelse*) is called into question by its coming into existence, as it is so trickily stated in the *Fragments* (PF 79). And thus, the moment (of such *in*-coming) is never quite there; it is never simply there in the present tense.

In the readings of this study, the sense of the word God does not roam the narratives as a theme to be unfolded; in both of the selected works, it all comes down to that mad and decisive moment where the word God breaks into the story (*Fear and Trembling*) or into time (*Fragments*). Striking movements that affect the stories into which they come, so that the plots of old tales (of a father of faith, and a god coming into time) are displaced from a discourse on sacrifice and obedience to a story on adventure and responsibility (*Fear and Trembling*), and from a discourse on truth and learning to a plot of risk and resolution (*Philosophical Fragments*).

RESUMÉ

Dette projekt er en undersøgelse af ordet *Gud*, som det kommer *til udtryk* i de to pseudonyme Kierkegaardske værker *Frygt og Bæven* (1843) af Johannes de silentio og *Philosophiske Smuler* (1844) af Johannes Climacus.

Projektet befinder sig på mange måder på en kant. På kanten af faggrænser mellem teologi og filosofi med en litterær fornemmelse som balancestang. På kanten mellem tro og viden som denne linje er tegnet op – og problematiseret – af både de silentio og Climacus. Projektet vil fra denne kant undersøge ordet Gud; det er hverken en teologisk eller en filosofisk undersøgelse, og det vil ikke vælge side mellem tro og viden. Projektet er dog heller ikke på kant med hverken teologi, filosofi, tro eller viden, men vil med en litterært-orienteret læsning netop gerne bidrage til en samtale på brudfladerne mellem felter.

Gennem nærlæsninger af de to pseudonyme værker vil projektet undersøge hvilken betydning ordet Gud får *gennem* værkernes fortællinger, og hvilken betydning ordet Gud har *for* værkernes fortællinger. Projektet er således også en genfortolkning af *Frygt og Bæven* og *Philosophiske Smuler* i forhold til et enkelt – men så langt fra simpelt – ord.

Det gælder for begge læsninger, at ordet Gud kommer til udtryk i en begivenhedsrig bevægelse:

I *Frygt og Bæven* er denne bevægelse et katastrofalt indbrud i fortællingen om Abraham. I de silentios genfortælling bliver ordet Gud udtrykt i sætningen: 'Gud fristede: 'Tag din søn og offer ham'. Det er et sammenbrud i fortællingen om 'Guds udvalgte, Abraham' ('Saa var Alt da forspildt,' SKS 4, 115), men det er netop også omdrejningspunktet for genfortællingen heraf. Det er den uhyrlige begivenhed, hvormed ordet Gud kommer til udtryk, som sætter de silentios værk i bevægelse, og som kalder de vanskelige spørgsmål frem, der udgør hoveddelen af *Frygt og Bæven*.

I *Philosophiske Smuler* er ordets begivenhedsrige bevægelse: at Gud kommer ind i fortællingen som Guden i Tiden, eller som det lyder i Climacus's komplekse genfortælling: "dette Absurde [...] at det Evige er det Historiske" (SKS 4, 264). Denne besynderlige formulering får særlig opmærksomhed i projektet, der i læsningen af *Philosophiske Smuler* undersøger både 'det Historiske' og 'det absurde'. Med bevægelsen hvormed ordet Gud kommer ind i tiden, er der atter tale om en begivenhed, der er *alt for meget* (at det uendelige bryder ind i det endelige), og igen er ordets indbrud afgørende for fortællingen. I *Philosophiske Smuler* er dette indbrud netop udgangspunktet for Climacus's spørgen: hvorledes er dette moment af afgørende betydning; dette 'Øieblik' hvori den absurde begivenhed finder sted?

Det gælder altså for begge læsninger, at ordet Gud kommer til udtryk i en begivenhedsrig bevægelse, men det gælder også for begge læsninger, at ordet Gud ikke kommer til udtryk som en menings-*givende* bevægelse: som uhyrligt indbrud og absurd bliven-til åbner disse bevægelser for spørgsmål snarere end medbringer svar. Det er en pointe for projektet, at ordet Gud netop som uhyre paradoksal og absurd bevægelse yder modstand til forstandens ordensmagter – det lader sig ikke så enkelt definere, men bryder ind i (livs)fortællinger og ud af begrebsdefinitioner med en drilsk og flertydig opsætsighed.

Projektet kommer i undersøgelsen af ordet Gud derfor frem til en betydnings-*åbenhed*. En åbenhed der også er udtrykt som et åbent *spørgsmål*. At svare på dette spørgsmål er på eget ansvar, eftersom der i åbenheden ikke er nogen grund (eller nogle grunde) hvorpå man kan stille ansvaret fra sig. Dette projekt finder i åbenheden (efter et ords indbrud) både en drilsk opsætsighed og en tyngde i form af ansvar, der ikke er pålagt, men antages i et svar.