

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

SILENCE AGAINST SCIENCE

by David Penner

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2000



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-57571-3

**Canada**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA**  
**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
\*\*\*\*\*  
**COPYRIGHT PERMISSION PAGE**

**Silence Against Science**

**BY**

**David Penner**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
of  
Master of Arts**

**DAVID PENNER © 2000**

**Permission has been granted to the Library of The University of Manitoba to lend or sell copies of this thesis/practicum, to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis/practicum and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to Dissertations Abstracts International to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.**

**The author reserves other publication rights, and neither this thesis/practicum nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.**

## **Abstract**

*This work explores the idea of silence disinterest as fundamental to Christian religious practice. It argues that there is a tradition within Christian philosophy which posits this procedure. I show this tradition to suggest that the mysterious (and central) elements of the Christian religion, including its concepts of God, love, the will, goodness, and fear, have been threatened by principles of understanding which are tied to an Enlightenment epistemology and the reflections of selves connected to politicized contexts. While this reason possesses a crucial role in the religious life of the subject, its primary purpose is negative. My thesis considers these themes through a reading of Augustine's view of contemplation as distinct from rationality in **On the Trinity and The Confessions**; Kierkegaard's complicated and ironic view of faith, silence, love and the problem of authorship in **Fear and Trembling**; Heidegger's conception of the nothing in his essay "What Is Metaphysics?"; and Eckhart's view that disinterest is the foremost Christian virtue. The main discovery of the thesis relates to my theory of the "one choice" that, in the Biblical story, Mary makes and Martha does not. This "one choice" is made for that which is non-contextual but does so, necessarily, from the perspective of a context. It is my view that this understanding of "one choice" permeates all non-rationalistic philosophy and is at the heart of what can be understood in terms of a disinterested Christianity and how this religious view begins to respond to issues of ethics and community.*



# Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	i
<i>Chapter One: Who Is Augustine Writing To?</i>	1
<i>Chapter Two: Kierkegaard's Unreliable Narrators</i>	32
<i>Chapter Three: Heidegger's Willful Question of Metaphysics</i>	66
<i>Chapter Four: Boring Eckhart</i>	93
<i>Bibliography</i>	125

# Introduction

All human beings by nature desire to know.

- Aristotle

The study of philosophy is legitimate and praiseworthy in itself.

- St. Thomas Aquinas

Because of this morbid curiosity...men proceed to search out the secrets of nature, things outside ourselves, to know which profits us nothing, and of which men desire nothing but to know them.

- St. Augustine

Man is, by nature, a political animal.

- Aristotle

## Thesis Statement and Elaboration

In this thesis I focus on the way certain voices in the Western Christian tradition have considered the importance of silence, along with the mooting of the intellectual instinct in religious practice. From four of these voices (Augustine, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Eckhart) I present a notion of theology as disinterested silence. Simply put, the thesis considers the theological tradition of silence as religious practice while also concerning itself with what it means to write about such a practice. And while the focus of this thesis is Christianity (for the usual reasons of imagined familiarity and rebellion) I suspect that what it has to say can be extended to any and all religious traditions. I suppose that as one of the benefits of silence as a religious practice, it is not bound by the language or culture it is not speaking or representing.

Before I get too far, it is important for me to be clear about what I am saying and what I am not saying when I talk about silence. By silence I am not referring to the common view that God is largely silent in His communications with human beings. Rather, the emphasis in this thesis

is the idea that religious practice is better performed when human beings are silent about God and other matters of religious truth. This is, at least, the view of a significant component of the Christian mosaic.

Also, I must be clear that silence should not be understood in this thesis as important only because of the contribution it makes to contemplation. This is most evident in my chapter on Saint Augustine. I am not interested in silence as a form of quiet or as the removal of mere sound. By silence I am referring to what I call the “mooting” of both expression and the thought which results from and gives rise to expression. Silence is not measured in quantities of degree as quiet is. Silence is not measurable and contains, in my usage, the mooring of principles of measurement.

The “issue” of theological silence, or silence as a religious practice, has to do with reading, the view of the self, epistemology, politics, ethics, community, and the history of philosophy and theology. If silence is the solution that is presented here, the problem is the science of understanding and the theology of Aristotle and Aquinas. It follows that that which encourages understanding or that which depends on understanding are threats to the avoidance of deception or truth through silence. This thesis explores these themes in its attempts to support its recommendation of the silencing of the intellectual and spiritual voice and its outbursts. In four main chapters I deal with four separate primary texts (Augustine’s *On The Trinity*, Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, Heidegger’s “What Is Metaphysics?”, and Meister Eckhart’s brief essay “About Disinterest”) and consider how they conceive of, contribute to, and are thwarted by this “conception”.

The word “thwarted” is applicable because I am perpetually interested in the potential irony or paradox of these great thoughts and words about the dismantling of thought and word. In

many of the primary sources that generate the chapters, the author has not been able to eventually live up to his own advice. This has often occurred within the work in question. I am interested thus in the process of writing about such a theme and what it means to write from a position of understanding about the impossibility of understanding. This has proven difficult but exhilarating.

This thesis is also concerned about the ramifications of the view that it considers. The dimensions of this concern may not be immediately clear or obvious to the reader because it may not be the sort of concern that is usual to academic study. Each of the chapters in this thesis in one way or another considers the way that understanding is shaped and guided by contextual thinking and ethical considerations. And in trying to carve a space outside of understanding within which silence can persist as a hermeneutic possibility, it has become important to think about the way that silence can be heard as a benefit. This is important because in identifying silence as conducive to one thing or another silence will be used to further a particular voice. This particular voice would not be silent. Therefore, it has been consistently necessary to ponder the manner in which silence could be used by the noisy and the way, to use language from *Fear and Trembling*, the *universal continues to swallow the individual in the name of the ethical*.

It is also necessary to recognize that I, unlike Oedipus at the end of *The Theban Trilogy*, do not disappear from my setting and have no intention of doing so.<sup>1</sup> I participate as an impressed witness to his vanishing but yet I remain. I am interested and baffled by what it means to talk about silence, to show invisibility, and to understand, at least on one level, that which can not be

---

<sup>1</sup>Sophocles' *Theban Plays* also demonstrates in fascinating ways the correlation between silence and religious practice, particularly in Oedipus' ascension in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Elsewhere, *Oedipus the King* is an extremely good source for a debate between reason (puzzle solving) and religion. Unfortunately, it is difficult to place Sophocles into the Christian tradition I wish to explore.

understood. I am interested by the dilemma of surrendering to the absurd and still showing up for work tomorrow.

While, as stated above, Christianity is the religion that is referred to in these pages, I want to be clear that my way of presenting my themes not be understood as proselytizing. It is difficult, I admit, to discuss with enthusiastic seriousness the materials under consideration here without presenting a theologizing stance. But I have no attention of attaining converts or furthering a theological mission. At the very most what I hope to do in this thesis is to re-suggest that there may be a bigger difference and conflict between science and religion than is often supposed by our present culture.

But given that this variant of Christianity accomplishes its movements in a “negative” or retaliatory fashion against more popular and mainstream methods, it is difficult not to appear, even if the gesture is only in exposition, to be recommending this tradition over all others. This is not the place to espouse particular theological views but in order to fully depict the depths and reaches of this silent approach it is possible to confuse my articulations with overt recommendation. I will, in the pages that follow, be careful about my inflections.

## Methodology

In the following chapters I consider one primary text from the perspective of an idea or suggestion made by a secondary text. For instance, my chapter on Kierkegaard is enthused by a statement made by Roger Poole. My chapter on Heidegger owes many of its discoveries to problems that I had with Richard Rorty’s reading of same. (An exception to this reliance on secondary materials occurs in the chapter on Meister Eckhart. The selection I consider “About Disinterest” has not been the subject of many critical discussions, at least not in English.)

These readings are, I think, representative of a fascinating story about the way humbled men and women<sup>2</sup> have related themselves to their religious impulses in retaliation against epistemological claims of knowing. Each chapter, in its own way, explores the way that dependence on the manners and methods of thinking collapses but is still viewed as essentially necessary to bring one to that collapse. From the penitent Augustine to Johannes de Silentio's Abraham to anxious Heidegger to Eckhart's Mary, each chapter shares this depiction of a contemplative journey that ends in silence.

The primary readings discussed in the chapters are, roughly, equally spaced through history. This is fortunate in that it suggests to me that the theme that I am drawing out from these writings is non-contextual. Each author comes to it from a different period and epoch and certainly received thoroughly disparate contextual contributions to their character but each writer provides extraordinarily similar accounts of this principle. (This thesis could easily have included many more writers telling a similar story - from Homer to Max Frisch to Reynolds Price.) Thinking about the mooting of thinking does not seem to require a historical development in order to be conceived. It is quite possible that the recent context of contextualization will work in the opposite direction and destroy this negative possibility through its endless premises and promises of fulfilment as religiosity. My point is that in the history of thinking about man where you come from and how you speak may be invaluable but that these contexts are less relevant in considering the destruction of thought and speech. And it is also to say that a full acceptance of the Thomist model (or Thomist analogues) of Christianity necessarily deprives the whole tradition of a

---

<sup>2</sup>While none of the featured writers are women, the personage of Mary (from the story of Mary and Martha) is central to the thesis.

sympathetic consideration of the possibilities presented in these pages.

This thesis is influenced by a number of critical theories about the role of the reader/student and academic work which require some articulation. They are: the impossibility of analytic neutrality (introduced to me through the work of Charles Taylor in his writings against the behavioural sciences); the idea that all scholarship depends on literary and rhetorical qualities (which I have learned, especially, from Phillip Roth, the essays of Richard Rorty and the interviews of Michel Foucault); and the importance of what Roger Poole calls “wrong” readings. I would like to briefly explain each of these theoretical underpinnings.

Charles Taylor’s critique of epistemology in the social sciences (and his elaboration of engaged agency in the work of Martin Heidegger) has led me to the view that everything that we look at, and wish to look at, is touched by what we think is good (this good, for Taylor, does not necessarily carry metaphysical weight; it is simply that which we deem valuable for whatever reason). Therefore, what is of potential interest in our scientific or philosophical pursuits is not that which we think is being shown to us by a text, or a text analogue like nature, but the position of the me or you that is seeing. There can never be such a thing, in Taylor’s reckoning as a neutral perspective. What we choose to look at and how we do the looking reflect the glimmers of our desires and our own claims of what is important.<sup>3</sup>

I think that Taylor is absolutely right and as a result I have become suspicious of definitive

---

<sup>3</sup>Taylor’s writing on the subject of neutrality are many and interesting. Foremost among them are: “Neutrality in the University”, *Neutrality and Impartiality: The University and Political Commitment*, Alan Montefior, ed., (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975); “Political Theory and Practice”, *Social Theory and Political Practice*, C. Lloyd, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); “The Philosophy of the Social Sciences”, *Political Theory and Political Education*, Melvin Richter, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); *Philosophical Papers II: Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

statements of fact, be them about natural science, the history of philosophy, or literary theory. In considering the opinions of sources, primary or secondary, I am always interested in the position of the writer's gaze and of my own gaze in watching the writer.

I also do not believe that I can be neutral about this lack of neutrality. That there can be no statements of truth about things as they are, without recourse to a certain set of contextually loaded eyes, is to me self-evident. I can see how this theory can be used to defend the premise that a scholar must learn the context of the writer they are studying. But I do not believe that the process ends there and that thinking that in understanding the context of the writer that we can make a better approximation of a truth of the way things really are I will still be asking why it is we seek to know. When I read of Eliot's relationship to Lewes and how it effected her invention of *Daniel Deronda* I feel no great confidence or interest in believing that these statements of fact are true. I fear that the importance of context does not make context any more identifiable than the original perspective of truth. In other words, trying to find the context seems, to me, as impossible as finding the truth.

Second: the history of scholarship is not a history of detached spectators commenting on literature and nature without their own agendas. For instance I do not believe that Hobbes arrived at his principle of the law of nature through deduction but rather that his particular reckoning fit both a rhetorical and political strategy. I also believe that Rousseau arrived at an opposite opinion for the same reasons. In this way, I believe, (following some interesting work by Richard Rorty and Michel Foucault<sup>4</sup>) that supposed works of science and philosophy may be understood as

---

<sup>4</sup>Richard Rorty has written at great length on the relationship between literature and philosophy. See: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*



novels; that, for instance, in Hobbes' *Leviathan* we watch the terrified man in the state of nature befriend or come to terms with a mysterious image of power and there is a pressing tension as to how everything will come to pass. In understanding the world of science or philosophy in terms of literature we blur the line between fiction and non-fiction. I have tended to see this relationship in the opposite way, that non-fiction is fiction, but I am open to the perspective that privileges neither imaginary category.

The importance of this strategy to the thesis is that it underlies the manner in which I read and the degree of freedom I feel to persist in what I identify as my third theoretical basis - wrong readings.

Roger Poole has written an interesting book on Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. This book, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*<sup>5</sup>, introduced me to the premise that a student should, and for Poole this was one of Kierkegaard's central lessons, instead of being afraid of reading everything "wrong", be encouraged to do so. This corresponds with my discomfort in thinking that one can ever get to the heart of a scholarly matter, that there can be studies of, say, Eliot or Hobbes that can be understood as absolutely informative on the subject of *Adam Bede* or *De Cive*. I think that when Poole uses the word "wrong" that he does not really mean it. I believe that Poole does not think that there are such things as correct or incorrect readings.

---

*Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Michel Foucault has also discussed this subject and how his own works can be contrived as novels. See: *Language. Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>5</sup>See: Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

Not only is this liberating for a student who is brand new to many of these subjects and is restless with rules but it is also, if one is to believe John Stuart Mill, good for the discipline in that even the most eccentric of perspectives are defensible in the affront they pay to homogeneity and rigidity. I think that for Mill eccentricity was to be recommended for the way it commended truth. This is not, in my view, Poole's logic. Poole is supportive of "wrong" readings because he does not believe in "right" ones. And he finds alternative views interesting whether or not they are responsible to somebody else's notion of truth.

To sum up, this thesis is influenced by three theoretical strategies: that neutrality is impossible, that there is no true, clear distinction between the discovered and the imagined, and that it is acceptable, and even perhaps commendable, to interpret in ways that do not correspond with traditional interpretations or ways of interpreting. These three methods are reflected in this thesis in the way I approach my sources and my own writing. But I have not converted the freedom they propound into a licence to shirk academic responsibility.

I believe that when we write, we write the texts that *appear* crucial to us and that have not yet been satisfactorily written. A thesis like the one I am putting forth requires any number of subthemes or theses that are not and can not be overtly stated. There is a larger thesis at work here, and which may always be at work in any writing, and it is that of the event of the writing itself. And given that one of the major themes and motifs of this work is the demand of silence in such work, the event of the writing while not increasing in significance, is highlighted in a way that makes the illusion of authorial distance doubly deceptive. Thus the writing of a thesis on religious practice and how that works for and against the other aims of the thesis is a concurrent theme of this thesis. This theme demands that its author pay attention to the tricks that he uses to

move from the beginning to the end.

## Outline of Chapters

I have organized the chapters, with one exception, in chronological order. The exception is the last chapter on Meister Eckhart. This chapter closes the text for reasons that will be obvious upon reading. It would be aesthetically awkward to have presented more material after the extremely strong account of religious disinterest that Eckhart provides.

The following is a breakdown of the chapters:

### **Chapter One: “*Who Is Augustine Writing To?*”**

In this first chapter I consider Augustine’s scheme of an education directed towards the dismantling of the self that is educated. Through a careful reading of *On The Trinity* I present Augustine’s progression of the self moving from reason to a faith beyond reason. It is my contention that Augustine recognizes that the final truths of God are before and beyond anything that can be articulated in sound and that the *telos* of the human mind is to demonstrate its own inadequacy in relation to philosophical/religious truth. Connected to this central discussion is the relationship between education and confession and between confessing and describing.

### **Chapter Two: “*Kierkegaard’s Unreliable Narrator*”**

This chapter furthers the aims of the thesis as a whole by considering the absurdity of faith and its negative relationship to a universal ethic. This universal ethic, that all things must be understandable, challenges the essence of Christianity that Kierkegaard’s *De Silentio* recognizes in *Fear and Trembling*. I explore in detail the temptation of the ethical and how it pertains to faith and the context of this thesis. In addition to this argument I consider Kierkegaard’s use of a pseudonym and how this reflects on the project of writing about Christianity.

### **Chapter Three: “Heidegger’s Willful Question of Metaphysics”**

In this chapter I consider Martin Heidegger’s essay on “The Question of Metaphysics” as a proponent of a philosophical/theological silence beyond understanding and will. He called this silence “the nothing” and suggested that its existence could be glimpsed through one’s experience with an anxiety that did not focus on a particular object. Heidegger is useful to the thesis in two central ways. First, he offers an engaging discussion about the powerful nothing which lies before questions of being and ontology and to which philosophy must, in its forward movements, come back to. Second, it is, in my view, Heidegger’s problem with the human will in his depiction of the nothing which has led me to a more radical view of silence and to eventually see Heidegger as succumbing to the temptation of the ethical status of the situated self.

