Philosophy of Religion 27: 41–61, 1990.

Kierkegaard on faith and freedom

LOUIS P. POJMAN
Department of Philosophy, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS 38677

> "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling for it is God who is working in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12f.).

Introduction

In his recent article, "Kierkegaard on belief, faith and explanation,"[1] David Wisdo argues that I have fundamentally misconstrued Kierkegaard's notion of faith. Specifically, he makes three charges against my interpretation of Kierkegaard's concept of faith in my book *The Logic of Subjectivity* (henceforth referred to as LS): (1) My claim that Kierkegaard is a volitionalist is fundamentally misguided, since I interpret this in a strong sense and Climacus only holds it in a weak sense; (2) My interpretation of Kierkegaard's concept of faith as involving the will is false, since faith is a miracle, excluding the will; and (3) my claim that Kierkegaard is giving a philosophical explanation of faith is misguided since "Kierkegaard rejects any philosophical explanation which purports to explain the acquisition of faith" (p. 96).

Wisdo's criticisms are important and our disagreements have more than incidental significance. They go to the very heart of Kierkegaard's interpretation and represent two diametrically opposed views on the nature of Kierkegaard's work, his work representing a long tradition of American Kierkegaard scholarship represented by Paul Holmer, Louis Mackey, and Josiah Thompson which emphasizes the anti-intellectual element in Kierkegaard's thought, denying that Kierkegaard has put forward a Christian philosophy (unless it be a philosophy about why there should be no Christian philosophy). My view lies in a more European tradition

which sees an internal outline of a system in Kierkegaard's thought (to be sure, it is in tension with an anti-system tendency) set forth by such thinkers as my teacher, Gregor Malantschuk, Paul Sponheim, James Collins and Heywood Thomas among others. There are passages that both sides can cite to support their positions, and I do not mean to settle the issue between them in this short paper. What I mean to do is defend my interpretation against Wisdo's charges. If I am successful in doing this, I will have at least shown that on some crucial issues it is plausible to view Kierkegaard as a Christian philosopher who is concerned with a philosophical analysis of Christian faith. The ball will then be thrown into the opponents court challenging them to respond with a decent volley.

What I mean to do is show that Wisdo can be answered on all three of his charges against me. I will try to show *contra* Wisdo that (1) the charge of volitionalism applies to Kierkegaard's notion of faith; (2) faith involves an act of will and (3) Kierkegaard gives an explanation of faith.

Exposition

Let me begin by a brief exposition of Wisdo's main points. Wisdo is concerned that Kierkegaard's notion of "the leap of faith" has been reified (95) or reduced to something philosophers can understand.

> I will show that, according to Kierkegaard, faith is a miracle and that *ex hypothesi* any epistemological reduction of faith distorts its true character. For this reason, it will become clear that a philosophical account, such as Pojman's, which suggests that Kierkegaard wants to *explain* the acquisition of faith by appealing to the will is fundamentally misguided. That is, since Kierkegaard flatly rejects any philosophical explanation which purports to explain the acquisition of faith, he would clearly reject the type of volitionalism attributed to him by Pojman (96).

Wisdo sees the central argument for his position in Johannes Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* and proceeds to interpret this work as a "conceptual clarification which might help the reader identify the absolute difference between speculative philosophy and Christianity." As such Climacus' analysis shows that while we can "explain the acquisition of ordinary beliefs by appealing to the will, this analysis cannot help us understand Christian faith" (faith in its "eminent sense" (98)). Wisdo argues that Climacus rejects any strong sense of direct volitionalism (the

thesis that we can acquire beliefs simply by willing to have them) but that he does accept the weaker sense "that the uncertainty of our contingent beliefs must be negated by the will."

Wisdo charges that I accuse Kierkegaard of being a volitionalist in the strong sense, whereas he is only one in the weak sense and there is nothing obviously wrong with that. Furthermore my Phenomenological Argument is guilty of committing the "phenomenological fallacy" i.e., assuming that the subject's explanation of his or her experience is the most acceptable (113). In fact, my Humean analysis of modelling belief-acquisition on the model of emotions leads to problems since modern psychologists and philosophers have been inclined to analyze emotions in terms of "complex judgments." Nonetheless, for logical reasons given by Williams and me, strong volitionalism seems a false doctrine, but this is irrelevant to Kierkegaard, for "Climacus does not intend to defend the strong volitionalist thesis that one can acquire a belief p by a sheer act of will. The real question is not whether we can will to attain belief by a mere volit, but whether the will can help us avoid error (Descartes) or negate uncertainty (Climacus) ... What [Climacus] wishes to highlight is the way the will helps us overcome the doubt and uncertainty that characterize contingent, historical beliefs" (106).

Finally, Wisdo takes issue with my attempt to "analyze faith as a special case of belief or knowledge" (108). Faith is sui generis. It is a miracle "which cannot be explained by speculative philosophy. Ultimately, no one can become a disciple unless he or she receives from God the Condition (*Betingelsen*), the gift of grace which transforms the individual into a new creature" (109). At this point Wisdo takes issue with me for asserting that the will is involved in the process of faith. "Whether we like it or not, faith enters the world as a miracle and as such resists our attempt to explain it by an appeal to the will" (110). "Faith is ultimately a miracle which depends upon the grace of God. In the end, it is not the will which accounts for the way one acquires faith, but rather faith which helps us grasp the miraculous transformation of the will" (112).