### **Chapter Four: “Boring Eckhart”**

The entire thesis is, in many ways, a reiteration of points made by Meister Eckhart in his short essay “About Disinterest”. I argue in this chapter that not only is this short tract central to the work of Eckhart but that it is central to Christianity. Eckhart’s view is that Christian faith requires that the suppliant not poison the working of their faith with the sediment of their own interest in the benefits of that faith. As a result, the Christian life is one completely removed from reflections of selfhood or interest in things of the world. From Eckhart’s work I dwell specifically on the principle of the “one choice” that Mary makes and Martha does not. I suggest that this theory of the one choice lies behind all non-analytic or dialectic philosophy and that concession, in the *name* of Christian observance, to it silences the history of philosophy of plurality.

It is my hope that at the end of these four brief chapters that the reader is able to imagine a dimension of truth that does not need him or her and that this dimension of truth, which is

unapproachable and uninteresting, will captivate.

## Acknowledgement

I want to take this opportunity to thank James Carter, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Elizabeth Pirnie and Corin Tucker for being invaluable resources and encouragements.

I would like to offer a special thanks to both Klaus Klostermaier and Dawne McCance. The former provided great support for the most radical elements of this thesis. The latter put up with me and helped me transform this thesis from 300+ unwieldy pages to the document that is presented here. Where the text flows, thank her, where it stumbles, blame me.

# Chapter One - Who Is Augustine Writing To?

The Baron made these speeches with a remorseless placidity very amazing to our hero, who had an innocent belief that a man's head may point out to him the shortcomings of his heart and make him ashamed of them.

- Henry James  
*Madame de Mauves*

(T)he word that sounds outwardly is the sign of the word that gives light inwardly; which latter has the greater claim to be called a word... For our word is so made in some way into an articulate sound by which it may be manifested to men's senses, as the Word of God was made flesh, by assuming flesh, that flesh in which itself also might be manifested to men's senses...whoever desires to arrive at any likeness, be it of what sort it may, of the Word of God, however in many respects unlike, must not regard the word of ours, that sounds in the ears, either *when it is uttered in an articulate sound or when it is silently thought*...We must go on then to the word of man, to the word of the rational animal, to the word of that image of God, that is *neither utterable in sound nor capable of being thought under the likeness of sound*...which precedes all the signs by which it is signified, and is begotten from that knowledge that continues in the mind, when that same knowledge is spoken inwardly.

- Saint Augustine  
*On the Trinity*

## Introduction

In this chapter I will present a structural outline of how Augustine conceives of thinking and contemplation in relationship to seeking God and a purity of heart. But I also hope to express the difficulties inherent in conceptions of God that are dependent on both human interaction and conceptions of self as physical beings capable of intellectual contemplation. In separating the thinking of man into two separate categories, beings of practical knowledge and beings of eternal contemplation, Augustine explicates an understanding of thinking and being that is neglected in the philosophy and theology of a scientific today.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Henri Marrou in his published lecture *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine Theology Of Human Values* discusses Augustine's unusual urgency to dispel with causes and effects and comfortable understandings in order to pursue God. I appreciate and share Marrou's impressed awe with Augustine's distance from current traditions. See: Henri Marrou, *The Resurrection and*

In order to demonstrate this difficult theme I will consider in some depth Augustine's articulation of four types of trinities present in the human that *aims to become being*. It is in exploring these four human trinities that I come to a consideration of a connection between God and man that can be ascertained, *if only in point*, through man.<sup>2</sup> It will be pertinent to my discussion to consider the relationship between blessedness and memory as Augustine portrays it. This is because memory is such an intimate quality, capable of strong emotional power even when

---

*Saint Augustine Theology Of Human Values*, translated by Maria Consolata (Philadelphia: Villanova Press, 1966), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Stock's excellent book *Augustine the Reader: Meditations, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* ("Reader" refers not to a collection of essays but to Augustine's praise of the art of reading) argues that "(t)he problem of *De Trinitate* is how to proceed from outer to inner words, from the words that we speak to the word of God." [See: Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditations, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 247.] But later he muses: "One purpose of the interlocking triads of *De Trinitate* 8 - 15 is to lead us in stages from the senses to the mind. Another is to teach us how far we can ascend through instruments of thinking. We discover that there are no direct links between worldly *scientia* and otherworldly *sapientia*, just as, in *Confessions* 11, there are none between time and eternity. The reflective individual can proceed to the highest realm of understanding only through faith. Can any role be played, therefore, by the images and memories that are encountered by the seeker after truth?" (See: Stock, 274.) The first rendering of Augustine's objectives presumes much in its articulation. It is presumed that there is a path from the word of man to the word of God. The second rendering leaves open the questionability of this path. The question that Stock ends with is the central question. It is my view that it is such a central question that it is impossible to answer without recourse to what the "reader" wants the answer to be. Stock wants to preserve reading as central to faith and so correspondingly answers the question in ways that I would not.

Harold Coward, of the University of Calgary, represents many Augustinian scholars in his simple approach to admitted Augustinian difficulties. For Coward, Augustine's agenda is easily summed up in a formula and the role of *De Trinitate* obvious. Augustine moves from the contemplation of the Greek, to the humility of the Jew, to the voice of Christ, and *De Trinitate*'s job is to justify the uniting of human spoken memory with the word of God. This progression appears sensible until one attempts to distinguish them and the singular delineation of *On The Trinity*'s aims is compelling until one reads it. See: Harold Coward, "Memory and Scripture in the Conversion of Augustine" in *Grace, Politics & Desire: Essays on Augustine*, edited by Hugo A. Meynell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 23, 25.

it is at most untrustworthy.<sup>3</sup>

It will remain, in this chapter, to consider the aesthetic component which I think is the most powerful of Augustine's ministering tools. It would be foolish to try and disconnect Augustine's views on aesthetics from his scheme of the relationship between thinking, being and God; the most compelling aspect of Augustine's communications about the beautiful and love is their beauty. Augustine's theory of love and how it relates to the self that loves, approaches and considers the most important questions that I need to address. While Augustine's philosophical value is multifarious, it is, I think, his thoughts on the relationship between love, blessedness, God, and the self which are the heart of his contemplated and contemplative discourses.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in light of all the perplexing arguments against the human touch on the divine and the aims of this thesis, I will consider the idea of speech and silence in Augustine's work. For Augustine, there is no great confidence that can be had by either human thought or speech for guidance in articulating or understanding the ways of God. The relationship between speech and silence is extended here into a discussion of knowledge and wisdom as they pertain to man's journey to Christ.

## Stages and Trinities

It is Augustine's contention, as suggested by, among many others, Robert Meagher, that there is a connection between the inner life of the human being and God.<sup>5</sup> Man, like the God he

---

<sup>3</sup>See: Coward, 25.

<sup>4</sup>For a provocative consideration of Augustine's rhetorical and aesthetic strategies, see: Stock, 211, 221.

<sup>5</sup>See: Robert E. Meagher, *An Introduction to Augustine* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 102. Meagher makes much of the use of the word "being". He does not



reads of in scripture, has a tri-partite structure and in considering the ways that I pursue God I am led back to a tripled understanding of the human being. What I discover is an understanding of the human as something that *approaches itself* as decipherable in accordance to a series of trinities.<sup>6</sup>

The first conception of this human trinity is: *mind, knowledge* (of mind), and *love*. Augustine writes:

But as there are two things (*duo quaedam*), the mind and the love of it, when it loves itself; so there are two things, the mind and the knowledge of it, when it knows itself, Therefore the mind itself, and the love of it, and the knowledge of it, are three things (*tria quaedam*), and these three are one; and when they are perfect they are equal.<sup>7</sup>

I begin with two things that quickly become three. I start with a mind and my love of that mind.

Given that the love of the mind must be in some sense separable from that mind I can derive a

---

understand this word in the generic sense of a non-qualifying addition to the word “human”. Rather it is a statement of what humans can hope to attain. Mostly we are human *becomings* striving after being. I am also indebted for Meagher’s collections of Augustinian text in thematic sections.

<sup>6</sup>I would like to introduce a counter-interpretation that is prevalent in the secondary readings. Stock, as representative of this community of interpreters (also see: Coward, 26; Edmund Hill, “St. Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: The Doctrinal Significance of its Structure”, *REA* 17 (1973), 281-2; Robert O’Connell, “Action and Contemplation”, *Markus* (1972), 47-50) states that Augustine’s view is that one learns of the trinities by the uniting of two paths: the reading of scripture and through mental cognition, and that this can only be done by someone who reads and is able to recall thoughts while following the words on a page. (See: Stock, 244.) It is my view that this understanding should not be especially privileged and should be relegated to the status of a stage. I will return to this discussion.

<sup>7</sup>See: Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 9.4.4. In order to avoid confusion I will be identifying the primary sources by the method used above: Title, Book #, Section #, Line #.. I have used many sources including, when access to others was impossible, those downloaded from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library internet site provided through Wheaton College (see: <http://www.ccel.org>) In order to deal with potential problems of translation in readers more versed than I, I have quoted generously.

third entity, knowledge of that mind provided by love. And there is a correlation between knowing and loving in that knowing my mind, fully, I also love my mind. Importantly, these three properties can not be separated from each other. The mind without a love directed towards it is not a relevant gauge of anything. When the relationship between mind, knowledge of mind and love is perfect, as Augustine says, all the parts are equal. There is, then, no drawable distinction between the mind, knowledge of it, and love.

Augustine is aware that the mind is also connected, (to even be noticed as a force worthy of love), to a world of context and language. It is language that governs my ability to have a mind.<sup>8</sup> It is words that decipher or prioritize the deliveries of my senses. Knowledge, even internal, introspective knowledge, is known to us through words. Therefore this first trinity must be expanded before it is complete. The first trinity of man is settled as: *mind, words, love*. In Augustine's words:

Now a word is born, when, being thought out, it pleases us either to the effect of sinning, or to that of doing right. Therefore love, as it were a mean, conjoins our word and the mind from which it is conceived, and without any confusion binds itself as a third with them, in an incorporeal embrace.<sup>9</sup>

This first trinity, under Augustine's mind and pen, evolves into a second trinity. This trinity consists of mind, the knowledge of the seeker, and the love of the seeker:

---

<sup>8</sup>Stock raises the interesting point that in Augustine one speaks of the self, because it is impossible to speak of the mind, and that this speaking of self can be confused as the mind. (See: Stock, 213.)

<sup>9</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 9.8.13. Instead of wondering about what sort of trinity this is, and how it is I can know with any sort of divine appreciation whether the words I wrangle represent the good or the bad let me show where the discussion is heading. The existence of the early trinities do not depend on truthfulness for their existence or justification. Asking questions of verification at early stages would be, in this case, nothing but a philosophical foible.

Or when it loves to know itself, does it love, not itself, which it does not yet know, but the very act of knowing; and feel the more annoyed that itself is wanting to its own knowledge wherewith it wishes to embrace all things? And it knows what it is to know; and whilst it loves this, which knows, desires also to know itself.

Whereby, then, does it know its own knowing, if it does not know itself? For it knows that it knows other things, but that it does not know itself; for it is from hence that it knows also what knowing is. In what way, then, does that which does not know itself, know itself as knowing anything? For it does not know that some other mind knows, but that itself does so. Therefore it knows itself. Further, when it seeks to know itself, it knows itself now as seeking. Therefore again it knows itself. And hence it cannot altogether not know itself, when certainly it does so far know itself as that it knows itself as not knowing itself. But if it does not know itself not to know itself, then it does not seek to know itself. And therefore, in the very fact that it seeks itself, it is clearly convicted of being more known to itself than unknown. For it knows itself as seeking and as not knowing itself, in that it seeks to know itself.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>See: Ibid, 10.3.5. Gerard O'Daly in his book *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* comments:

(T)he desire for self-knowledge is a natural and universal human desire. The link between knowledge and love which is present in all knowledge, or, rather, in all striving after knowledge, is particularly obvious in introspection. One cannot love, or long for, that of which one is totally ignorant. There can, of course, be love through hearsay: X's reputation for beauty may make X, though unknown, desirable. But in this case one knows the genus prior to any knowledge of the instance. (See: O'Daly, 209.)

There is something not quite right about this delineation. O'Daly considers the relationship, in what he thinks a gesture of Augustinian faith, of knowledge and love through the presence of knowledge. I think that this is backwards and believe, rather, that claims to know are dependant on the desire to love (if not actually love). Let me briefly consider O'Daly's interpretation. Let me ignore the universalist, at least in being universally problematic, claim that we all desire self-knowledge as irrelevant to the other points being made here. Let me instead consider that I must know, at least in the form of the genus, that which I love. I can accept that I do love things that I think that I know. But I can add to this claim the very real possibility that I love things I know nothing of. In loving the known I am loving in a sensible way. It is also possible to love things without knowing why. It is possible to have a vague love of say, children, or nature, or of things and essences unstatable. It is also possible to be wrong about that which I think I know and love, discover my error without mending it, and continue to love. I cannot claim to know, in any serious or important way, my wife. My inability to make a claim of knowing is based on making previous claims and being wrong. I am almost universally wrong in my understandings of other people. But this realization of error in no way tempers my love. My love, eventually or always, is based on something quite different than knowledge and the abstraction that is to underlie my love is opaque and uninteresting to me. But it has not always been uninteresting. And at those times

This appears to be very similar to the first trinity but it is different in subtle ways. Mind, knowledge and love have exposed themselves as built on ambiguity. What is important in the human *as being* is not knowing but seeking. The important knowledge to acknowledge is the seeking of knowledge and not the actual possession of fact. The mind is not based on possession but pursuit. This sounds uncomfortably close to a celebration of an active mind and not about a mind absent in the tranquillity of the oneness of knowing. But to suggest this would be to confuse a stage as an end.<sup>11</sup> The act of seeking is not the end of the human being but it does lead to the next trinity in the continuum.

In contemplating and loving the mind as the method of knowing oneself as a seeker I am led to see that, given that I have no absolute knowledge<sup>12</sup> of what it is I am pursuing, I am being led by something which I do not know. To give ourselves over to this seeking is to have a faith that there is something from which I am being propelled and to something which I return. Thus

---

my seeking of knowledge has been the result of my love. My desire to know has always been fuelled by the love of the object under inspection or through a love of myself that wishes protection from an object. I am often wrong about this self-understanding and what it sees as necessary for self-protection. Interest, which is at least a mild form of love, is always, as John Bayley remarked, a way of pointing back at myself. What I am interested in, and seek knowledge of, is then a reflection of my own love. (I can also love things that I know I should hate. And as such I can love things, and in certain ways, that I cannot make sense of.) What does this mean for loving God or loving love. If I was to declare my loving intentions for either of these two “things”, my listener would be best advised to recognize that I would not know precisely what I was talking about. She would also be advised to realize that my declarations would be both sincere and meaningless.

I am hoping that my comments here, while removed from O’Daly’s analytic understanding, communicate something of the spirit and methodology of Augustine.

<sup>11</sup>This confusion is present in the desire to preserve components of initial trinities as they are replaced.

<sup>12</sup>While risking the ire of positivists, I would like to add that without absolute knowledge of the metaphysics of man there can be no such thing as a partial knowledge.

the third trinity of *holding faith, contemplating faith, and the loving of faith*. Augustine writes:

Wherefore since, as it is written, 'While we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight;' undoubtedly, so long as the just man lives by faith, howsoever he lives according to the inner man, although he aims at truth and reaches on to things eternal by this same temporal faith, nevertheless in the holding, contemplating, and loving this temporal faith, we have not yet reached such a trinity as is to be called an image of God; lest that should seem to be constituted in things temporal which ought to be so in things eternal.<sup>13</sup>

This is a confusing and difficult passage. The faith that necessarily governs the relationship I have as a seeker of knowledge and as a being is also what distinguishes us from actually being in the image of God. This is interesting. My ability to seek is given to us through faith. Faith is that which allows me to have belief and it is also, through the discovery of the essence of my seeking, that in which I believe.<sup>14</sup> But in being entirely based on the faith of the truth of God I am not yet truly in the image of God as I am only *believing* in the identity and am not one in *knowing* the identity.

I should not, though, be disappointed by this third trinity of faith for it leads us to the fourth trinity. It is through an understanding and knowing of faith that the mind is purified. The purified mind exists in the fourth trinity of *holding, beholding, and loving the face of God*.

Augustine clarifies:

This trinity, then, of the mind is not therefore the image of God, because the mind remembers itself, and understands and loves itself; but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made. And in so doing it is

---

<sup>13</sup>See: Ibid, 14.2.4.