Defense

Three general criticisms of Wisdo's argument should be made before getting to the specifics. I will constantly recur to them as I make develop my defense. If I am right, they help explain why our treatment of

Kierkegaard differs. (1) Wisdo fails to locate the significance of faith within Kierkegaard's schema of the stages of existence. He mentions that Climacus uses *Tro* in two different ways. The fact of the matter is that Kierkegaard has at least seven different uses of the concept which are regulated – in large measure – by their context within the stages.[2] An understanding of that context is relevant especially to the question of whether Kierkegaard has a philosophical anthropology or a Christian philosophy of human nature and its development. I've argued elsewhere that he does.[3] (2) Wisdo confines himself to an analysis of the *Fragments* in treating faith but neglects the longer and informative *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* as well as comments on faith and freedom in *The Concept of Anxiety* and in Kierkegaard's *Papers* which elaborate on the ideas in the *Fragments* and which I have used in LS to support my conclusions. Whatever the merits of hermeneutic isolationism elsewhere, it wreaks havoc here. (3) Wisdo has an undialectical understanding of Kierkegaard. Here I can do no better than refer you to Paul Sponheim's worthy treatise, *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* for a brilliant discussion of the dipolarity in Kierkegaard's conceptual framework. This is especially relevant to Wisdo's claim of univocacity regarding grace, *sola gratia*, whereas a more complete reading would have recognized the rightful place of the will in Kierkegaard's theory of the process of salvation.

1. Faith and the stages of existence

Let us briefly examine Kierkegaard's notion of faith. No one writes more passionately about this concept, nor values it more highly. Whereas, his predecessors have largely viewed faith as a necessary evil, a distant second to knowledge, Kierkegaard reverses the order (*Papers* X 4 635). Knowledge about metaphysical issues is inappropriate for us, because it prevents the most important virtue from developing. For him faith is the highest virtue and personal growth into selfhood depends on uncertainty, risk, venturing forth over 700,000 fathoms of ocean water. Faith is the lover's loyalty to the beloved when all the evidence is against her. Faith is the soul's deepest yearnings and hopes, which the rational part of us cannot fathom. Even if we had direct proofs for theism or Christianity, we would not want them; for they would take the venture out of the religious experience, without which the experience would be bland, indeed.

Actually, Kierkegaard has, at least, seven different notions of faith/belief. They range from aesthetic faith through ethical commitment to religious faith and Christian religious faith. They include "opinion", belief as an organ of apprehension of the past, and faith as hope. There is no clear conceptual analysis of these terms, and the Danish word (*Tro*) for "faith/belief" is similar to the English term "faith" and "belief", including both the propositional aspect of "belief" and the trustful emphasis of "faith". As with English there is only one verb for the concept, the Danish "*troer*". Hence, there is a natural tendency to conflate and intermingle the various meanings of the word, and this we find in the father of existentialism.

Two aspects of Kierkegaard's thought should be introduced in order to help us understand his thoughts on belief. First, he thought that concepts were quasi-living or dynamic entities, God-given, which were multi-faceted, having a life of their own, as it were, and changing their meaning depending on their context (*Samlede Vaerker* Vol. IX, p. 201f.). For our purposes, this means that the experience of faith changes as we develop into mature self-hood. The concept becomes transformed and means something different, though related, as we move from one stage of spiritual/psychological development to another.

This development of the self through the stages of life is the second aspect of Kierkegaard's thought which we should understand. Each person is on a pilgrimage from innocence and immediacy in the naive egoism of the aesthetic (read "sensual") stage through the ethical stage of personal commitment to others and the moral law to the religious stage, "religiousness A" (the focus of existentialism), where the individual becomes fully autonomous and self-aware. If grace is afforded there is the possibility of reaching the Christian religious stage, religiousness B, where one believes in the paradox of the incarnation and lives in radical discipleship.

Faith changes its complexion throughout this development. In the aesthetic stage it is a seed, manifesting itself as animal intuition and a naive primitive trust. It has no opposite in reason, for the aesthete is not yet rational. In the ethical stage faith manifests itself as commitment to reason and the moral order which is the function or manifestation of reason in society. Ethical faith is a faith in reason to harmonize conflicts of interests and produce the social good. In religiousness A faith manifests itself as risk and venture in attaining the highest possibilities for self-hood. Like aesthetic faith it is intuitive and immediate, but it is so after reflection, as a "second-immediacy".

Finally, in the Christian religious stage the self believes by virtue of the absurd, is "conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience" (Hume's *Enquiry*, p. 131). One needs grace to have faith in spite of reason's veto, but one is free to reject or accept the proposition; so the issue is up to us. There seems to be the assumption that if one lives within his lights, one will be given grace to believe.[4]

We need not spend much time with the fifth version of belief, opinion *(Mening)*, for Kierkegaard is not interested in it and dismisses it as unimportant for his purposes. Opinion is probabilistic, common-sensical, the sort of psychological state necessary to get us to take our umbrella with us to work or take in less calories in our diet.

The sixth type of belief is "the organ for apprehending history", which makes the past present to consciousness, involves the imagination and will in an act of recreation of the past (cf. "Interlude" of the *Fragments*). In believing what happened in the past the will is active in recreating the scene or proposition. It takes testimony and reworks it, transforming the "what" of the past into an active "how" of the present, making the historical contemporary. In this way belief is volitional. "Belief in not so much a conclusion as a resolution ... Belief is not a form of knowledge but a free act, an expression of the will" (*Fragments*, p. 102f.). The idea is that the imagination (of which nothing human is more free) takes over in belief attainment.

This is as radical a volitionalism as Descartes'. We are free to believe whatever we please and are responsible for all our beliefs. Believing is a fully autonomous act. It seems that Kierkegaard, who sought to work out a distinctively Christian epistemology, thought that this view was present in the *New Testament*, particularly in Paul's "Epistle to the Romans", where he writes "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin". Paul seems to be talking about eating meat that was sacrificed to idol with a clear conscience, but Kierkegaard takes the verse literally and writes:

> Belief (*Tro*), surely, implies an act of the will, and moreover not in the same sense as when I say, for instance, that all apprehension implies an act of will; how can I otherwise explain the saying in the New Testament that whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23)? [*Papers* I A 36, my translation].

The final use of the concept of belief/faith in Kierkegaard is one found only late in his writings, mostly in his private papers. It sees faith, not as propositional belief, but as *hope*. Space does not allow me to examine this interesting concept at length.

Kierkegaard never developed his concepts in detail, but the twist and turns he gives to the notions of faith/belief are original and, often, insightful. Elsewhere, I have criticized the anti-rational element in some parts of his concept.[5] He seems to have too narrow a notion of reason, not realizing that intuition and testimony are forms of evidence which may be taken into the picture when assessing the merits of a proposition. We shall postpone our analysis of the volitional aspects of Kierkegaard's thought until Part IV of this paper.

It would seem then that faith functions within a general schema of a philosophical anthropology. Not only does Kierkegaard provide conceptual clarification, as Wisdo emphasizes, but he also has a philosophical psychological theory of the stages which is informed, if not controlled, by a Christian world view. What Wisdo seems to miss in his attack on my attempt to see Kierkegaard as a philosopher is that you simply can't separate conceptual analysis from epistemological and metaphysical perspectives. I turn then to the notion of the possibility of a Christian philosophy in Kierkegaard's thought.

2. The possibility of a Christian dialectical philosophy

This view of the legitimacy of a Christian philosophy is corroborated when we consider Kierkegaard's private papers. There he distinguishes between non-Christian and Christian speculation:

> Philosophy and Christianity will never allow themselves to be united, for if I hold to the most essential element in Christianity, namely, the redemption, so that this element must, if it really is to be something, be extended over the whole person. Or must I consider his moral ability as impaired while viewing his cognitive faculties as unimpaired? I certainly could consider the possibility of a philosophy according to Christianity, but it would be a Christian philosophy. The relation would not be philosophy's relation to Christianity but Christianity's relation to Christian cognition [Papers, I A 94, October 17, 1835].

To recur to the Sponheimian point about dialectics, there are two poles in Kierkegaard's work, one speculative and metaphysical, emphasizing a

comprehensive understanding of the entailments of the Christian world view and one subjective, personalistic and ethical, emphasizing appropriation of the depositum fidei and obedience to God.

Perhaps the best illustration of this di-polar aspect occurs in a discussion of the relationship between faith and works (or will). It is where the young Kierkegaard comments on Augustine's notion of predestination. Remember that while Kierkegaard, as a student, was deeply troubled with the problem of predestination (and with it fatalism), and concerned to show that it was a false doctrine, he was careful to steer away from Pelagianism and ended up embracing a modified, synergistic version of Augustinianism in which freedom is paradoxically coupled with a notion of original sin and divine election. At one point he identified with Schleiermacher's view of "relative predestination" (I 295, 1936) which was the view that grace is the condition which makes the free choice possible. The significant quote which illustrates the di-polarity is the following:

> There is a major opposition between Augustine and Pelagius. The first will crush in order to raise it. The second refers to man as he is. The first system views Christianity in three stages: creation, the fall through sin and with it a condition of death and impotence; and a new creation, whereby man becomes placed in a position where he can choose ... Christianity. The other system refers itself to man as he is (Christianity adapted to the world). The importance of the theory of inspiration is seen from the first system. Here one sees the relation between the synergistic and semi-pelagian conflict. It is the same question, only that the synergistic conflict has the Augustinian system's idea of a new creation as its presupposition" [*Papers* I A 101].

It seems to me that this early entry sets the tone for all of Kierkegaard's other work on this subject. We begin with the primacy of God's grace, the miraculous, but there is still a contribution that we must make. We can reject grace. Our freedom is never wholly obliterated, else we have the "monstrous inhumanity."