<sup>14</sup>See: Ibid, 13.1.1. "(W)e have done enough to distinguish the office of the rational mind in temporal things, wherein not only our knowing but our action is concerned, from the more excellent office of the same mind, which is employed in contemplating eternal things, and is limited to knowing alone." Stock adds: we know the self exists but we do not know what the self is. (See: Stock, 207.)

made wise itself. But if it does not do so, even when it remembers, understands, and loves itself, then it is foolish. Let it then remember its God, after whose image it is made, and let it understand and love Him. Or to say the same thing more briefly, let it worship God, who is not made, by whom because itself was made, it is capable and can be partaker of Him; wherefore it is written, 'Behold, the worship of God, that is wisdom.'<sup>15</sup>

It is through contemplating God as the sole object that I am aligned in the image of God.<sup>16</sup> I seek to become one with the One. This is not done through seeking my own self but I am led to the pursuit of the One through this pursuit of the self. From the mind, knowledge, and love, as they pertain to self, I end up at remembering, seeing, and loving, as they pertain to God.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>See: *Ibid*, 14.12.15.

<sup>16</sup>For Stock, and many others, this "contemplating" is identical with reading scripture with the appropriate will. But Stock also writes: "The 'enjoyment' that is unique to the trinity is concealed within the mind, *just as*, for the exegete, it is concealed in scripture." (See: Stock, 245. Italics mine.) The words 'just as' demonstrate a shift that, I think, Stock should be more careful about making. If it is the case that the enjoyment is placed in the mind why would there be any need for reading? Could I not pursue the enjoyment through contemplation? And how am I going to use Augustine to defend the primacy of reading when I realize that there is nothing that I can do on my own to bring me closer to God?

<sup>17</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 15.20.39. "We have reasoned also from the creature which God made, and, as far as we could, have warned those who demand a reason on such subjects to behold and understand His invisible things, so far as they could, by those things which are made? and especially by the rational or intellectual creature which is made after the image of God; through which glass, so to say, they might discern as far as they could, if they could, the Trinity which is God, in our own memory, understanding, will. Which three things, if any one intelligently regards as by nature divinely appointed in his own mind, and remembers by memory, contemplates by understanding, embraces by love, how great a thing that is in the mind, whereby even the eternal and unchangeable nature can be recollected, beheld, desired, doubtless that man finds an image of that highest Trinity. And he Ought to refer the whole of his life to the remembering, seeing, loving that highest Trinity, in order that he may recollect, contemplate, be delighted by it. But I have warned him, so far as seemed sufficient, that he must not so compare this image thus wrought by that Trinity, and by his own fault changed for the worse, to that same Trinity as to think it in all points like to it, but rather that he should discern in that likeness, of whatever sort it be, a great unlikeness also." This appears to be more optimistic for the modern, thinking man than it is or could be. A known or knowable separation between likeness and unlikeness is difficult. The moment the *like* is put into the language of the thought I am dealing

Augustine's inspection of the self leads us to understand the duality of self as provoked by and grounded in the singular unity of God. The Trinitarian nature of God shows us how parts are merged into the one. This allows us to correspond my own tri-partite nature into the fold of Christ. This is interesting as it bridges the human becoming and the human being (to steal from Meagher's articulation).

I would like to now consider what it means to understand this association between these two states of existing as a human. This first part has been about demonstrating the *meaningfulness* of man's journey through the trinities of existence which lead from false senses of *becoming* to a disappearance in *being*. The second part is about what a person is to do about this.

## The Human Self in Augustine

Augustine draws a strong distinction between two places of living (inside and outside of God). This division is connected to temporality. The human lives his life in time. I am stuck in the middle of creating this life in time and that which is given to us by changeless eternity. I am caught between the eternal and that which temporality suggests I can alter. As I have shown Augustine to suggest, I begin with the tri-partite arrangement of mind, knowledge of mind, and love. I can add to my understanding of this trinity by considering the Augustinian idea that "a

---

with the *unlike*. As Carol Harrison, in her wonderful book *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* puts it: "Language, so to speak, forms a veil which has fallen over man's prelapsarian, silent, intuitive, inner conception of truth, to render him dark to himself and to his neighbors." (See: Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], 55.) In this darkness of articulated or thought consciousness it is impossible to discern the like from the unlike. Thus the distinction is beyond the tangible self and is made, not by you as a contextually bound human, but by the you that is correlated with God, i.e. by the you that you would not recognize or know.

person becomes what it thinks about with love.”<sup>18</sup> This is a very important and powerful reflection. What I love in my being is connected to what we will. I will towards that which I love.

Augustine confesses:

With my external senses I have viewed the world as I was able and have noticed the life which my body derives from me and from these senses of mine. From that stage I advanced inwardly into the recesses of my memory -- the manifold chambers of my mind, marvellously full of unmeasured wealth. And I reflected on this and was afraid, and could understand none of these things without thee and found thee to be none of them.<sup>19</sup>

On my own I am incapable of discovering the will of God that will make sense of the self that seeks.<sup>20</sup> This is important for what I want to get at in this chapter. Without God, Augustine is at a loss to say who he is:

---

<sup>18</sup>See: Ibid, 10.5.7. Plotinus describes this as the thinker and the thought being one. See: *The Enneads*, 133.

<sup>19</sup>See: Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.40.65.

<sup>20</sup>For affirming support, see:

From the moment of first self-consciousness to the mental ascent at Ostia, the Augustine who believes he is the source of his actions attempts to find the solution to his difficulties through rational analysis. For the convert to philosophy, the Manichaen enthusiast, and the professor of rhetoric, there is no higher authority. The beginnings of serious doubts about rationalism coincide with the influence of Ambrose. Each subsequent episode - the debate over neo-platonism, the conversion to the religious life, the dialogues at Cassiciacum, and his baptism - are steps away from the earlier position. After Ostia and in books 10 - 13 (*The Confessions*), Augustine abandons reason as his principal guide to self-understanding. The bishop knows that he is just an actor in his narrative; he cannot pretend to be outside of it, unaffected by its events. If his life has an author and an authority, they must be located beyond the reason's limits, as are the sources of his ethical imperatives. (See: Stock, 212.)



This is the reason for my love of griefs: that they would not probe into me too deeply (for I did not love to suffer in myself such things as I loved to look at), and they were the sort of grief which came from hearing those fictions, which affected only the surface of my emotion. Still, just as if they had been poisoned fingernails, their scratching was followed by inflammation, swelling, putrefaction, and corruption. Such was my life! But was it life, O my God?<sup>21</sup>

The lived life can be a lie. It can be this if it is the result of a self-willed and self-directed love.<sup>22</sup>

This problem of the self-willed and self-directed love that governs a life can be mended if I recognize through reflection that I must live according to my nature. I can begin my liberation in recognizing my place in the hierarchy of being.<sup>23</sup> If I am to do this I will be able to bridge the gap between the pride of thinking of oneself and the knowledge of where one belongs.<sup>24</sup> If I can

---

<sup>21</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 3.2.4. For an extremely interesting and agreeable correlation between this statement and Greek tragedy, see: William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 36.

<sup>22</sup>And thus it is necessary, in one's reading, to have the right will or else one will read away from the truth of the self, even if the source is scripture. But this does not yet establish the primacy of reading in the religious life. Life as a lie is a fiction, a story in words, which is recreated subjectively in the imagination of the individual person. It is what happens, in Augustine's rhetoric, to the person whose story is imagined to be other than God's plot. See: Stock, 213.

<sup>23</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 10.5.7. "Why therefore is it enjoined upon it, that it should know itself? I suppose, in order that, it may consider itself, and live according to its own nature; that is, seek to be regulated according to its own nature, viz., under Him to whom it ought to be subject, and above those things to which it is to be preferred; under Him by whom it ought to be ruled, above those things which it ought to rule."

Plotinus defines a similar hierarchy of being thus: (in descending order) The One and the Good, Intellectual Principle, Primal Thinker, Human Soul. See: *The Enneads*, 132. Plotinus shows that the understanding of this progression works from the top down. The One, as the hierarchy is a part of the one, understands the progression. An entity further down the ladder is not capable of understanding the entirety of the structure in terms of its Truth.

<sup>24</sup>See: *Ibid*, 10.5.7. "So, whereas it is one thing not to know oneself, and another not to think of oneself (for we do not say of the man that is skilled in much learning, that he is ignorant of grammar, when he is only not thinking of it, because he is thinking at the time of the art of

realize this I will be able to let my mind reflect on where my will is to properly head. This is the step between the second and third trinitities of the human self; the mind is on its way towards God when knowledge of self is no longer confident and it begins anew a seeking of that self. It is through this knowing of the mind as seeking that the reality of the mind as unknowing becomes grasped and is replaced by a mind that knows it is seeking.<sup>25</sup>

It is this juncture in one's self inspection and correction that the idea of the whole becomes a question as the self becomes a question to the self. I am led to the realization, by the opening made by this question, that I cannot be without God. I receive this understanding through the grace of blessing (which must be why it lacks clarity on the page). It is through the denunciation of the self outside of God that leads to a self within God.<sup>26</sup> I should not direct my

---

medicine);--whereas, then, I say it is one thing not to know oneself, and another not to think of oneself, such is the strength of love, that the mind draws in with itself those things which it has long thought of with love, and has grown into them by the close adherence of diligent study, even when it returns in some way to think of itself." O'Daly importantly adds: "Augustine evidently wishes to keep this question of self-knowledge in an experiential sense distinct from the notion of the mind's self-reflexion, a Neo-Platonic doctrine to which he subscribes." (See: O'Daly, 150. Also for further corroboration with direct reference to Plotinus, see: Gerard O'Daly, "Memory in Plotinus and Two Early Texts of St. Augustine", *Studia Patristica* 14, 117, p 462.)

<sup>25</sup>See: Ibid, 10.3.5. "Further, when it seeks to know itself, it knows itself now as seeking. Therefore again it knows itself. And hence it cannot altogether not know itself, when certainly it does so far know itself as that it knows itself as not knowing itself. But if it does not know itself not to know itself, then it does not seek to know itself. And therefore, in the very fact that it seeks itself, it is clearly convicted of being more known to itself than unknown. For it knows itself as seeking and as not knowing itself, in that it seeks to know itself." !

<sup>26</sup>Plotinus also writes of this recognition of my own impotence and that I can not be competent on my own. (See: *The Enneads*, 147.) He is, throughout the tractate on Intellectual Beauty, much more careful than Augustine that people do not disparage their own bodies too much. We are not to confuse the human soul, as Plotinus' hierarchy attests, with the Soul but we are not to understand this as a thorough dismissal of the human soul. It is my ticket to the Soul even though the essential Soul has no need of it. Our lives are a poor copy but this copy is something. (See: *The Enneads*, 138-9.) So Plotinus also warns that we should not turn these

wills in the direction of self-creation. I must recognize my weakness outside of God.<sup>27</sup>

Many of us mistakenly place mind above all else in the universe. I must admit that as long as I do not know my end, I do not know what a human *being* is and that man has, still, no power over death.<sup>28</sup> These are the realizations that I must make and in making them give my being over to a faith in Christ which will bring me into His image.

But those who, by being reminded, are turned to the Lord from that deformity whereby they were through worldly lusts conformed to this world, are formed anew from the world, when they hearken to the apostle, saying, 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye formed again in the renewing of your mind;' that that image may begin to be formed again by Him by whom it had been formed at

---

feelings of self-doubt into self or world loathing. Despising the world, in Plotinus, is not the way to the One. When we are critical of that which is related to the Supreme, our knowledge becomes just words. This is because our language, our context, our path, blocked as it may be is connected to the hierarchy which is not made from, but is not, the One. We are not to deny the body, but continue to look past it. (See: *The Enneads*, 148-9.)

<sup>27</sup>Dionysus the Areopagite also touches upon this theme. In *The Mystical Theology*, Dionysus recommends that I negate the self in order to open the self to the darkness. He also warns that people will pretend to know who it was that made the darkness that the surrendering of such knowledge exposes. See: Dionysus the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*, translated by C.E. Rolt (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920), 192.

Consider Stock's comment (especially in light of his other comments on the privileging of reading): "Far from completing his narrative, his activity as a reader is a witness to his inability to reach a point of closure." See: Stock, 233.

<sup>28</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 13.13.17. "For how great can be the power of mortals? Therefore let mortals cleave to righteousness; power will be given to immortals. And compared to this, the power, how great soever, of those men who are called powerful on earth, is found to be ridiculous weakness, and a pitfall is dug there for the sinner, where the wicked seem to be most powerful. And the righteous man says in his song, 'Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law: that Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance, until righteousness return unto judgment, and all who follow it are upright in heart.'" The seeming optimism here can also be read as impossible for man outside of God, and thus still man, to achieve. Righteousness, or the correct attitude towards ethics, is the best one can accomplish on earth. But in no way is this accomplishment to be considered as conducive to union with God. Therefore, obedience is not contemplation or surrender.

first.<sup>29</sup>

I would like to consider the idea of blessedness which allows the individual to move from this point, where the self disintegrates, into a faith in Christ which redefines the self. Augustine often writes of being compelled towards, (and of knowing that he is), seeking the ultimate good. He often speaks of knowing, inherently, the direction in which I should head. The idea that I have the blessing of Christ inside of my memories to begin with, “ingested with my mother’s milk”<sup>30</sup>, is, as I try to further understand the relationship between the thinking man and his God, the problematic focus of the next section of this chapter. It is at this point that I must consider whether surrendered man bears any resemblance to the man who is surrendering.

## Memory and Blessedness

Augustine believed that the essence of God was already contained within me. Augustine believed that the name of Christ was part of who I am. To have certainty of God is only possible when I exist in the frame of eternity, stuck in temporality all I can possess is the memory of this certainty. This memory is not immediately apparent to me. It is discoverable through seeking purity of the heart.<sup>31</sup>

Conveniently, that which propels me to seek a purity of heart is also inside of me, as is the guide of the conscience. Famously, Augustine writes of man always knowing if his mind is after

---

<sup>29</sup>See: Ibid, 14.16.22.

<sup>30</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 3.4.8. For Mallard this means that the most important lessons for Augustine were not from philosophy or Cicero but from Monica, his mother. I like this interpretation not because I believe it but because of the way it adequately calls into question the position of reading in Augustine’s scheme. See: Mallard, 41,44.

<sup>31</sup>See: Ibid, 8.1.1.

the true and good thing. He states:

Wherefore since the mind, when it seeks to know what mind is, knows that it seeks itself, certainly it knows that itself is a mind. Furthermore, if it knows this in itself, that it is a mind, and a whole mind, then it knows itself as a whole. But suppose it did not know itself to be a mind, but in seeking itself only knew that it did seek itself. For so, too, it may possibly seek one thing for another, if it does not know this: but that it may not seek one thing for another, without doubt it knows what it seeks. But if it knows what it seeks, and seeks itself, then certainly it knows itself.<sup>32</sup>

The human mind knows enough, *a priori*, to know to seek itself in its own fullness.

The road back to the purity of heart which is God is not entirely paved. The mind is imperfect because it is forgetful. A forgetful mind is one that believes it is, itself, the result of the amassing of its own awareness and accomplishment. A forgetful mind is one that does not believe that it begins in memory.<sup>33</sup> It is the fragile logic that realized the first human trinity which will also show us the power of memory.

And since he was present to himself, he could not possibly remember himself, unless memory pertained to things present. And, therefore, as that is called memory in things past which makes it possible to recall and remember them; so in a thing present, as the mind is to itself, that is not unreasonably to be called memory, which makes the mind at hand to itself, so that it can be understood by its own thought, and then both be joined together by love of itself.<sup>34</sup>

The knowledge one has of their mind is contained, then, in memory. It is this memory that

---

<sup>32</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 10.4.6.

<sup>33</sup>But, according to Stock, the lie of a life is also tempted to embrace memory as a conduit to the past rather than a guide to the future. To connect memory to the past is to connect it to your own moments, to derive it for the future is to connect it to one's aim in God. Memory, then, is also a way of lying. (See: Stock, 225.) Coward remembers that even though our memories can be contaminated by the mind, there still remains in it the original blueprinted image placed by God. (See: Coward, 24.)

<sup>34</sup>See: *On The Trinity*, 14.11.14.

I am drawn to in love. This relationship is governed by a blessedness that is both the end of human hope and the beginning in which that hope is ignited. This blessedness can be described as the human “being” becoming the **being**.<sup>35</sup> This process entails recognizing that which I have never seen.<sup>36</sup>

What am I to do? How is this to be accomplished? How can I find the happiness of the

---

<sup>35</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 10.17.26. “So great is the power of memory, so great the power of life in man whose life is mortal! What, then, shall I do, O thou my true life, my God? I will pass even beyond this power of mine that is called memory -- I will pass beyond it, that I may come to thee, O lovely Light. And what art thou saying to me? See, I soar by my mind toward thee, who remainest above me. I will also pass beyond this power of mine that is called memory, desiring to reach thee where thou canst be reached, and wishing to cleave to thee where it is possible to cleave to thee. For even beasts and birds possess memory, or else they could never find their lairs and nests again, nor display many other things they know and do by habit. Indeed, they could not even form their habits except by their memories. I will therefore pass even beyond memory that I may reach Him who has differentiated me from the four-footed beasts and the fowls of the air by making me a wiser creature. Thus I will pass beyond memory; but where shall I find thee, who art the true Good and the steadfast Sweetness? But where shall I find thee? If I find thee without memory, then I shall have no memory of thee; and how could I find thee at all, if I do not remember thee?”

Vernon Bourke, in his book *Augustine's Love of Wisdom*, argues that this passage demonstrates Augustine's committed step to go beyond human memory and connect it to God. He writes: “This is one of Augustine's many efforts to transcend ordinary human experience and ordinary objects of study.” (See: Vernon Bourke, *Augustine's Love of Wisdom* [West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1992], 170.)

Gerard O'Daly also recognizes how extraordinary this passage is. He writes: “We shall, he asserts, retain in the memory the contents of our temporal religious faith; however, vision of the truth will have superseded this faith, and the latter will be recalled as something belonging to the past, just like other memories of our previous life...” (See: O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 150-1.) Again, I think that O'Daly's comment is interesting and telling but misleading. First, there is an irony present here that O'Daly ignores. If there is a correlation to be found between the memories of our faith now superseded by the truth and our other memories (and how they work to construct a self-image) it is one that reduces memory to an inconsequence. O'Daly has the Platonic philosopher standing in the sun reminiscing about the images in the cave.

<sup>36</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 10.18.27. O'Daly and Stock agree that the unchangeable is transitory to the human mind and that the memory is incapable of displaying the soul. See: O'Daly, 137; Stock, 211.

blessed life? Is this nonsense? Augustine writes:

How, then, do I seek Thee, O Lord? For when I seek Thee, my God, I seek a happy life. 'I will seek Thee, that my soul may live.' For my body liveth by my soul, and my soul liveth by Thee. How, then, do I seek a happy life, seeing that it is not mine till I can say, "It is enough!" in that place where I ought to say it? How do I seek it? Is it by remembrance, as though I had forgotten it, knowing too that I had forgotten it? Or, longing to learn it as a thing unknown, which either I had never known, or had so forgotten it as not even to remember that I had forgotten it?<sup>37</sup>

The answer to these questions is uniformly yes. I seek happiness because it is at the center of my being. It is what everyone seeks because it is the center of everyone's being and is what all of us seek to will.<sup>38</sup>

The inherent presence of God's blessed blueprint for being has, as one might expect, tremendous effects. It is that which fuels my pursuit up the ladder of human trinities. When I speak, and judge what I say, I do so from the perspective of a mind that knows when it is being true; my mind knows when it speaks for the eternal and when it speaks for the temporal. It also knows that I must seek to speak from the former in argument against the latter. When I do this I am speaking from the memory of my heart to my mind.<sup>39</sup> Also the faith of the third trinity is

---

<sup>37</sup>See: Ibid, 10.20.29.

<sup>38</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 13.2.5., 13.3.6., 13.20.25.

<sup>39</sup>See: Ibid, 15.10.19. O'Daly points out that it is easier to approach God than the Platonic Forms of my existence. If this is to be agreed with, I must add that it is because in the former God does the work for me and in the latter there is no work to be done. See: O'Daly, 213.

Stock articulates a very Kierkegaardian paradox at work here: "In 'forgetfulness,' therefore, he has an example of a more general paradox of self-knowledge. He is unable to comprehend the force of his memory because he is unable to get outside the boundary of his mind; yet he is not able to 'speak' himself without it, since the knowledge that he has of himself is contained in his mind. If he finds God outside his memory, he will not be able to claim that he has a memory of God. Yet how is he to find him, if he does not remember him?" (See: Stock, 220.)

I think that these are pertinent questions only if we think that Augustine's view must

verified to the self by its concurrence with what memory recalls. Faith in the divinity of God is always present to us in memory.<sup>40</sup> If I am able to evoke the truths of the eternal images I can then see the mind as the image of God.<sup>41</sup>

This is very clever. Through the use of the trinities of human perception and the glue of memory, which first shows myself to myself, I am logically led to a view of the self, entwined with faith in God, which becomes the image, if not the actuality, of God.

I have tried to show the importance of the understanding of the human mind as the image of God which is delivered to the self through memory. Before I can consider how little Augustine has to actually say about the religious experience of man it remains for me to discuss how the relationship between love and beauty is crucial to the Augustinian formulation of how I inevitably pursue the One.<sup>42</sup>

## Love

---

return to the being as thinker and conceiver. It is my contention that Augustine outlines this procedure so that people like Stock will ask such questions and be dissatisfied with the best answers. I am still uncertain whether Augustine is correct (or even if he thinks this) that I must pursue all the wrong ends to find the one path which I will never walk down on my power.

<sup>40</sup>See: Ibid, 14.6.8.

<sup>41</sup>See: Ibid, 14.12.16.

<sup>42</sup> Plotinus, in the *Ennead* 5.8 “On the Intellectual Beauty”, makes a number of statements that can be seen in Augustine’s writings. What I see as beautiful is derivative of the full beauty of the One. The Idea that is behind the One must be beautiful for this is where beauty must begin. The true beauty cannot be seen by mortal eyes. Because of this I run towards and plant my love on the outer, facsimile beauty. (See: *The Enneads*, 423.) The greatest of all beauties is in the wisdom of the soul connected with the mind. To see it one must avoid believing in the appearance of beauty on the outside. It is the beauty inside the mind which will show us. (See: Ibid.) I am to admire the beauty of the Divine Idea not **just** its earthly image. I should not denigrate the image but recognize that it is only, but is, a trace. (See: Ibid, 429.)



Augustine argues that there are two kinds of love. There is the kind that cares for that which cannot be possessed, the other craves that which can be, albeit temporarily, owned. Delight in the former is superior to desire of the latter.<sup>43</sup>

What I love destines me. “The body by its own weight gravitates towards its own place. Weight goes not downward only, but to its own place. Fire tends upwards, a stone downwards... My weight is my love; by it am I borne whither soever I am borne.<sup>44</sup> How am I to decide what it is that I am supposed to love? How am I able to tell that which feels very right from that which is right? There is not much that I should love with depth. I will not find God in my loves of the earth. I will not see Him in the laughter of my child, I will not see Him in the red sunrise that comes up off my lake. Augustine illustrates:

And what is this? I asked the earth; and it answered, “I am not He;” and whatsoever are therein made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the creeping things that lived, and they replied, “We are not thy God, seek higher than we.” I asked the breezy air, and the universal air with its inhabitants answered, “Anaximenes was deceived, I am not God.” I asked the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars: “Neither,” say they, “are we the God whom thou seekest.” And I answered unto all these things which stand about the door of my flesh, “Ye have told me concerning my God, that ye are not He; tell me something about Him.” And with a loud voice they exclaimed, “He made us.” My questioning was my observing of them; and their beauty was their reply? And I directed my thoughts to myself, and said, “Who art thou?” And I answered, “A man.” And lo, in me there appear both body and soul, the one without, the other within.<sup>45</sup>

I am not to love what stands outside or inside my door, nor that which I can see with my eye. I am not to love what is known but what I believe outside of what is known in the temporal

---

<sup>43</sup>See: Augustine, *On Music*, 6.11.29.

<sup>44</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 13.9.29.

<sup>45</sup>See: *Ibid*, 10.6.9.

world.<sup>46</sup> I should long to love my own conversion to Christ through the long loving road of the trinities. This conversion which I can know to wish for is only, finally, accomplished by a granted and unprovokable grace. “He, then, who is day by day renewed by making progress in the knowledge of God, and in righteousness and true holiness, transfers his love from things temporal to things eternal, from things visible to things intelligible, from things carnal to things spiritual; and diligently perseveres in bridling and lessening his desire for the former, and in binding himself by love to the latter. And he does this in proportion as he is helped by God.”<sup>47</sup> I do this in proportion to the help I receive from God. Thus the beauty and lovely sadness of Augustine’s cry: *let me love You*.<sup>48</sup> This is the best that man can muster - the hope of doing something that he cannot do, and that if done extinguishes him like Oedipus in his final moment.

I can, as Dionysus wrote, bring myself to the darkness but I cannot force the hand of God to show me the light. All I can do is delight in the possibility of its radiance and be prepared to turn my heads and gaze so to see it shine. The danger is turning this impotence into a plan; turning humility into gestures of piety I can be proud of. I turn my attentions to the method and make all its points a conclusion rather than a blind and vacant inevitability.

I turn my attention now to the final component, and important for my purposes, of

---

<sup>46</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 8.4.6. O’Daly assists in exposing a potential trouble (a trouble that this trouble seeks to tweak) in Augustine: “Yet in other senses God is unknowable, for he is truth, the Good, of which we have an ‘impressed concept’.” (See: O’Daly, 214.) O’Daly is absolutely right if I am to talk about this subject. I will be unable to remove myself from the terms of my ‘impressed concept.’ Fortunately, despite the controversial aspects of this claim, Augustine does not necessarily fall into this trap.

<sup>47</sup>See: *Ibid*, 14.17.23.

<sup>48</sup>See: *Ibid*, 15.28.51.

Augustine's peculiar matrix.

## Speech

Augustine's own conversion to Christianity is famously provoked, as he notes, by the call of a child's voice demanding that he take up and read:

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; take up and read." Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in whilst the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." And by such oracle was he forthwith converted unto Thee. So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell...<sup>49</sup>

There is an interesting dichotomy presented to the reader in this passage. I am shown, explicitly, that Augustine desired that the scriptural text *speak* to him. But I am also told, again with unnecessary explicitness, that he reads in silence. Is there a tension being exposed here between the importance of speech and silence? Or is it more the case that there is a relationship between speech and silence that is connected to my pursuit of a purity of heart? The heart of this chapter

---

<sup>49</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 8.12.29. Mallard stresses that this moment of 'grace', if you will, must be contextualized and that moments of grace demand landscapes. This reading strengthens the position that, in Augustine, futility is necessary. In strengthening this point, that which leads to futility (including reading) are also seen as necessary and therefore of value. But this does not make these paths of emptiness ends in themselves. In fact, in this view, what would make reading or thinking better than sinning, given that all are negatively necessary for salvation? (See: Mallard, 160-1.)

rides on this question.

I am shown in the Book of Genesis that the speech of God creates the world. I can also know that speech and language are central to being a human being. Augustine adds an extra level of depth to man's relationship with the uttering of words. He writes that human beings speak that which is already in their hearts and that, as such, speech is reflective of thinking with love.<sup>50</sup> But again, it is important to ask, what sort of love is this that is being spoken for? Is it love of God or love of self? When I speak am I speaking out of a love of my own self or am I speaking out of a love of God? Am I pontificating or praying?

If I speak in the former sense I can never be sure that I am speaking the truth. When I speak from the latter and from a love of the latter I do connect with something like truthful speech. When God speaks in the first chapter of Genesis He speaks the Truth. When I speak I cannot be as clear and my words do not have the same resonance. Speech is designed to show us how little I have the authority to speak. I am to conceive of speech as the Early Desert Fathers conceive of thinking; I am to abide by the speech given to us by God and in time my own voice will learn to harmonize with His. Until that time my voice is best heard in a silence that is learned in loving speaking. Speaking assists us in understanding the relationship between mind, knowledge and the love of goodness. When one progresses up the ladder of being into deeper and

---

<sup>50</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 9.7.12. "And when we speak to others, we apply to the word, remaining within us, the ministry of the voice or of some bodily sign, that by some kind of sensible remembrance some similar thing may be wrought also in the mind of him that hears,--similar, I say, to that which does not depart from the mind of him that speaks. We do nothing, therefore, through the members of the body in our words and actions, by which the behaviour of men is either approved or blamed, which we do not anticipate by a word uttered within ourselves. For no one willingly does anything, which he has not first said in his heart." But I must be careful not to confuse the provocation, or even the desire for it, with the result. The path towards God is not God.

more spiritual trinities one sees or hears that “the word conceived and the word born are the very same when the will finds rest in knowledge itself, as is the case in the love of spiritual things.”<sup>51</sup>

Till this point is reached, nothing I say is true. And when this point is reached the word will evaporate into the truth of what it is.<sup>52</sup> Faith will not be present in dialogue but in vision.

Scripture, itself, will become the face of God.<sup>53</sup>

Dionysus the Areopagite explains the relation between speech and silence in a similar way.

---

<sup>51</sup>See: Ibid, 9.9.14. This seems to correlate with Stock’s and others opinion about the redemption of reading. I think that we will see, though, that these retroactive results become more meaningless rather than meaningful.

<sup>52</sup>As Stock puts it, God is localized by delocalizing him. (See: Stock, 226.)

<sup>53</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 13.15.16-18. Carol Harrison provides a scholarly defense of my position. She, too, sees Augustine as being committed to a wholehearted critique of language and thought in relation to theology. For instance: “What he says therefore is not necessarily informed by or consonant with the truth within his mind - rather he can lie or deceive, and most importantly he possesses the capacity to turn away from the truth, to ignore it, to turn to the created word and thought rather than the Creator, to become immersed in the temporal and therefore to forget the eternal, or merely to define it in corporeal terms, so that although God is present to him, he is not present to God...” (See: Harrison, 59.)

And exactly aligned with my view: “In other words, we have again arrived at an encounter between man’s fall, his darkness, and the beauty of divine revelation in the temporal realm which inspires faith, hope and love, and especially delight in order to purify man and lead him to its Source.” (See: Harrison, 96.) It is my view that I have to be careful about talking about this last part, the delightful part. For in discussing it I taint it to a place outside of God and into a place of pragmatics. I fully agree with Bubacz’s opinion that “the suggestion that memory claims (and other knowledge claims) are important in the degree to which they have utility...makes Augustine seem a pragmatist.” (See: B. Bubacz, “Augustine’s Account of Factual Memory”, *Augustinian Studies* 6 [1975], 192.)

In the great mass of secondary materials on Augustine, the majority of commentators are more than happy to make Augustine a pragmatist, friendly, eventually, to both science and reason. This return of Augustine to the Enlightenment fold has been pursued with great vigour and many informants will gladly tell you that Michael Polanyi’s statement that Augustine “destroyed interest in science all over Europe for a thousand years because science contributed nothing to the pursuit of salvation” (See: Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962], 141.) no longer applies. Luckily, for my own purposes and perspective, there is also an Augustine that need not be forgiven or placed in a paradigm of rationalistic apologetics.

In his reckoning all the mysteries of Truth hide in silence which is a darkness that “outshines our brilliance.”<sup>54</sup> For Dionysus the eloquence I am shown that God possesses actually speaks no words because it supersedes human speech and understanding. When I think and speak, truthfully, knowledgably, I am drafting symbols of things that are all less than God.<sup>55</sup> Dionysus is not clear as to whether he is aligned with a principle that suggests that speech is useful in showing its own uselessness. He prefers to circumvent this path by making observations about what is ultimately required of us. He does speak of progressively getting closer to God and that the closer I get the more idiotic my words will become and appear.<sup>56</sup> But he also writes that when I totally become dumb that I will be united with God.<sup>57</sup> This second argument suggests that reconciliation with God results when I am able to surrender myself to being dumbfounded and not that this dumbness is the result of my drawing closer to God. Logically, it is more believable that God shuts us up than believing that by shutting up I draw God to my side. But on close inspection the two possibilities may not be all that different especially if I am to understand the call of dumbness as a command from God. Dionysus is careful in his writing. One might interject that if I am to exist in complete silence I cannot be expected to hear the commands of God. But as Dionysus asserts God, in His eloquence, speaks no words. If God has a message for you, He will get it to me no matter how tied my tongue or stuffed my ears.

---

<sup>54</sup>See: *The Mystical Theology*, 191.

<sup>55</sup>See: Ibid, 193-4. If God is eternal then His Word is changeless and immune to the vagaries of human speech. (See: Stock, 233.)

<sup>56</sup>See: Ibid, 198.

<sup>57</sup>See: Ibid.