3. Kierkegaard's idea of freedom[6]

Before we can understand this synergistic element in Kierkegaard's dialectical Christian philosophy we need to examine briefly his notion of freedom as it unfolds in his writings and plays a central role in his anthropology and the schema of salvation. One might say that freedom is

the central concept in his philosophy of religion, and that it provides one with an ariadne thread with which to wind one's way through the myriads of tunnels and diversions of his works. All his other notions, e.g., anxiety, despair, subjectivity, and faith, are expressions of this notion. There is a question whether "freedom" is really more than one notion in the melancholy Dane's work, but I shall assume Kierkegaard's own view on the matter that the concept is one but has various forms or levels of meaning, of which some are more adequate than others.

The first thing to note about the concept is that it is not a simple concept in any of its phases. In fact, Kierkegaard treats all of his concepts as complex and dialectical, having significance only in opposition to another concept. Good only is understood in relationship to evil as its necessary other, love through indifference, salvation through despair and suffering. Freedom is always seen in tension with necessity, whether it be in the form of facticity, historical necessity, fate, divine grace, and/or guilt.

Secondly, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between freedom as radical free will (*liberum arbitrium*) and as liberation (*libertas*). The first category is identified with *indifferentia aequiliberi* (arbitrary or indifferent freedom), the freedom of Buridan's Ass who starves to death because he cannot decide between two equidistant bundles of hay.[7] Unconditioned freedom is a chimera, no where to be found in the world. There are always pressures, forces on the mind, emotional factors weighting down the soul that produce tendencies to action. Indeed, Kierkegaard is hardly interested in freedom of outward action, of whether I have a choice to raise my arm or not. Freedom is essentially an inward state which has to do with our loyalties, commitments, and beliefs. Freedom is not so much *what* we do, as the subjective *how* with which we do it. It is the good or bad will, the motive and intention. In the last analysis freedom as voluntary choice happens in the eternal "Now" which breaks into the normal course of determined action. It is a *metabasis eis allo genos* (something of an altogether other dimension from ordinary events), a mystery which signals divine grace and omnipotence.[8] At its apex freedom becomes liberation from guilt and restless autonomy. Nonetheless, as I will argue further, an element of free will is regnant at every point of human activity, including that wherein the divine intercedes.

Let us turn to Kierkegaard's notion of the fall and redemption and see how this description of freedom functions in his *scala paradisi*, his ascent to heaven. We may mark off Kierkegaard's eternal pilgrimage in nine stages, beginning with the human creation (every person) in "dreaming

innocence" and ending with the summum bonum in supreme blessedness. Briefly, the stages are as follows:

1. *Dreaming Innocence*: each soul is in the same state as Adam and Eve before the Fall, except that now there are environmental pressures towards sin that there were not then.

2. *The Advent of the Prohibition*: goodness can only come to life with its dialectical opposite evil (SV IV, p. 185). But the possibility of illegitimate autonomy creates pressures that the unequipped soul can hardly withstand. This creates the vertigo of freedom in which the Fall becomes probable.

3. *The Fall*: freedom's first movement in which it yields to the pressures brought on by the possibility of autonomy. It "looks down" and "lets go" of the good. This is the first sin, though every other sin has essentially the same logic. Each person is Adam who sins for the first time, bringing sin into the world anew.

4. *Slavery to Sin*: this is the state of mind which results from the first free fall, a dispositional quality which makes every succeeding sin easier and more natural.

5. *The Abyss of Despair*: the dissatisfaction the soul experiences, caused by anxiety, that holy hypochondria, which reminds us that we were made for something better. There are various levels in this abyss, the very worst are those in which the disturbing voice of anxiety (the Spirit) is quieted, the Demonic, where the soul is locked-in within its own autonomy *(Indesluttedhed)*.

6. *The Ascent to the Good*: here prevenient grace through anxiety for the good moves the soul towards the good and creates the possibility of faith (as a gift).

7. *Freedom's Second Movement*: the open and welcome response to prevenient grace and the possibility of faith, where the soul yields up its autonomy and gives itself back to God.

8. *Slavery to God*: a dispositional quality of total dependency on God corresponding to stage 4 (slavery or total dependency in sin), but the soul has been sick and must be gradually healed by divine medicine and reconditioning in a sick world. Hence, suffering becomes as a mark of salvation which is caused both by the healing process within and the opposition from without.

9. *Eternal Blessedness*: eternity in which the soul is united in love with God.

The key stages are 3 and 7. They are described in some detail in *The*

Concept of Anxiety and the *Philosophical Fragments* respectively (and to some degree in *Sickness unto Death* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). The former work is a brilliant reinterpretation of original sin, which makes each of us responsible for our own Fall. Every person finds himself guilty before God, which implies personal responsibility for a misrelationship. Anxiety is the symptom as well as the cause of the misrelationship. Anxiety is the psychological equivalent of a metaphysical state of independence from the source of one's being.

In innocence, anxiety is present as a dream, adumbrating the sin-fall in the forms of premonitions and vague apprehensions. The sense of inner nothingness as well as the "prohibition" and "voice of judgment" cast their ghastly shadows onto the wall of our imagination somewhat as the shadows in Plato's cave. In this case, however, they both allure and repel, albeit, vaguely as in the faint remembrance of a dream after awakening. Then the time comes when the situation of which we have dreamed takes place. It is described as being on the edge of a cliff, overlooking an abyss. Something of the abyss' Nothingness calls us alluringly, and, in spite of our dread for what attracts, we *look* down. We are at once both extremely repelled and deeply attracted by this Nothingness; and this increasing ambivalence of anxiety produces a state of dizziness in us, causing us to begin to faint. In the process of sinking, we grasp for something to hold onto, and it turns out to be finitude (any temporal object in place of eternity which had been our proper focus and which we ought to have grasped). Holding on to our object for balance, we faint for an instant (*Ojeblikket*, the glance of an eye), and when we have regained our consciousness, we realize that we have chosen finitude and have been degraded by this poor choice.