Speech holds a strange place in Augustine's thought. It leads us to discover the emptiness of my rhetoric but lead me to recognize the love that lies behind my desire to articulate. This recognition of love as it correlates to the words of my mind will provoke me down the road to God. Speech and text themselves, this text itself, cannot be believed for they are not of God. That which claims to be of God cannot be accused of being mere speech because the accusation itself is formulated in insignificant talk. My word, and accordingly my evaluations of words, are only true when I have wisdom and the truth does not fully belong to knowledge.<sup>58</sup>

## Wisdom and Knowledge

Finally, I would like to consider the distinctions that Augustine makes between wisdom and knowledge and how they connect to Augustine's vision and how they advance the view of this thesis. There are no surprises here. Augustine begins his confessions by pronouncing how "scattered apart" he felt being a self in constant change.<sup>59</sup> He recognizes that true knowledge

---

<sup>58</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 15.15.25 - 15.16.25. "In respect to those things also which are so known that they can never escape the memory, because they are present, and belong to the nature of the mind itself,--as, e.g., the knowing that we are alive (for this continues so long as the mind continues; and because the mind continues always, this also continues always);--I say, in respect to this and to any other like instances, in which we are the rather to contemplate the image of God, it is difficult to make out in what way, although they are always known, yet because they are not always also thought of, an eternal word can be spoken respecting them, when our word is spoken in our thought. For it is eternal to the soul to live; it is eternal to know that it lives. Yet it is not eternal to it to be thinking of its own life, or to be thinking of its own knowledge of its own life; since, in entering upon this or that occupation, it will cease to think of this, although it does not cease from knowing it...."

<sup>59</sup>See: *The Confessions*, 1.6.8. "So I cast about limbs and voice, making the few and feeble signs I could, like, though indeed not much like, unto what I wished; and when I was not satisfied--either not being understood, or because it would have been injurious to me--I grew indignant that my elders were not subject unto me, and that those on whom I had no claim did not wait on me, and avenged myself on them by tears."

would be the timeless knowledge of the temporal and that this knowledge comes from God.<sup>60</sup> This timeless knowledge is not best described as knowledge. It is better described as wisdom. Wisdom is to contemplation what knowledge is to action.

Augustine writes: "Yet action, by which we use temporal things well, differs from contemplation of eternal things; and the latter is reckoned to wisdom, the former to knowledge."<sup>61</sup> Knowledge is the manipulation of the temporal for temporal ends. Wisdom is the contemplation of the eternal.<sup>62</sup> Knowledge is the realm of thinking in charge of the world of temporal things. I am not to confuse it, in either structure or value, with contemplation.

There is a choice to be made by the individual as to whether they seek to pursue a life of wisdom or a life of knowledge. The life of wisdom is daring and may not result in actualization. It is threatened with the possibility of failure and, accordingly, uselessness.<sup>63</sup> The person who pursues wisdom can never have confidence about the meaning of their personal life or what it means to be a human being until they have surrendered themselves to the Lord.<sup>64</sup> The life of

---

<sup>60</sup>See: Ibid, 1.6.8-9. Mallard, oddly, labels this as the long road of language to God. (See: Mallard, 11-2.)

<sup>61</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 12.14.22.

<sup>62</sup>See: Ibid, 12.14.22, 12.7.12.

<sup>63</sup>For clarification as to how wisdom is beyond the grasp of human beings, see: Stock, 207.

<sup>64</sup>See: *On The Trinity*, 12.14.23. "For the thought of man, for example, does not so abide in that incorporeal and unchangeable reason of a square body, as that reason itself abides: if, to be sure, it could attain to it at all without the phantasy of local space. Or if one were to apprehend the rhythm of any artificial or musical sound, passing through certain intervals of time, as it rested without time in some secret and deep silence, it could at least be thought as long as that song could be heard; yet what the glance of the mind, transient though it was, caught from thence. and, absorbing as it were into a belly, so laid up in the memory, over this it will be able to ruminate in



knowledge is the life of power, of controlling the things of the earth and profiting from them. It is challenged by the fact that it is inevitably stupid in that it has nothing to do with the perspective of a God which is Truth. Knowledge is power, Augustine suggests, and as such will make you the king of a vain and useless kingdom. But knowledge will not make you True. If I fall in love with the mind that understands the world with the power of objectivity I will be loving my own sense of power and will not be concerned with the changeless whole that is God.<sup>65</sup> Wisdom has become confused with knowledge as I have sought to call the love of power a reflection of my truest self. I have rejected the ultimate test of thought which asked us to whom the thought was directed. I have decided that empiricism and my senses are gifts from God which will lead me to God. This is how I have recreated the Whole which is God as discovered through the playful and important work of my own image. The original sin of Adam and Eve in seeking to place the knowledge of God within themselves is repeated constantly. From a desire to be like God, Augustine writes, we end up like beasts.<sup>66</sup> Dionysus argues along a very similar track. By rejecting all knowledge as less than wisdom you come to possess a wisdom which is beyond understanding.<sup>67</sup>

Augustine's concern with knowledge is obvious. One would be wrong, though, to think

---

some measure by recollection, and to transfer what it has thus learned into systematic knowledge. But if this has been blotted out by absolute forgetfulness, yet once again, Under the guidance of teaching, one will come to that which had altogether dropped away, and it will be found such as it was." That your memories will be returned to you through God would seem an uninteresting proposal to the man devoted, surrendered to and replaced by God. The offer is a strange one and does open Augustine to the charge of theological economics or pragmatism. And while this may be a rhetorical opportunity, there is a danger of making transformation a bargain.

<sup>65</sup>See: Ibid, 12.9.14.

<sup>66</sup>See: Ibid, 12.11.16.

<sup>67</sup>See: *The Mystical Theology*, 194.

that Augustine was radically against science. What he was against was confusing science as something of ultimate importance.<sup>68</sup> As with Plato, knowledge must be controlled by wisdom. Satan gave man knowledge and Jesus gave himself to be contemplated. To become God's child you do not need to know anything but you must believe in the name of Jesus. This belief becomes, with reconciliation, true knowledge.<sup>69</sup> I must not be too harsh in my judgements against those who practice the witchcraft of knowledge. But I must also be careful in my forgiving. I must recognize that, as human beings, I cannot help but act and that my actions change that what is changeable creating the appearance that I am capable of having a profound effect. But God is not in the changeable. The changeable is a mere representation of Him. I can recognize this in the good love that I have for my mind. I can recognize that my proximity to God depends on which thoughts I love and which ones I repel. I must rebuff the thoughts that seek to glorify me and choose those which glorify God. I am mistaken if I choose to confuse the two. If what I direct my mind towards in love is depraved and removed from God, all my other wills and options will also

---

<sup>68</sup>I will persist in insisting that this gentle warning also applies to logic, dialectics and epistemology. As previously stated, much secondary commentary considers Augustine's theology either in terms of philosophical (meaning epistemological) acceptability or for the ways it tempers but offers inclusion to logical or dialectical example. The following, by Christopher Kirwan, can act as an example: "The characterization of language which we find in these three texts is neither original nor profound nor correct. Nevertheless it is appealing, it is bold, and it has had - partly through the wide currency of Augustine's writings - a lasting influence." (See: Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* [London: Routledge, 1989], 35.) Kirwan thinks that he is complimenting Augustine in this last sentence but what he is doing is reducing the thought and retaliations to thought that Augustine contemplates and explores to reflections that have had historical weight and as such need to be considered. *There is no desire on Kirwan's part, and the many who write books like his, to contemplate along with Augustine.* Rather, the urge here is to explain and place Augustine into a larger context of human understanding. This attempt is only slightly more tolerable than the actions of "Christians" making room for their own thinking within the dismissive rubric of Augustine's tone.

<sup>69</sup>See: *On the Trinity*, 13.15.19.

be deprived.<sup>70</sup> I must surrender my knowledges to a faith that will lead me to a wisdom which will in essence dissolve into the actuality of Truth.<sup>71</sup>

## A Final Word In Lieu of Conclusions

In this chapter I have sought to address Augustine's thought on the problem of silence. I have pursued this by exploring how Augustine understands a human being's approach to God. Augustine's thought entails a particular comprehension of man. This man, in essence, is already formed by God and must relinquish the self that imagines, thinks or pretends otherwise. In other words, I have to get rid of the self that would seek to identify and name this newly created self. In personal ethics, Augustine's position is, again, similar to that of the Early Desert Fathers. I must surrender the ego-bound self to a self that is connected to the largeness of God. God is not found in the pursuit of knowledge and as this is so the pursuit of knowledge can easily become a *hubristic* forgetting of what man is truly capable of on his own.

There are logical circles in Augustine's writing but to point them out, as many scholars do,<sup>72</sup> is to not be interested in the thought of Augustine. There is no reason to believe that the Truth plays by the rules I have demanded of it. For me to analyse Augustine in relation to whether or not he returns his discussions of that which is beyond man back to man is not eventually a good

---

<sup>70</sup>See: Ibid, 11.6.10.

<sup>71</sup>And so reading leads me to silence. All shouting about the benefits of reading, especially in this regard, can only be done in advance of accomplishment.

<sup>72</sup>See: Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (New York: Routledge Press, 1989). Kirwan announces in his introduction that he comes to Augustine as an atheist and is not interested in his theological arguments. His aim is only to consider the logical verifiability of Augustine's philosophical arguments. This is an irony that makes me uncomfortable.

or faithful project. A better project, in my view, is to consider the depth of silence and whether what Augustine considers to be faith is actually an extension of my own present posited towards the future. I should be careful and suspicious of the voice that knows the precise English language of God and I should be leery of theologies that make promises to the selves to whom they do not apply.

It might be possible, if only once, to imagine talking and thinking in a way that has nothing to do with challenging, questioning, provoking, demanding and imagining - all principles that seek knowledge. It is, I hope, possible to wonder in God and not just in oneself. But to do this is to disappear. To offer this promise to those of us who are still here, as it can only be obliged in this way, is a bit of a trick.

I can take the words of the promise and I can understand them in relation to the other words I have learned. But I will, if I am compelled to the promise, outgrow my lexicons of understanding and the self that they define. The self that is drawn to the promise is erased when the promise is elicited. As such, I will not come back. The paradox of the promise that destroys the words in which it is offered acts as a warning of hypocrisy and inconsistency only if I come back; only if I refuse the promise. Until I make that Augustinian "choice" I can not confuse my decisions, experiments, hypotheses, and reckonings with theology or the practice of religion. And because I am still playing at salvation, and because the task is not completed and the experiment is not over, I can only feign to disappear or fade away. How does one sacrifice oneself and keep writing?

In the next chapter I consider the way that Kierkegaard sacrifices himself and keeps writing, and in writing sacrifices the book.

## Chapter Two: Kierkegaard's Unreliable Narrators

Who nowadays dares to read Kierkegaard on his own, without the commentaries? Yet when you begin to read Kierkegaard, you take a risk. Are you strong enough to come to terms with this torso? Can you give it a "strong misreading," or are you only going to add to the archives of weak misreadings? Are you prepared to be interrogated, interpellated, buttonholed, misused, questioned? Or did you come to this torso only for objective information and doctrine? If the latter, Kierkegaard's gesture is plain and rather chilling: Go ask Professor...

- Roger Poole  
*Kierkegaard: The Indirect  
Communication*

- At present I am making an effort to get every child I meet to smile.  
- Soren Kierkegaard  
*Journals*

Whoever entered the political realm had first to be ready to risk his life, and too great a love for life obstructed freedom, was a sure sign of slavishness. Courage therefore became the political virtue par excellence, and only those men who possessed it could be admitted to a fellowship that was political in content and purpose and thereby transcended the mere togetherness imposed on all - slaves, barbarians, and Greeks alike - through the urgencies of life. The "good life", as Aristotle called the life of the citizen, therefore was not merely better, more carefree or nobler than ordinary life, but of an altogether different quality. It was "good" to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process....The one activity taught by Jesus in word and deed is the activity of goodness, and goodness obviously harbors a tendency to hide from being seen or heard. Christian hostility toward the public realm, the tendency at least of early Christians to live a life as far removed from the public realm as possible, can also be understood as a self-evident consequence of devotion to good works, independent of all beliefs and expectations.

- Hannah Arendt  
*The Human Condition*

### Introduction

What interests me in this chapter is the articulation of a faith that requires the thorough silencing of philosophy. This leads me to ask if philosophy is to be silenced, is it the only model of thinking that must be mooted? Is a complete and humiliating silence required for faith?

This chapter will try to further its aims by discussing a sequence of points that arise

through a reading of *Fear and Trembling*. I think that *Fear and Trembling* is an extremely sneaky book.<sup>1</sup> It is my view that Kierkegaard has written a book about a subject that can not be talked

---

<sup>1</sup>Roger Poole has written at length on what Kierkegaard has called his method of “indirect communication”. While much commentary on the works of Kierkegaard have generally ignored this method I am most appreciative of it. I agree with Poole that if I am to understand the pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard as his own opinion, I do so carelessly. (See: Roger Poole: *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993].) In respect to this hesitation I will refer to de Silentio as the author and to Kierkegaard in works signed with his signature. In admiration of the statement made by Poole that I use as an epigraph, I seek to make a strong misreading. But unlike Poole I do not have as an eventual truth that one thing will always remain - that I must keep reading Kierkegaard. If I must choose between Kierkegaard as philosopher (as narrowly defined in the Western analytic tradition) or Kierkegaard as poet (as defined in terms of literary theory), I choose the latter. My reading of Kierkegaard has everything to do with what I am looking for when I read Kierkegaard. The texts are rich enough to support other, even oppositional, readings with comfort.

This decisive recognition that I have made also reflects on my particular usage of secondary materials in reference to Kierkegaard. There are many such materials, the majority of which are, sadly, very poor. Most of these texts attempt to formulate an understanding of Kierkegaard’s dialectical and logical contribution to the systems of philosophical analysis. They make a system of Kierkegaard’s work and in doing so reject the methods of an “indirect communication”. Also, they make far too much reductive use of Kierkegaard’s relationship with Regine Olsen which while interesting and possibly telling need not ever be written about again. Authors in this category include: George Connell, Stephen Dunning, John Elrod, C. Stephen Evans, Ronald Green, Alastair Hannay, Walter Lowrie, George Pattison, Paul Sponheim, Neils Thulstrup, and Sylvia Walsh. To refer to their attempts of making a Hegelian of Kierkegaard and of “going further than faith” would be to invite a polemical discussion which already belongs more to their interests than to mine. Let it suffice to mention the worst of these, Theodore Haecker who writes of Kierkegaard: “With his philosophy of subjectivity he was necessarily a realist and not an idealist. He stands for sound common sense.” (See: Theodore Haecker, *Soren Kierkegaard*, translated by Alexander Dru [London: Oxford University Press, 1937], 27.)

Commentaries that take seriously the irony of Kierkegaard and the question of auth(ority)ship reflect a different use of scholarship. While many of these discussions are of interest to me, they do little to contribute to this chapter given that they are mostly, and correctly, interested in propounding their own views. Authors like Sylviane Agacinski, Pat Bigelow, Jacques Derrida, Louis Mackey, Roger Poole, John Vignaux Smythe, and Mark Taylor have provided interesting interpretations of Kierkegaardian works which make no systematic claims. But, unfortunately, they have little or only occasional bearing on my own hopes. To overtly mention their views in relation to mine is to invite a comparison that works only to validate my impressions and thus reject the premises of indirect communication which I respectfully celebrate. Also, my reading of *Fear and Trembling* paradoxically implies the end of reading thus placing hermeneutics

about and because it can not be talked about he created a man of silence to write it. And Kierkegaard eventually sacrifices this author.<sup>2</sup>

My approach to the book can be divided into four areas. First, I wish to discuss the question of dialectics in regards to actions, like Christian faith, that may not be designed to be qualified by their result. Included in this discussion is some reflection on the power of thought in relation to the conceptual idea of faith. Second, and also stemming from a consideration of Hegelian philosophy, I will deliberate on the relationship between ethics<sup>3</sup> and the single individual. Third, I will consider the potential importance of what it might mean to consider Abraham as a hero or great man. I am interested<sup>4</sup> in whether it is important that I consider Abraham a great man

---

beside epistemology.

<sup>2</sup>For corroboration of *Fear and Trembling* as a deceptive book, see: Ronald M. Green, “‘Developing’ Fear and Trembling”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, edited by Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 257. For a more in depth discussion of Kierkegaard’s technique of indirect communication, akin to Poole’s discussion, see: Josiah Thompson, *The Lonely Labyrinth: Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Works* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967).

<sup>3</sup>Kierkegaard’s use, and accordingly mine as well, of the term ‘ethics’ or ‘ethical’ are broader and more inclusive than the modern reader may immediately recognize. Ethics is not just how we treat each other in society. (This is how Jacques Derrida defines ethics in the context of Kierkegaard’s work: the highest of the ethical is what binds us together. See: Jacques Derrida, “Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)”, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* [Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998], 155.) For Kierkegaard, the ethical is also the contextual realm where I learn behaviour and where I discern appropriate actions from inappropriate ones. It is the place where I learn my morals. The ethical dimension, as this, takes on a ‘universal’ authority in my life. Kierkegaard’s recognition of this authority, I think, demonstrates his recognition of certain tensions in Christian thought. This is why much of *Fear and Trembling* is devoted to placing Christian faith outside of these ethical boundaries.