> One may compare Anxiety with dizziness. He, whose eye gazes down into the swallowing deep, becomes dizzy. But what is the cause of this? It is just as much the fault of his eye as the abyss, for what if he had not looked down? Thus anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which occurs because spirit will establish the synthesis, and freedom now stares down into its own possibility and then grips finitude to hold onto. In this dizziness freedom faints. Psychology cannot come further than this and will not. In the same moment all is changed, and when freedom again rises, it sees that it is guilty. In between these two moments lies the leap which no science has explained or can explain. He who becomes guilty through anxiety, is as ambivalently [*tvetydige*] guilty as it is possible to be. Anxiety is a female weakness in which freedom swoons. Psychologically, the sin-fall always occurs in impotence; but

> anxiety is also the most selfish, and no concrete expression of freedom is so selfish as the possibility of every concretion. This is again the overwhelming experience which determines the individual's ambivalent, sympathetic and antipathetic relationship. There is in anxiety the selfish infinity of possibility which does not tempt like a choice, but disturbingly makes anxious with its sweet anxiety [*Beaengstelse*] (SV IV, p. 331; Lowry translation, p. 55).

This is the phenomenology of the original sin, whether it be ours or Adam's, but *mutatis mutandis* it is also a description of the process of every sin, which in a sense is a new fall.

In dreaming innocence there was an inchoate sense of Nothingness disturbing the state of tranquility. This Nothingness is identified here as the abyss. The abyss as a metaphor is attached to every possible state of affairs, for qua possible (rather than actual) it is not known (through acquaintance), but simply vaguely adumbrated by a certain pre-understanding. For consciousness, the possible arises out of Nothing in the present moment and projects itself as future. It insinuates that the individual is capable of actualizing the possible. Possibility always brings with it a certain "prohibition" or inherent antithesis, as well as the intuition of judgment. These heighten the intensity of the ambivalent emotions involved in the experience of anxiety. The whirling vortex sensation which we experience at the heart of anxiety (as when we panic) seems to overwhelm the self so that it becomes too weak or giddy to see rightly or do what is in its best interest. The self is dizzy and "faints" or "swoons", and on awakening discovers that it is guilty.

Although anxiety is the conditioning factor and the process of the Fall has a certain quasi-causal necessity, ultimately free will is responsible for the fall. "What is the cause of this? It is just as much the fault of his eye as the abyss, for what if he had not looked down?"[9] The implication is that, although the ego feels the repulsive attraction to gaze at possibility, he could have looked away if he had willed it strongly enough. In the *Edifying Discourses* there is a passage which may shed some light here. "When the navigator is out on the open seas, when all changes around him, the billows are born and then die; then he must not fix his gaze on them; for they change. He stares up at the stars."[10] That is, he holds on to infinitude instead of finitude, he chooses the eternal and unchangeable instead of the temporal and changeable. "Freedom now stares into its own possibility and then grips finitude to hold onto." It would seem that there are actually two acts of freedom here: (1) looking and (2) gripping. Is he

guilty because he has stared or because he has gripped finitude? Is the leap the staring or the gripping? The implication may be that even after the ego in freedom looks down instead of upwards, it still has the possibility of gripping infinity. But we may interpret the passage as implying that once having looked, the grasping onto finitude follows necessarily. The matter may be left in doubt, for as Vigilius says, "Psychology cannot come farther than this and will not."

Vigilius Haufniensis makes it clear that the cards are stacked against the poor dreamer (a suggestive description for innocence before the Fall), and that with every sin, sin becomes more normal, so that it becomes harder and harder to resist sin. Here we see an "ensnared freedom" indeed, a freedom that has a distinct predilection to swoon into the possibility of finitude. One may rightly question the justice of God in predisposing us in this way, for it seems that the overwhelming probability is that each of us will "freely" fall and continue to do so. But, if I understand Kierkegaard correctly (and he is never clear here), it may well be the case that the Fall is paradoxically a good thing (felix culpa) without which the summum bonum cannot be attained – for to know the good entails knowing evil. Kierkegaard never says this explicitly, but I leave it to you, my reader, to suggest a better explanation.

The second movement of freedom, in which the leap of faith (or second *metabasis eis allo genos*) occurs, is that of the move to redemption. The second leap occurs once the dregs of guilt and sin have been experienced and anxiety, the holy homesickness, a sort of prevenient grace prepares the self for faith. The description is found in greatest detail in the *Philosophical Fragments* (especially Chapter 4 and the Interlude). Here Johannes Climacus sets forth two philosophies of salvation, the Platonic way (represented by Philosophical Idealism) and the Revelational way (represented by Christianity). In the former the truth is immanent within us, so that our freedom is sufficient to discover the truth that liberates. One needs no teacher to discover the truth within. The revelational way depicts us as an alien to truth, so that the truth must come to man, if it comes at all, as a gift, bestowed from without. In this way the teacher becomes a necessary condition for discovering the truth. He becomes a benefactor in that he freely gives what we would not otherwise be able to obtain, for he creates the possibility of faith. If man is void of truth and in untruth, there is no possibility for learning or receiving the truth in the present condition. So he must be given a new capacity, a receptacle for containing the truth within. This new organ is faith.

Faith is not the truth, nor is the capacity for faith a guarantee of possessing the truth. It is the necessary, but not sufficient, condition for possessing the truth (or "containing" the truth). That is, possession of the truth in this revelational sense involves choice, a decision to live entirely according to this truth, as well as a decision to believe, a "looking upwards" and gripping the ladder to paradise. Here we have the working out of the synergism mentioned in the reference to Augustine (above). Salvation is a cooperative venture between God and man. The capacity for divine truth, as well as a revelation of the truth, is given freely by God, but the individual must choose whether or not to accept it. Rejection is still possible. Grace does not force man against his will "If I do not have the condition ... all my willing is of no avail; although as soon as the condition is given, the Socratic principle will again apply." (Wisdo rejects my interpretation of this passage, so I will come back to it in a moment)[11]

True, there is a strong inclination to accept God. Faith, sensu eminenti, is not an act of the will, but a miracle of grace, but it does not exclude the final decision of the will. As Frater Taciturnus says in *Stages on Life's Way*:

> My choice is not free. I am aware of freedom in my choice only when I surrender myself to necessity, and in surrendering to forget it ... I cannot go to any man, for I am a prisoner, and misunderstanding, and ... misunderstanding again are the iron bars before my window; and I do not elect to go to God, for I am compelled ... My situation is as if God had chosen me not I God. There is left to me not even the negative expression of being something of importance, namely, that it is I who come to Him. If I will not submit to bearing the smart of necessity, I am annihilated, or have no place to exist among men except in misunderstanding. If I bear the smart of necessity, then there will come about the transformation (*Stages on Life's Way*, pp. 322f.).

This passage sets in distinct dialectical tension the claim that both election and voluntary choice are required for salvation. Exactly how the will works here is left as much a mystery as it was in Vigilius' description of the Fall. In a classic journal entry the synergistic tension between grace and free will ("subjectivity") is set forth like this:

> No one is saved by works [the humanly subjective] but by grace – and corresponding to that – by faith. Good! But can I then do nothing myself with regard to becoming a believer? Either one must now immediately answer unconditionally, NO; and thus we have the election-through-grace in a fatalistic sense, or one must make a little

admission. The thing is that man is always suspicious against the subjective, and since one establishes that we are saved by faith, one grasps immediately the suspicion, that here too much has been conceded. So one adds: but no one can give himself faith. It is a gift of God which I must pray for.

Good! But can I even pray [in my own power] or must we go further and say: No, to pray (especially for faith) is a gift of God, which no man can give himself; it must be given him? And what then: Then I must again be given the ability to pray correctly for it, that I must correctly pray for faith and so forth. There are many, many envelopings, but they must at one point or another be stopped by the subjective. That man makes the scale so great, so difficult, can be praiseworthy as majesty's expression for God's infinity; but however do not allow yourself to exclude the subjective; unless we want to have fatalism *(Papers* X 2 A 301, 1849).

The dialectic between God's grace and human freedom must "at one point or another be stopped by the subjective." Humans have a role to play in salvation which, although quantitatively it may seem minuscule in comparison to God's part, is still decisive in the final analysis. Even God cannot or will not override our freedom.

But here we notice both a symmetrical relationship between the role of freedom in the Fall and in Salvation. Just as in the Fall freedom is depicted as a response to pressures in favor of the possibility of sin, now freedom emerges as a response to the pressures of guilt-consciousnesses and grace in favor of the possibility of faith rather than sin. This is the symmetrical relationship between the Fall and the Rise to Salvation. But there is an asymmetrical relationship as well. In the Fall, the cards are so stacked against the individual that sin is almost inevitable. But the probabilities do not seem to be in favor of freedom's leap to Salvation to the same extent. Why is this? Just as the weight of accumulated sinfulness produces a strong tendency towards sin without determining it, so the weight of grace would greatly incline the chosen towards salvation (or faith) without determining it. Is this not the best way to interpret Kierkegaard's many passages on this topic?

As I mentioned (p. 17 above), Wisdo chides me on my interpretation of the Socratic-principle passage as an indication that free will is still valid within grace in choosing faith. He's correct in saying that the passage in itself is indecisive. I was interpreting this passage in the light of other passages cited in that section (LS p. 92), which he ignores.

But there is more evidence for the notion that the will is always involved in faith, even Christian-Climacian faith, and that can be found in

the *Postscript* mentioned earlier. Recall that in the Postscript Kierkegaard characterizes existential faith as holding fast to an uncertain proposition through the strength of the will. He defines it as subjective truth: "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual" (182). Then identifying this relationship with faith, he continues, "Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith."