<sup>4</sup>Once again, the words ‘interest’ and ‘interesting’ are not as innocent as my casual usage suggests. Kierkegaard writes that “the interesting is a border category, a *confinium* between aesthetics and ethics.” [See: Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, edited by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 83.] This makes the interesting that

as the father of faith or if I am to distance myself from poetic celebrations of his strange fame.

Fourth, I want to explore the relationship between silence, philosophy and ethical/Hegelian postulations of the dynamic between the individual and the contextual universality which is the community.

In exploring these four areas, I will be able to provide the reader with crucial material on my thesis. De Silentio's articulation of the contamination of a universalizing ethics plays a fundamental role in these pages. This contribution alone demands this chapter. But what is perhaps of even more importance to what I have drafted here is the way that Kierkegaard forms his discussion.<sup>5</sup>

It is sensible that I begin with the predicament of dialectics as a glance at my other aims show the necessity of dealing with, or silencing, the dialectical question.

---

which is derived from the context of the ethical community and also that which in time dictates which ethical boundaries and universalities are of importance and *interest* to its citizens.

There is also a tension that exists between the ethical and the aesthetic side of the interesting. See: "You have various good ideas, many droll fancies, many foolish ones. Keep them all; I do not ask for them. But you do have one idea I beg you to hold onto firmly..." [See: Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or Part II*, edited by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 210.] Often enough it is the interesting aspects of temptations which will lead us astray of what is of interest in the ethical. Consider this connotation: "She curtsied graciously, asked if it was not my carriage in the courtyard, whether I was going to Copenhagen, and would I allow her to ride along. The modest and yet genuinely dignified way in which she did it was enough to make me lose sight of the *interesting* and exciting aspects." [See: Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, edited by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 147. Emphasis mine.] The interesting demonstrates the ethically important and aesthetically attempts to slink away from it.

My use of the term gently tries to avoid both of these categories. I hope that my interest is more than just aesthetic attraction; I trust that what interests me is obedient but outside of the ethical. I use it as the closest, but still inadequate, declarative term I can use to discuss the paradox between the confident intellect and the disgrace of pride.

<sup>5</sup>For further discussion, see: Green, 258.



## Dialectics and Di Silentio

A casual glance at the secondary material on *Fear and Trembling* will show you that commentators have been struck, in particular, by one seemingly innocuous statement de Silentio makes: "But here I stop; I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically."<sup>6</sup> The reader has been warned of the possibility of this eventuation in the book's subtitle: *Dialectical Lyric*. The dialectical, it appears, has apparently overwhelmed the lyrical. Any fundamental importance for the sentence can be easily dismissed by its textual placement<sup>7</sup>, but there is something to be considered here. De Silentio has drawn a division between the poet and the dialectician in a way that, say, Coleridge or Blake would never have. *Fear and Trembling* discusses both sorts of characters and leaves them both behind. And it does this poetically and dialectically.

The author of *Fear and Trembling* is neither a poet nor a dialectician, nor an aesthete or an ethicist and in his occasional participation in these clubs of existence he is only a purveyor and not, ultimately, a member. That *Fear and Trembling* offers dialectical argument cannot be denied, that this method of argument is meaningful perhaps can be. But given the attention and importance that De Silentio gives to the poet as the one who documents greatness and that this

---

<sup>6</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, translated and edited by Edna and Howard Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 90. For sources that make much of the statement, see: Stephen Crites: *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel versus Kierkegaard on Faith and History* (Chambersburg, American Academy of Religion 1972), 114; Cornelia Fabro, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic" in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, edited by H.A. Johnson and K. Thulstrup (New York: Harper, 1962), 178.

<sup>7</sup>The section, *Problema III*, is designed to discuss two poetic personalities dialectically to see what sort of anxiousness we can arrive at - the project shows itself to not provide what the story of Abraham provides. De Silentio does not use this section to be the poet, *per se*, he is not to be included in the duo of poets thus he must be the dialectician the situation calls for.

poet is eventually irresponsible to the irresponsibility of faith<sup>8</sup>, it is worth considering how the dialectician disappoints in distinction to the methods of the poet.<sup>9</sup> With the offerings of the poet taken and considered but the position of the poet ultimately discarded, it is important for me to consider what the philosopher has to give and what their fate is in De Silentio's strategy.

The dialectician (he who, through argument, works through the contradictions in our utterances and formulations and leads us closer to truth, through mediation, by the mending of our initial errors) is not celebrated in the opening pages of *Fear and Trembling*. The modern mind has reached the state attempted by Descartes where everything can be doubted. The modern mind, though, is not content to doubt, it longs to travel past this position.<sup>10</sup> De Silentio parallels

---

<sup>8</sup>Derrida speaks on a similar theme at: Derrida, "Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 157.

<sup>9</sup>For an excellent discussion of Kierkegaard as predominantly a rhetorical poet, see: Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971). For an interesting discussion of Kierkegaard in relation to a more literary consideration of philosophy by a scholar of the existentiality of Rousseau, see: R. Grimsley, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Scribner, 1973).

<sup>10</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 5. The criticism here sounds straight forward but I think it is a bit peculiar. What could it mean to not go further than doubt? Can one go further in doubt? To consider this one must consider what one is to do in a position of doubt. The reproach made here by De Silentio implies that I move on to other thoughts before I have appropriately finished with doubt, a doubt that, de Silentio hints will silence the desire to go further. What is it to think doubt through, to be done with it? The problem is not as dialectical as it may appear. One does not think through doubt like it is an antithesis. When immersed in doubt the dialectical conclusion is the negation of those dialectics. This is what doubt through thought will show, the collapse of thought. And so doubt leads to faith and going past, that is continuing to think, is to deny faith in the name of oneself.

But while in doubt do I not need or require strong dialectical methods and approaches so in order to think it through? Besides intellectual acumen, I must consider the necessity of linear, logical approaches to thinking and doubt before the project/anti-project even begins. I seek to get through, to get past, to get post, doubt. And faith does do this. Therefore, faith is connected in steps of anti-logic to the position of doubt. The question which should concern me is how tied will I be to time when I am in faith? If I am connected to time it is going to be hard for me to

this desire to go past doubt into a further truth with a desire to go further than faith. The desire to know and to have knowledge of truth transcends the promises and demands of faith.<sup>11</sup> De Silentio, besides his religious concerns, does not understand the practicalities of this desire. He asks: even if faith could be conceptualized, how is it that I could know that I had comprehended it in a way that would allow me to comfortably move on?<sup>12</sup> Reminiscent of Socrates, De Silentio questions not only the desire to move past faith but my ability to move at all given my lack of comprehension about faith. How is it that I can be so cavalier in my approximations of what faith demands of the human being as I strive to discover more about my responsibility to others and to the history of the world?

The faith of Abraham, for De Silentio, shows exactly the opposite point: he needed one hundred years to get to the position where faith became possible.<sup>13</sup> This demand of faith was not

---

“distance” myself from understanding that faith in terms of Derridean religious economy? Can I read the criticism of going further than doubt/faith as also applying to thinking through doubt/faith or thinking at all? Derrida does state that sacrifice suspends time and I would think that included in this understanding of sacrifice is not just Abraham’s but ours, our sacrifice of self and of thought. (See: Derrida, 160.) Gabriel Josipovici offers that I read Kierkegaard as suggesting that thinking robs me of the thought. (See: Gabriel Josipovici, “Kierkegaard and the Novel”, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* [Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998], 124.) I suspect the answer as it is with Augustine is yes and no

<sup>11</sup>For further emphasis, see: Green, 260.

<sup>12</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 7. It is a bit clearer now what the dialectical position of the person in doubt/faith is. While movement in totality has not been nullified, dialectical movement from the position of doubt/faith (if not within it) has been challenged. The question that De Silentio asks is how can anyone be confident about where there are going once they have moved past faith. The question, as I have hinted and will eventually assert, is a fake one. Nobody thinks past faith because faith ends thinking.

<sup>13</sup>See: *Ibid*, 23. De Silentio seems to be wrong about this. There is no scriptural reason to think that Abraham was ever a man without faith. Actually, the Book of Genesis presents an Abraham always in faith. He leaves his home, he barter his wife, he fathers a son against the logic

solicited by Abraham and nor will it be provoked by me, it is dependant only on the demands of God. Most importantly, in the case of Abraham, “you get no further than faith.”<sup>14</sup> The dialectical progression that would take me past faith and doubt (curiously intertwined by De Silentio) is impossible.<sup>15</sup>

De Silentio, reflecting on his times, notes that it is supposedly difficult to argue or think your way past Hegel but that it is easy to move past Abraham.<sup>16</sup> He, conversely, finds stepping past the logic of Hegel effortless but that to think about Abraham “shatters” him.<sup>17</sup> De Silentio can

---

of biology, and he is prepared to sacrifice his beloved. The first two seem as powerful an example of faith as the last. What can De Silentio be referring to? I think the deception is an interesting one. De Silentio has placed Abraham and his faith into the path of progressiveness. Abraham *becomes*. It is perhaps necessary, in De Silentio’s view, to posit Abraham in this framework so to make him a subject worthy of approach. But as I soon see, Abraham shatters the thinking of the author, he cannot be approached through thought. This misunderstanding about the results of Abraham’s life is partly at fault in that it leads one to consider Abraham in economic and teleological terms. Abraham, as far as I can glimpse, has always had faith. It is, for him, not the result of doubt, anxiety or the recognition of human futility. His faith has not been an answer to anything, it has just been. Thus the trouble of bringing the mind centred and focused on becoming to the realm of that which is already being. The dialectic demands becoming. It is gesture less in the face of being.

<sup>14</sup>See: Ibid. Because faith is not a place or position.

<sup>15</sup>There is the need of some note, though, on the apparent correlation between doubt and faith. They are not the same thing. But as faith begins in doubt it has some allegiance to it. (I will also discuss this later; there I will consider how the difference between faith/doubt can be made in relation to anxiety.) For now, I should accept that both doubt and faith involve a suspension, if not a ceasing, of dialectics.

<sup>16</sup>See: Green, 260.

<sup>17</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 33. “Shatters” is a provocatively violent word. What is it that is shattered? What is shattered, I suspect, is the being that is understood through thought and language. It is thinking about Abraham that shatters; not Abraham nor Abraham’s faith but thinking about Abraham. If one were not able to think about Abraham one might feel justified, if you longed to think about him, in using a word like disappointed. To be shattered implies a different result. Being unable to think is not necessarily shattering. What is shattering is when your

not make sense of Abraham, he can not place him in a framework where the contradictions apparent in Abraham's actions can be mended to be dialectically sensible. Abraham's actions are absurd and to understand them or mimic them is not to be accomplished through reckoning.<sup>18</sup>

Kierkegaard's author is unable to "plunge confidently into the absurd."<sup>19</sup> He longs for it but he is unable to accomplish it because he does not have faith. His trust is not strong enough that he feels he can surrender to personal movements and actions that are both outrageous and insensible to him. All he can draw from Abraham is amazement. The story is beyond the grasp of his mind. He writes that the desire to ponder the story is a desire to "suck worldly wisdom out of

---

entire sense of being, which has been constructed through the universalizing understanding of thought, language and community, is destroyed. This is what thinking about Abraham will get you. Thinking about Abraham will destroy who you think you are becoming and it will promise a silence that will seem to you to be made up of the void created by the exploded pieces of what you were. This is not actually what happens but it is the way it appears from the perspective of the one who thinks dialectically.

Paul Ricouer ignores this idea of shattering in his consideration of how to read Kierkegaard. It is his view that a proper reading of Kierkegaard must include a reading of Hegel (and Fichte and Schilling). (See: Paul Ricouer, "Philosophy After Kierkegaard", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* [Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998], 11.) There is, I must agree, a way of reading Kierkegaard that includes a reading of Hegel but to imply the necessity of the latter for an understanding of the former is to reduce the former into a position where he is understood. Doing this, allows you to escape the shattering.

<sup>18</sup>For a very good discussion of how De Silentio and Kierkegaard can be used to reject notions of faith as the result of an intellectual progression, see: Jerry Gill, "Faith Is As Faith Does", in *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals*, edited by Robert Perkins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 204.

<sup>19</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 34. The use of the oxymoronic word 'confidently' is odd. How is it that confidence is to fit in with the concept of the absurd? It is quite likely that the author's problem stems from this desire for confidence.

the paradox.”<sup>20</sup> It is to wish to go past faith. It is to recognize the movements of faith, to sense their impossibility and to seek another, easier, way. But in trying to reconcile the paradox between the suppositions of Abraham and sensibleness one wanders away from faith. Faith is not to be made sense of.<sup>21</sup> It is, after all, absurd.

Faith is, supposedly, beyond dialectical thinking. Faith is not a stepping stone that our forefathers accomplished, allowing us to take further steps. Faith, if it is to be, must be repeated at the whims of God. One does not inherit it and one can not save it for one’s children. And this task of faith, as De Silentio hopes to show, is enough ‘movement’ for any generation.<sup>22</sup> For those who want faith there can never be more. For those who want more, they can not have faith.<sup>23</sup>

Am I to be dismissive, then, of all intellectual pursuits?<sup>24</sup> De Silentio does suggest that I

---

<sup>20</sup>See: Ibid, 37.

<sup>21</sup>This is for purposes which will become clearer as this chapter progresses. For now I need to hint that the recognition of this uselessness *may* need to be made sense of. For a further discussion, see: Green, 263.

<sup>22</sup>See: Ibid, 121-2. There is no actual movement to be made. De Silentio’s statements can be read as edifying lies. The text is written in the language of dialectics so to persuade the individual who is self-defined by dialectical procedures to enter into the self-shattering life of Abraham. That this is “movement” enough for any generation is ironic. Gregor Malantschuk in his book *Kierkegaard’s Thought* confuses irony with wit. He writes: “Johannes de Silentio...by means of his capacity for sympathetic insight is able to discover hidden conflicts in the individual’s life. With his sympathy for suffering and with his understanding of inner conflicts, Johannes de Silentio is closer to humour than to irony...” But this I assert is the irony: that a sympathy for suffering and a compassion for ‘inner conflicts’ while noble is not faith though the declarations of interest in faith are to be made in this terminology. See: Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard’s Thought*, edited and translated by Howard Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 236.

<sup>23</sup>For reiteration of how faith, for De Silentio, is impossible to defend, see: Green, 263.

<sup>24</sup>Lev Shestov eagerly defends Kierkegaard as thorough-going irrationalist, see his work: Lev Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, translated by Elinor Hewitt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).

forget everything and remember Abraham, that I become “occupied... not (by) the beautiful tapestry of imagination but the shudder of the idea.”<sup>25</sup> I should not become preoccupied with the

---

<sup>25</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 9. He asks us to *shudder* at the image of ourselves shattered. Derrida contributes to the vein I wish to mine. He writes:

On the other hand, trembling, at least as a signal or symptom, is something that has already taken place, as in the case of an earthquake or when one trembles all over. It is no longer preliminary even if, unsettling everything so as to imprint upon the body an irrepressible shaking, the event that makes one tremble portends and threatens still. It suggests that violence is going to break out again, that some traumatism will insist on being repeated. As different as dread, fear, anxiety, terror, panic, or anguish remain from one another, they have already begun in the trembling, and what has provoked them continues, or threatens to continue, to make us tremble. [See: Jacques Derrida, “Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)” in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 151-2.]

Thus in trembling there is movement or the appearance of continuation which can look like movement. (There is a problematic in that Derrida has Abraham trembling. There is no scriptural justification for this and De Silentio purposely rejects this idea in his admiration for Abraham’s steady hand. Sylviane Agacinski also reads Abraham as extremely nervous. See: Derrida, 155, 165; Agacinski, 132.) I am not certain, though, of a thorough agreement between us on this dialectical point.