This sounds like the will is involved in existential religious faith, passionately holding on to the idea. But you might object – this has nothing to do with Christian faith – it is sui generis (as Wisdo has insisted to be Climacus's view). But on page 187 Climacus supposes that the truth itself is now a paradox, that "the eternal truth has come into being in time: this is the paradox ... Existence can never be more sharply accentuated than by means of these determinations." Climacus goes on to say that we can never have objective knowledge of this truth but must appropriate it subjectively. "Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is the paradox, paradox and passion are a mutual fit, and the paradox is altogether suited to one whose situation is to be in the extremity of existence" (206). So there seems to be a connection between ordinary existential faith and Christian faith, after all, in spite of Wisdo's insistence to the contrary.

Finally, at the end of the Postscript Climacus sums up his definition of Christian faith. "Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree" (540). Again I beg you to compare this with the definition of ordinary existential faith. Doesn't it seem reasonable to maintain that for Climacus and Kierkegaard the will continues to remain in the process of maintaining faith? and that Christian faith involves the Paradox but doesn't eliminate the will?

So I continue to maintain that for Kierkegaard God makes belief/commitment to the Paradox possible and possibly inclines the individual in that direction, but the individual must choose to believe and obey. Furthermore, there is, contra Wisdo, a continuity between ordinary

believing, existential believing and faith sensu eminenti. It may be put this way in summary form:

1) *Ordinary Belief*: Subject (S) receives historical evidence and decides whether to believe (by negating uncertainty or whatever).

2) *Existential Belief*: S receives evidence for a proposition P of the utmost importance to one's life (e.g., immortality), sees that it is highly uncertain, but via the passions of the will decides to believe and live according to P. Ultimate Importance and Commitment are the new aspects in 2).

3) *Christian Faith*: S entertains a proposition P of the utmost importance to one's life which seems contradictory, but is given grace to enable S both to choose to believe and choose to live according to P. It is the notion of the Paradox that is new in 3 and perhaps the apparent impossibility of living according to it.

4. Kierkegaard and volitionalism

Once again I must urge that we take the whole of the Kierkegaardian corpus (or at least the Climacus writings and possibly some interpretive comments from the *Papers*) to heart. Wisdo distinguishes between strong and weak volitionalism and says that only the weak version applies and there is nothing abnormal about that. Let us see.

Strong volitionalism says that we may choose to believe anything we wish to believe that is not contradictory for us but weak volitionalism is merely the idea "that the uncertainty of our contingent beliefs must be negated by the will." I'm afraid that this sounds like a distinction without a difference. Let us see how this might work. Take the proposition P: Jesus Christ came to America in the first century AD (as the Mormons aver). Now according to strong volitionalism I could come to believe this simply by willing to believe it. But by a process of weak volitionalism I must simply via the will negate any doubt or uncertainty about it and I will believe it. Since believing "is not a form of knowledge but a free act, an expression of the will" (*Fragments*, 104), there doesn't seem to be any limits to this process, so I seem to be able to come up with the same result – that of believing anything I wish to believe which I don't see as necessary truths. So perhaps the weaker version is more indirect (*viz.* I must disbelieve Q before I come to believe P). But then how do I get myself to ignore or negate the "uncertainty" or evidence against P which would

enable me to believe P? Don't I have to imagine new evidence R and get myself to believe that? In spite of the fact that this "evidence" isn't genuine?

The point is that Kierkegaard doesn't explain his volitionalism to us. He merely makes flat statements like "belief ... is a free act, an expression of the will," and "I have ... expounded the thesis that all [evidential] approximation is useless ... so as to permit the absurd to stand out in all its clarity – in order that the individual may believe it if he wills to" (CUP, 190), and the like. As I admit on p. 103 of LS, exactly what he had in mind is unclear but a functional equivalent of direct descriptive volitionalism seems to be a reasonable hypothesis. Whichever interpretation we give to these passages, they seem more disturbing than Wisdo is inclined to admit.[12]

I conclude this part of my paper by maintaining that not only is the will involved in faith, not only is there a connection between existential and religious faith, but a form of direct (or an indirect version which is nearly direct) volitionalism is regnant in the process.

5. Kierkegaard and explanation

Finally, I must say a brief word about the idea of explanation in Kierkegaard's work. Wisdo accuses me of misconstruing Kierkegaard by claiming that he offers an explanation of faith whereas the truth is that he sees faith as a miracle that cannot be explained, a mystery. Here we need to distinguish two kinds of explanation. Suppose you ask me how a car operates and I tell you that it operates when one starts the ignition and puts it in gear and starts the accelerator and then steers it wherever one wishes to go. But you object, "That's not what I meant. I want to know the internal mechanisms that make the operation possible." I respond that I don't understand them, that they're a mystery to me.