We should first consider Derrida’s qualifier of “at least as a signal or a symptom”. What other types of trembling could there be? Let us first consider trembling as a finished, but preserved, signal and symptom. Signal implies warning and a trembling of warning would be a hint of something large to come of which the tremble is an omen. Symptom implies either pathology or illness; trembling as a symptom would be a harbinger of a larger disease. In both cases, then, trembling is read as a warning of more of that same. Given this qualifier the rest of Derrida’s paragraph seems a subtle repetition. But there is a possibility of a trembling that is not a warning and still has the chronological effects that Derrida represents. The trembling can be the whole of the force divided (or not divided) into a part and that is it. But it would continue in time in relation to one’s memory of the tremble. This leads to the second consideration of Derrida’s point (and this is attached to Derrida’s thesis as a whole on the secret of Abraham which I will consider again later) and that is the continued threat of that which made you tremble. This reading places the story of Abraham, but not Abraham, into time. To do this one understands the shudder of thinking about Abraham as a prediction of further tremors and as such makes our shuddering advice. Derrida is correct to think that this is what De Silentio writes. But Derrida appears to take De Silentio’s word on this where I think that De Silentio is tricking the reader into a hut that will be eventually shook, trembled if you will, until it collapses around us. Fear and trembling, as De Silentio’s use of the Apostle Paul shows, is the system of faith. It is not faith. And if trembling is

promise of thinking, and the beautiful aesthetic experiences reflection provides, but should face the horror of the present idea. Becoming aware of this idea, though, does seem to require intellectual work. De Silentio boasts that he does not lack the courage to think a thought through.<sup>26</sup>

This sounds like a recommendation of mediation and intellectual progressiveness and as such is full of problems one might expect De Silentio to notice and avoid. How is it that you know that a thought has been considered all the way through? The Socratic answer, and perhaps also the answer for De Silentio and Kierkegaard (but not here), is when the thought dies. You can tell that you are finished with a thought when it is no longer worth thinking. De Silentio follows subtly different cues. You can tell that you have pursued a thought to its end when it becomes too fearful to think.<sup>27</sup>

The result of thinking is apprehension and not just disbelief or doubt. Thoughts *scar* if I am thinking correctly. It is my fear of what I know that I do not know that haunts me. It is this knowing of ignorance which through its terror leads me to the gates of faith's paradoxes. Abraham had faith that Isaac would not be irrevocably taken away from him. For Abraham to believe this he must have faith in the seemingly impossible. Abraham had faith in the *activity* of

---

in time, which it is as a warning, it is also outside of progressive time, as a remembered scar.

We have a difficult dynamic in trembling. It is a brilliant term to use given that it allows both the perpetuation and collapse of time. Trembling and thinking are synonymous, and the shuddering leads to the shattering of both the thinker and the body that shakes.

<sup>26</sup>See: Ibid, 30.

<sup>27</sup>See: Ibid, 30. And the next *step* is when the thought, borne from but outside the thinker, is no longer thinkable. From this position fear disappears into faith, into nothing.



the absurd.<sup>28</sup> There is no way that Abraham could think this, (“human calculation was out of the question”<sup>29</sup>), yet Abraham believed in the God that would return Isaac to him more than he believed in anything else.

Intellectual work, as it was in the previous chapter, is that which brings me to the place where I can go no further. Thinking is necessary to show me how I can not think about the subjects that matter to me.<sup>30</sup> Those who are the more accomplished thinkers and more appreciative of their thinking will be the longest to this realization. Education, for De Silentio, is that which allows us to “catch up” with ourselves.<sup>31</sup> It is that which allows us to chase thoughts till they show us the anxious terror of our ignorance. If I do not use my mind to pursue or recognize that thinking pursues this course, no amount of enlightenment will move me. Thought

---

<sup>28</sup>See: Ibid, 35. But Abraham has and needs no image of the absurd. This language of absurd, and activity stemming from it (which is necessary to assert that actions do stem from non-logical causation) is spoken only to those without faith. To the faithful it is meaningless.

<sup>29</sup>See: Ibid, 35. And as such there is no possibility of the spectre of impossibility. So Abraham does not face an intellectual dilemma. He makes no leap for the issue is decided in the silence of other options. Derrida thinks that Abraham’s silence is willed. He reads Abraham’s response to Isaac’s question of where a ram will be found as Abraham saying something he doesn’t but that is also true. (See: Derrida, 156.) First of all, there is no clear reason to think that Abraham is willfully silent or secretive. To read his response to Isaac’s query as something he does not know is misleading because I can not clearly assume that he doesn’t know. In fact, given Abraham’s faith his answer is thoroughly and reflectively true. Derrida should be open to the possibility that Abraham had no secrets.

<sup>30</sup>Sylviane Agacinski, in her work, also alludes to the tension between time, thinking and surrender. She provides a powerful account of the sermon in *Either/Or II* on that I am always wrong before God. She extends this thought to a consideration of *Fear and Trembling* and establishes that the source of my error is because of my existential presence in time. See: Sylviane Agacinski, “We Are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves”, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 130.

<sup>31</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 46.

takes me to Abraham's door but no further; it does not trace me along to the mountain. Abraham and his faith are that "which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops."<sup>32</sup>

But if this is where thought has stopped how is it that I can have a trustworthy inkling about faith beyond the point where thinking is halted? How can I presume that there is anything beyond my ignorance?

De Silentio answers this by adding anxiety to the equation. The limits of my thought, the anti-conclusions that I reach, provide me with an anxiety about my place in the world and the fear that I lack such a place. A rational speaker may respond that this fear can be rationally explained.<sup>33</sup> I am scared only in relation to contextual expectations of life made by ancient intellectuals. De Silentio is not so easily dismissed. For, if the rational speaker is convincing or compelling in his statements that there is no meaning to life and the notion that there is has been constructed by human minds, if he is a powerful speaker, am I appeased? Has my fear disappeared? Do the reasons for fear erase a fear of this magnitude? As we roll our rocks in homage to Sisyphus and assert that the mountain plays a thoroughly different role in our life than it did for Abraham, are we able to name despair as the force of our lives without naming despair's

---

<sup>32</sup>See: Ibid, 53.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Wyschogrod understands anxiety, completely, as the inability to find one's own existential place. (See: Michael Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: The Ontology of Existence* [New York: Humanities Press, 1969], 97.) This is not immediately dismissable but it seems to me that the problem of anxiety is representative of a much quieter, unstatable problem. To associate this anxiety with existential doubt is to, again, use Christian faith to heal the sores of the self.

negation?<sup>34</sup>

## De Silentio and Infinite Resignation

De Silentio sees in thought the beginning of the ‘movement of infinite resignation’. It is in thinking that I see my limitations and emptiness. These can provoke me into self-resignation which may lead to faith. Adherence to dialectics prevents this movement. Awareness of the possibility of movement is discovered normatively, it is found in the contexts of my thinking and my expression.<sup>35</sup> Passion, as *eros*, is needed to see between what you understand and what is too terrifying to comprehend.<sup>36</sup> This passion is necessary “to make the authentic Socratic movement, the movement of ignorance.”<sup>37</sup> One must be erotically drawn to acceptance of their anxiety about that which they cannot know. If you are unable to put your life into this one desire, if you can not appropriately “concentrate” your “soul is dissipated in multiplicity from the beginning.”<sup>38</sup> If you

---

<sup>34</sup>This seems something like celebrating the aesthetic or ‘interesting’ element of the thought. Any insistence that I consider the ‘horror’ of the thought before I move on is an insistence on the aesthetic element of thinking. Why I should consider this aesthetic element is not immediately clear. Using Socratic language, I think that Kierkegaard recognizes the moment of fear and the importance of the moment of fear in relation to recollection. I am stopped by our fears because they do resonate. They are aesthetic reactions but this does not dismiss them because I am not content to merely stay in the aesthetically fearful moment. I am going to surrender to the fear not to our aesthetic ability to sense it. This demonstrates how one can think too much by suppressing the aesthetic reaction in order to rationally find ways to stifle it. I go nowhere in this dialectic. The aesthetic moments should be noted.

<sup>35</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 42. And the context for my thinking is the only place that this is found.

<sup>36</sup>See: John Vignaux Smythe, *A Question of Eros: Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard and Barthes* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1989), 21.

<sup>37</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 42.

<sup>38</sup>See: *Ibid*, 43. I am interested in the question as to whether, even if some people are as De Silentio describes, there is anything absolutely wrong with behaving and thinking this way. My

are stuck in a myriad of potential and possible selves, you will not be able to make the movement. If your affection is for the thought that will carry you away from a lust of your own fear, you will always be stuck in particulars. The moment in which you fear will become a situation which you particularize, objectify, and then consider as a point of dialectical discussion and not as the moment that brought fear and trembling. The mind will try to consider other possibilities to escape from this particular quandary. This impossible act, as De Silentio notes, is only possible in the spiritual. The impossibility of actuality can not be rectified in the world of the external thought, it can only be approached in the movement of resignation.<sup>39</sup> If I am to look at Abraham

---

interest starts, but is not limited to, with the contention that a position that refuses to be defined is going to have trouble being convincingly exclusive. But, and as I will later pursue, this problem is compounded with Kierkegaard's concurrent work on faith in his upbuilding discourses. There, I think I will find, that I am to possess a very complicated love that prevents me from seeing the people that are described in my text above. This love is central to faith. My concern is that this love justifies, and blinds me away from, those who seem unable, because of their psychologically narrow choices, of attaining this sort of faith or ability to love. This issue is further complicated in that there is nothing, really, I can do to get my own faith and therefore, it might seem, nothing I can do to reject it if it is delivered onto me.

<sup>39</sup>See: Ibid, 44. Does it not seem that this sentence refers only to a switching of resources rather than of actual method? Instead of seeking the truth from without, I seek it within. Is the where so important? Is it not more important, if it is important, that I stop the seeking that the shudder halts? De Silentio writes in this reference: "Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the finite world there is much that is not possible. The knight (of faith), however, makes this impossibility possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it. The desire that would lead him out into actuality but has been stranded on impossibility is now turned inward, but it is not therefore lost, nor is it forgotten." It is hard to know how to make sense of this passage. The knight makes the impossible possible through spiritual expression. What is being spiritually expressed? The impossible? Or the possibility of the impossible? Picking one of the two is crucial as the next fragment of the sentence tells me that spiritual expression is a renunciation. Later in the page I am told that the knight of faith is one that has everything and is self-sufficient. One would think that he has everything including the impossible. This is not the case, he has everything because the number of actual things, of possibility and impossibility have been greatly reduced. Reduced is not a good word to use here because it implies a diminishing which leaves items that still persist but are not counted. What is being expressed here is that the number of things that are to be counted, which are all things, have lessened. The implication is

and consider what he is going through in the particular sense of an 'ordeal'<sup>40</sup>, I will have denied that Abraham has acted. I will have stripped Abraham of his 'greatness' so to make him more like me.<sup>41</sup>

De Silentio sees Hegel as misunderstanding faith as the assumptions that I bring to the table before I reason.<sup>42</sup> But in De Silentio's scheme faith comes **after** the reasoning is done.<sup>43</sup> If

---

that some of *things* that I thought were things were not. The way this claim is worded does seem to shift the focus on phenomena rather than dismiss the idea of a focus. Things still are and I still perceive them. They are just different things than I first thought. As I shall see such a relationship between different points of focus is also something that vanishes. As such, this conversation we are having could only be had between two people who do not have faith or love.

Also see: Paul Dietrichson, "Kierkegaard's Concept of the Self", *Inquiry* 8, 1 (Spring 1965), 2.

<sup>40</sup>See: Ibid, 52. He writes: "An ordeal, this word can say much and little, and yet the whole thing is over as soon as it is spoken. We mount a winged horse, and in that same instant we are on Mount Moriah, in the same instant we see the ram, We forget that Abraham rode an ass..." De Silentio is concerned that I will rush through my understanding and reading of Abraham's story and in doing so make sense of it before anxiety can grip me. What De Silentio seemingly wants to highlight is the anguish of Abraham's movements - riding for three days to Mount Moriah. De Silentio wants to anguish the dread of these three days. Now, this is a problem for me and I must be careful in considering this motif of movement in describing Abraham. The discussion, here, cannot be about Abraham, after all, nothing can be thought of him. The entirety of De Silentio's discussion is about reading about Abraham and how to do that properly. The concern here, and I must think about whether or not I should be concerned, is glossing over the story and making it sensible. The aim here is to expose the anxiety, connect it to the reader and conclude that this will lead to the first stage, through aesthetics and ethics, of faith. It is my concern that this very concern and aim are also dismissed from the perspective of the faithful.

<sup>41</sup>See: Ibid, 71.

<sup>42</sup>There has been much commentary on how Kierkegaard demonstrates that an act of faith is an act of the will. I do not think that this is demonstrable in *Fear and Trembling* and relies too heavily on Kierkegaard's margins. T.H. Croxall has Kierkegaard asserting, like Kant, that something is true only if I have grasped it. As such an act of faith is an act of the will. (See: T.H. Croxall, *Kierkegaard Studies* [Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1948], 120-21) This latter statement is, I think, true but the first is not and so I dispute the correlation between the two. The movement of faith is the movement of a will aligned with God's will. The truth of this is beyond the grasping of the self. The best the self can do, that is the self outside of God, is, as De Silentio well knows, is

faith is as Hegel sees it, Socrates is to be blamed for not going further or praised for attempting to. Socrates did neither. Socrates surrendered himself, through ignorance, to infinite resignation.<sup>44</sup> The individual, like Socrates, after thinking has taken its toll must follow their anxiety into the infinity of their own ignorance and inability. They must resign themselves to infinite impotence. It is only when the individual has emptied himself into this infinite that faith can possibly break through.

De Silentio laments his generation for the terrible idea of wisdom which they honour.<sup>45</sup> It is terrible because it convinces me that my thinking is the highest of human possibilities and it argues that faith is something that I have surpassed. The objective of the

---

infinite resignation.

<sup>43</sup>T.H. Croxall states, he does not show, that Kierkegaard does not disparage reason. Besides the fact that Croxall does not distinguish between Kierkegaard and De Silentio it is hard to read Kierkegaard, or De Silentio, as limiting the power of reason. It then depends what you mean by disparage. If reason is what Hegel says it is, then Kierkegaard does disparage it. If reason is to be understood in an Augustinian sense, then maybe not. But to make the point that Kierkegaard does not disparage is to protect reason at the expense of something that Croxall does not name. See: Croxall, 122.

<sup>44</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 69. What Socrates does from this position of infinite resignation is a question that I should have learned by now not to ask. Though it is possible to read the *Crito* and the *Phaedo* as answering this empty query.

<sup>45</sup>See: *Ibid*, 101. He writes: “(O)ur generation has itself given birth to its hero, the demon, who ruthlessly puts on the dreadful theatrical piece that makes the whole generation laugh and forget that it is laughing at itself.” (I make a similar statement in chapter one of this text.) The important distinction between what our generation does with the hero and what De Silentio does with Abraham is that the latter is not presumed to be a comic character. By this I mean that Abraham does not provide an optimistic conclusion for the citizen of the world. To do that, you must be immersed in ethics. My eventual question and I suspect the underlying theme of *Fear and Trembling* is that the *instant* you talk about Abraham you are in danger of making him an economically comic character and the parallel becomes one between Abraham and Jesus and not Jesus and Isaac.

reasoning dialectician is not the discovery of a particular God but rather the force behind reason is political and ethical. Dialectics, when contemplating the domains of morality and virtue, contrives an ethical view which further justifies dialectical knowledge. The question of what is ethical has become the standard to which all hermeneutics returns. The ethical is universal. It is the truth. Its language is best spoken in the liberations of the dialectic for it is the world of ethics as the universal where dialectics fancy that they have made progress.

## **De Silentio's Faith and the Universality of Ethics**

Early in the text, De Silentio provides four imaginative variations of Abraham's story. These four ways of telling the story are four ways of attempting, both, to deal with the story on an ethical level and to show how the story transcends the ease of my ethical lessons and arrangements. Interestingly, none of the four variations on a theme are workable.<sup>46</sup> De Silentio recognizes that what happened on Mount Moriah after three days silent travel can not be redeemed in terms of human, ethical relationships. I can not and should not make Mount Moriah the place where Abraham faltered and doubted God in the name of ethics.<sup>47</sup>

The relationship between man and his ethics is of great interest to De Silentio. Adherence to ethics as the end of man, as dialectics is to the ends of thinking, has made the step toward Christian faith difficult. De Silentio recognizes that the ethical thinking of his time was rooted in a

---

<sup>46</sup>See: Ibid, 11-4. The stories all conclude with the image of a mother using different techniques to wean her baby. Each of the stories ends with the admonition that I am lucky not to have to breach my ethical understandings. But, and most importantly, each of the stories fails to communicate the story of Abraham and this failure is what makes, curiously, the stories of the mother so *meaningful*.

<sup>47</sup>See: Ibid, 22. Failure to do this is also a failure to turn the Judaeo-Christian tradition into a religion of pragmatism.

concept of God. Duty to one another is only 'duty' in relation to a God that demands it. The error made by the modern is in thinking that participation in duty leads to a relation with God.<sup>48</sup> There is something for the Christian which is the foundation of proper, moral ethics but which is also bigger than ethical judgements.<sup>49</sup> Life, measured in terms of ethical satisfaction, does not provide the love necessary for the perpetuation of those ethics or a relationship with God. Ethics are only workable as a secondary aim, they cannot be derived through dialectical inspiration. The love of the community is fuelled by a love of God which is made, eventually, by, not thinking, but through surrender or resignation to the virtue of the absurd.<sup>50</sup>

If I am to consider the story of Abraham ethically, I will have to deal with the thought that Abraham meant to murder Isaac. But this is not the only way to consider the story and it is not inevitable that I view Abraham as a murderer. I can still fathom that there is a religious interpretation of Abraham's actions. If I am to consider Abraham from a religious perspective what he attempts to do can be read as a sacrifice. This difference in language is the difference between ethics and the religious, the human and the divine. To paraphrase De Silentio, to be a murderer is not acceptable, to offer sacrifice to God is holy, in understanding that the two are eventually one, and identifying the contradiction that appears, is the essential anxiety that belongs

---

<sup>48</sup>See: Ibid, 68. He writes: "This duty becomes duty by being traced back to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter into relation to God." Clearly, that which is governed by God is not to be confused with access to God.