The same logic is valid for Kierkegaard's notion of faith and grace and will. If you ask him how are we saved, he can give you an account in terms of God's grace and enabling act which makes faith and obedience possible, but what he cannot give you and what is a mystery is exactly the mechanics of grace and will. This is beyond all of our comprehension. It is important to place the mystery in the right place. Philosophy and theology have every right to work out the logic of religious ideas (as Vigilius Haufniensis does the Fall in the Concept of Anxiety and as I have argued

Climacus does in his writings), but what Kierkegaard was rightly opposed to was an attempt to claim to understand the mechanics of the Fall, of making his Christian epistemology into a science like psychology or Hegelian speculative philosophy. As I have tried to show in *The Logic of Subjectivity,* Kierkegaard saw his task as working out the epistemological and conceptual implications of a Christian world view as set forth in the New Testament. But that is not to reject all explanation (note – even to say God created the world is to give an explanation). It is to put explanation to use in the service of faith in the spirit of Anselm's *fides querens intellectum.*

Notes

1. David Wisdo, "Kierkegaard on belief, faith and explanation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 21 (1987): 95–114. All page references attributed to Wisdo are to this article.
2. See my *Logic of Subjectivity* (University of Alabama Press, 1984), Chapters 4–6.
3. Ibid., Chapters 1 and 2.
4. For a discussion of this point see my *Logic of Subjectivity*, Chapter 3, esp. 69f. 3.
5. Ibid., Chapters 6 and 7.
6. Some of the material in this part is repeated with slight alterations from my article "Kierkegaard on Freedom and the Scala Paradisi," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985): 141–148.
7. "If sin has come in by an act of an abstract *liberum arbitrium* (which no more existed in the beginning as later in the world, since it is a mere mental chimera), anxiety does not exist." *Samlede Vaerker* IV, p. 320.

   "The abstract freedom of choice (*liberum arbitrium*) is a fantasy, as if a human being at every moment of his life stood continually in this abstract possibility, so that consequently he never moves from one spot, as if freedom were not also an historical condition – this has been pointed out by Augustine and many others. We may make this clear simply by the following example. Take a weight, even the most accurate gold weight – when it has been used only a week, it already has a history. The owner knows this history, e.g., that it tilts towards off balance one way or the other, etc. This history continues with use.

   So it is with the will. It has a history, a continual progressive history. A person can fall so far that he eventually loses even his capacity to choose. With this, however, the history is not concluded, for, as Augustine correctly says, this condition is the punishment for sin – and is again sin " (*Papers* X 4 175, 1851, my translation).

Usually freedom of will is presented as an extraordinary good. It is, but it is also depends on how long it is going to last. Usually one makes the mistake of thinking that this itself is the good and that this freedom of choice lasts one's life time. But what Augustine says of true freedom (as opposed to freedom of choice) is very true and very much a part of experience – namely that a person has the most lively sense of freedom when with complete and decisive determination he impresses upon his deeds the inner necessity which excludes the thought of other possibilities. Then freedom of choice or the agony of will comes to an end" (*Papers* X 4 A 177, 1851 my translation). Cf. also *Papers* X 2 A 428.

8. Cf. Either/Or II, p. 232 and *LS*, p. 103.
9. "The greatest good which can be done to anyone, greater than any end to which it can be created, is to make it free. In order to be able to do this omnipotence is necessary ... If we correctly understand omnipotence, clearly it must have this quality of taking itself back in the very manifestation of its all-powerfulness, so that the result of this act of omnipotence will be an independent being. This is why one person cannot make another person free, because the one who has the power is imprisoned in it and consequently always has a false relation to him whom he wishes to free ... Omnipotence alone can take itself back while giving, and this relationship is nothing else but the independence of the recipient" (*Papers* VII A 181).
10. *Samlede Vaerker* IV, p. 331 (Lowry trans. p. 55).
11. Note Wisdo's charge that I try to reduce faith, eliminating the mystery. On the same page that I discuss the quote in question I go on to say "Exactly how the will works is left a mystery," and on 102 again I state that the precise operations, the how of the relation of grace and will regarding faith in the Paradox "Kierkegaard leaves the matter a mystery, but I think we can go far to demystify it," and work out an explanation consistent with what he himself says.
12. Wisdo also misunderstands the force and motivation of my Phenomenological Argument, accusing me of committing the "Phenomenological Fallacy." However, after making this accusation he fails to offer a shred of evidence for his thesis (i.e., that I have unwarrantedly assumed that my explanation of my experience is the most acceptable, 113). The motivation of phenomenological arguments is to get the reader to reflect on his or her own introspective experience and see if it isn't the case. Since we are talking about *believing* or more precisely occurrent beliefs, which are accessible (to a large degree at least) introspectively, this seems the correct way to begin. It may not be decisive or final, but I never pretended it was. But its force is to begin to realize that there are limits (contingent or otherwise) on what we can come to believe. I have discussed this at greater length in *Religious Belief and the Will* (1986).

    Actually, Wisdo may himself be guilty of some curiously circular reasoning in his argument against my position. After noting that I use a Humean model of treating beliefs and emotions both as essentially passive (events that happen to us), he goes on to say that this symmetry of treatment

may undermine my thesis since "recently, some philosophers and psychologists have suggested that although emotions may be experienced as passive "states," they actually involve complex judgments concerning the situation in which the subject is engaged" (104f.). But judgments are *beliefs*, so rather than undermining my thesis, it actually is consistent with it. The logic seems to be that I cannot use the same model for beliefs and emotions because emotions are complex beliefs any way. His conclusion is "Given these brief considerations it is possible that a more detailed application of Pojman's analogy between emotion and belief might yield conclusions quite different from his own" (105). I must wait for those conclusions. For the moment I must remain skeptical.