<sup>49</sup>J. Bogen argues something slightly different. He argues that if I am to talk in terms of trumping ethics then I am no longer able to use a word like 'duty' in reference to God because this word belongs to ethics. (See: J. Bogen, "Kierkegaard and the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical", *Inquiry*, 1962, 314-5.) But if ethics owns the rights to certain words I am in no position to say that it has been trumped. The transvaluation of the term 'duty' in this sense is relevant.

<sup>50</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 100, 27.



to the Christian.<sup>51</sup> This anxiety is not a problem to be mended for “without this anxiety Abraham is not who he is.”<sup>52</sup>

The story of Abraham is not about, though, transvaluating murder into something divine. Abraham does not, although he is prepared to, kill his son. He is given back, from God; his son is not killed by his hand. The ethical result is attained only by the decree of God. *This secondary end is accomplished through Abraham's faith.* This faith is the one that is demanded by Jesus as the one, though the size of a mustard seed, that can move mountains. A mountain is indeed moved. Mount Moriah is transformed from a place where man was in anxiety to a place where faith was rewarded and anxiety redeemed. Abraham denounces the world of ethics and his place within it for the demands of eternity.<sup>53</sup> In doing so with sincerity and faith, the world of the temporal is apparently returned to him.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>See: Ibid, 30.

<sup>52</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Elmer Duncan argues that Kierkegaard's aim is to repair Kant's declaration that to tell any sort of lie is a betrayal of moral principle. Duncan has Kierkegaard as showing that there are situations where ordinary moral principle is inadequate. See: Elmer Duncan, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings In Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 349. For corroboration, see: Geoffrey Clive, “The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical in Nineteenth-Century Literature”, *The Journal of Religion* 34 (April 1954), 75-87. This praise of Kierkegaard seem, to me, misdirected, as Abraham is outside of the ethical. He is outside of not just bad formulations of the ethic but also the very best ones imaginable.

<sup>54</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 49. I am not sure why I would want it back. The offer, and I think in this context I can understand it as an offer, is made to those who would find it attractive, to those who long for ethical cohesion and the maintenance of that which is deemed precious, my human relationships. Christianity does not make me monstrous but the only true monstrosity is to not be Christian in this undefined sense. These human relationships show me what love can mean but they are overwhelmed by what love does mean. It is especially curious in this trumping of ethics by faith that the call to ethics is made in reference to the political side of ethics. I am very interested in the complex relationship of this enticement and of who it can be offered to.

The ethical has come to be seen as the universal realm by which all judgements and actions are made and conceived.. This is the context within which I live, my own actions and identity are constructed in light of this view.<sup>55</sup> I am governed by an idea of self-responsibility that is dependant on the larger, communal ethical whole. I judge what I do individually by its reflection in the mirror of society. The world of the ethical is the universal world of all human truth. It is the place of language and interlocutors. It is the place of culture and aesthetic expression. It is the place of law and structures of justice. It is the world of science and technological achievement. It is the world of crime and the world of success. It is everything that the human being relies on to be a human being. It is that which Aristotle spoke when he stated that man was, by nature, a political animal. It is that which Rousseau warned me about.

All that I am is ethically derived, if ethics can be defined in this sense. The idea of a single individual removed from this notion of the nurturing whole is an insult to ethics.<sup>56</sup> The individual who espouses a domain of self that is not connected to the realm of the ethical, universal context is an insult to, first, dialectical logic, and second to the citizens who provide the true context of being. This desire for hiddenness, for removal from the nurturing, communal mother, provides nothing for the context and lives a lie in its attempts at social distance. To live hidden like this is

---

<sup>55</sup>John Elrod claims that the self only gains crucial self-understanding by realizing itself in its existence and the need for the transcending of ethics is because ethics imposes a self on the self. Faith is what allows this process to occur. (See: Elrod, 125,209) This is, I think, very wrong. The implication that ethics *needs* to be transcended is not found in Kierkegaard. If this was the case the movement of faith that De Silentio recognizes would not be difficult at all but would be desirable as an aesthetic gesture over social imposition. Elrod has faith taking the place of rebellion and emancipation from a Rousseau like social structure. In suggesting that faith is useful in liberating me from the constraints of and ethical contextualization is certainly an example of going further than faith.

<sup>56</sup>For reinforcement, see: Green, 263.

to either be wrong or idiotic and it is always to be irresponsible.

When the community is faced with the story of Abraham a problem is raised. What am I to make of a man who is going against the ethical universal for something higher than that universal?<sup>57</sup> How can it be that the God who defines the human idea of duty make demands that insist on rejection of that duty? How, given the contextual debt of the individual to the ethical universal for their *being*, can I continue to be when I suspend and step outside of the universal ethic?<sup>58</sup> This paradox is central to both *Fear and Trembling* and the “arguments” of this thesis.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup>This question has had numerous responses. Avi Shumeli argues that, in Kierkegaard, Christ returns man to the particularity of his existence. While this may be true it is hardly the trump in Kierkegaard’s Christian thinking. This return to existence is a surrendered existence. I would think that it is an existence no longer in self but in Christ. (See: Shumeli, 59.)

Emmanuel Levinas, distinct from other commentators, is put off by what he sees as the existential core in Kierkegaard’s thought. He criticizes Kierkegaard for making subjectivity an absolute. (See: Emmanuel Levinas, “Existence and Ethics” in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* [Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998], 26.) Levinas seems closer to the mark than the others but is still, I think, off target. Kierkegaard certainly praises the subjective individual, he does dedicate many of his works to this being. But this is the not entire aim of Kierkegaard’s theology. The subjective or even existential self has a part to play that requires distance from conceptual thinking and conservative contexts. But the attainment of this distance for the individual is always in regards to the higher absolute or calling. In criticizing the church of his day and its conception of God and claiming that man must withdraw into himself to discover the truer mystery of God is not to praise subjectivity over faith.

Anthony Rudd reads Kierkegaard as consistently and constantly calling for individual responsibility. (See: Rudd, 117) Rudd’s work on Kierkegaard is often very enjoyable (if I did not have my own points to express I would gladly devote a chapter to his), but here he misses a crucial point. In making the claim that I must work out my salvation in fear and trembling as primarily suggesting that I do this alone is to miss the larger point about the unknowability of God.

<sup>58</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 62. De Silentio writes: “How did Abraham exist? He had faith. This is the paradox by which he remains at the apex, the paradox that he cannot explain to anyone else, for the paradox is that he as the single individual places himself in relation to the absolute. Is he justified?” This question is an awkward and the author does well to avoid to avoid a systematic answer. It cannot be justified in terms of sensibility or Hegelian universality. It cannot be justified by the tenets which raise the question.

Also of importance, I must note that Abraham is not able to explain this paradox but De

The fear, within ethics, is that a switch of onus onto the individual will destroy ethical life.<sup>60</sup> This fear is compounded by the view that the life of the single individual, that life of the individual outside of their context, is an easy mistake to make and that living within an acceptance of the ethical universal is something that people find hard to accept.<sup>61</sup> De Silentio sees no strong evidence that the bonds delivered to us by God that serve the ethical are severed by Abraham. The ethicist attempts to make a monster of Abraham by declaring that he could not have loved his son. De Silentio adamantly disagrees. Abraham *must* love Isaac and this love must be placed in a paradox against the love Abraham has for God so to show what the true point of the human life

---

Silentio, while perhaps not explaining it, is defining it. This is another difference between De Silentio and Abraham, between Abraham and the rest of us. De Silentio is seeking wisdom from that which Abraham lives and does not contain in his being as knowledge. This battle against universality is not a temptation to Abraham because it does not occur to him, his cues are derived from God. When God says where are you, Abraham answers.

<sup>59</sup>And while Anthony Rudd attests that *Fear and Trembling's* main point is that religion transcends ethics may appear to be correct, it does not say enough. To say that this is the main point is to simply restate a different idea of ethics, it is to posit a different universal. This, to me, demonstrates that when De Silentio speaks of ethics he means more than the universal, he means that which must be avoided as the universal, as such I should be careful in my drafting of new rules. Rudd does seem aware of this extra dimension in comparing De Silentio's use of the term ethics to Hegel's term *sittlichkeit* (social morality). But in mentioning Hegel, Rudd carelessly brings the discussion back to a dialectic of universality. The reference to Hegel must be contrived to provide explication and understanding. That gesture is an ethical one. See: Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 144-5.

<sup>60</sup>Gene Outka understands Abraham to be a man who is avoiding mind-numbing conformity. See: Gene Outka, "God as the Subject of Unique Veneration", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21, 2 (Fall 1993), 211-5. This view is another of those that seeks to find a way of making Abraham look good, ethically. But positing the potential murder of one's child as an act of justifiable rebellion goes too far.

<sup>61</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 75.

is.<sup>62</sup> Ethical understandings as depicted in aesthetic feelings are necessary to understand my true and full relationship with God. The tension and difficulty of ‘sacrificing’ or surrendering my ethical and human loves and the human universal it depicts, is done by standing apart from the community, before God, in “fear and trembling.”<sup>63</sup>

My inklings, when they do occur, to buck the ethical threatens me with the anxiety of the paradox. How can I live as a being when I cut away that which provides my sense of being? This problem is further complicated in that my breach of the ethical can be either sinful or faithful in nature and I am unable to know which. When I move myself away from the universal ethic I may be stepping into either the demonic or the divine. The thinker is lost with this paradox.<sup>64</sup> He is lost because the result, the final truth, is known by God and not by man. If I could figure out the guaranteed path towards faith, then I would have replaced the power of God with dialectical

---

<sup>62</sup>See: Ibid, 74.

<sup>63</sup>See: Ibid, 75. A huge and crucial question must be raised here. How is it that I can have an understanding of either fear/trembling or the self that must do this outside of my contextual arrangements? The answer, I suppose, is similar to the one I considered in regards to thinking. There is a necessity of constructing an environment where these sorts of questions and concepts can arise but that it is a mistake to think that this construction is adequate to the full task of the Christian. There is more to be done, through God, outside of this context. But this is not as satisfying a response as it was when considering the role of thinking. In this case the demands of surrender and that there is a further task beyond me are also reflections that come from the ethical universal which I seek to move past. The idea of transcending the ethical universal, given its constitution in language and thought, is an idea that comes to me from the ethical universal. This is exactly the problem I seek to address in this paper and my work. For now, I am content to address the problem. I will leave consideration of this problem on a deeper level to the dramatic close of this paper. I will hint that my problem arises in thinking that the absurd to which surrender can actually be named in a way that is akin to my label the absurd.

<sup>64</sup>See: Ibid, 107. The thinker is lost because he is a thinker. Without the thought that aims to understand there is no paradox. It is only as a thinker who seeks understanding that there can be a fear of damnation and a glee in redemption. The one who loves without the judgement of thought does not participate in this continuum.

ingenuity.

If the ethicist is afraid that consideration of the story of Abraham may result in citizens attempting the same action as Abraham then there can be no discussion of Abraham. But, as De Silentio notes, acting like Abraham does not make you akin to Abraham. Only faith can make you akin to Abraham.<sup>65</sup> But what is this faith?

Faith is the paradox that man, as a single individual, is actually “higher than the universal.”<sup>66</sup> This movement, though, towards faith requires this concept of the universal. Faith is not a part of the universal (as I saw when I distinguished it from Hegel’s sense of a presumption). If faith does not break away from this encompassing idea of the ethical universal there can be no faith. Faith has to be found outside of that which is everything. If the context of our categorical ethical universal is everything, then all the categories of existence and being are already accomplished.<sup>67</sup>

Faith argues, in *Fear and Trembling*, that the single individual, who originates in the ethical universal, is higher than this universal. The ethical universal must be exposed to show that it is the highest place for man to subsist; that the single individual is in a superior position when they are in an absolute relation with God. That which brings about this realization is the mediation

---

<sup>65</sup>See: Ibid, 31.

<sup>66</sup>See: Ibid, 55. And as Abraham is *outside* the universal ethic, he has nothing to say in judgement about what happens in that ethic. He does not say it is empty or that life spent pursuing ethical norms is a life misspent. He is not in position to say anything at all.

<sup>67</sup>See: Ibid. And therefore I would not possess anxiety. I would possess only particularized fears of which I would have recourse, if not ability, to assuage, within the boundaries of my own humanity. I would be fully able to solve myself within the materials of human existence. Perhaps I can.

that comes from, and tempers, the ethical world. Faith is inside this paradox that I am shown the possibility of more through the realization of less. Faith, in a form that is antagonistic to the ethical, must not be reduced to a spiritual trial.<sup>6869</sup>

Abraham's faith is so contrary to the ethical demands of the universal it cannot be properly considered in relation to the overwhelming context of the ethical universal.<sup>70</sup> Abraham's actions can not be made sense of ethically and given that his cues of how to act are delivered to him through this ethic, I have a paradoxical movement. That Abraham acts as he does is both an absurd action and an action arrived at through surrender to the absurd. It is this resignation to the absurd, to the unreasonable and non-contextual, which places the individual in a position higher than the universal.<sup>71</sup> Abraham is not tempted to sin by God. Abraham is not tempted by God at all. He is tested by God. He is tested to see if he can withstand the temptation of the call of the ethical. He is tested to see if he can actually breach the ethical universal that gives him language and being.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>See: Ibid, 55-6.

<sup>69</sup>Ronald Green, whose work on Kierkegaard is consistently interesting, does an excellent job of criticizing the urge to ethicalize Abraham. But Green eventually sees *Fear and Trembling* as being a discourse about sin and redemption from sin. This conclusion, I fear, brings Green into the fold of those who have found a use for Abraham in a universal, meaningful, economic way. See: Green, 272-3.

<sup>70</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 56. It *shatters* the being born from that universalizing context.

<sup>71</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>See: Ibid, 60. Abraham passes this test in the only way that it can be passed. He does not realize that he is being tested. Croxall rejects the premise that *Fear and Trembling* implies a transcendence of the ethical. He asserts that ethics and religion are closely allied in the work. This may be true but Croxall's emphasis is always on the ethical. He argues that given what Abraham does is eventually for the good, it is thereby ethical. (See: Croxall, 118, 126.) This ignores the

Faith is found in this paradox: that the interior of a person, and not in the exterior context which constructs the named interior, is that which is led to faith.<sup>73</sup> Ethically, I am to subvert the appearance of an interior for the truth of the exterior. In an act of faith, solicited by distance from the exterior, there is the creation of an interiority which is non-contextual. That is to say it is outside the reach of the universality of thought and language. This step cannot be accomplished in the words of ethics. The understanding of action through “ethical relations”<sup>74</sup> makes action relative and dependant on the understanding of the universal ethic to be plausible. That which is done for the universal ethic is not done in faith. Faith can not be made to appear as the ethical because that would make it already present in the world of human universals. It would take it away from God and place it in the hands of ethically conceived man. By trying to universalize the step the individual takes away from the universal would be to translate into ethical conversation that which can not be made sense of in this way.

De Silentio parallels the potential sacrifice of Isaac with the stories of sacrificial virgins. They are very different types of stories. The sacrifice of the virgin was done for the community. It was a sacrifice in the name of the ethical universal. This context of sacrifice can not make room

---

way Kierkegaard opens up the concept of the ethical to include that which universalized being in the world. It also renders the concept of the ethical, if Abraham’s faith is an example of it, as unknowable and until after God’s call is made; ethics in this sense is senseless.

Croxall’s argument also appears in works by J. Donnelly. Donnelly’s position is identical. (See: J. Donnelly, “Kierkegaard’s Problem I and Problem II: An Analytic Perspective” in R.L. Perkins, ed., *Kierkegaard’s ‘Fear and Trembling’: Critical Appraisals I* [Montgomery: University of Alabama Press, 1981].).

<sup>73</sup>See: Ibid, 69. This interior is not to be confused with the psyche or the conscience or such constructions of the inner made in the world of the outer. The inner, that which tends to faith, is unnamed and is silent. It is not available through Socratic recollection.

<sup>74</sup>See: Ibid, 71.



for Abraham. Abraham can not explain what he is doing to Isaac in this way. The book of Abraham, De Silentio writes, has been “confiscated by God”, it is not “public property.”<sup>75</sup>

The ethical task is to step out of the hiddenness of interiority and show oneself, and accordingly, given the rules of your context derived origins, others, in the universal. The universal ethic is based on mediation of the dialectical sort. It is based on conversations taking place in the public space which allow us to conceive and define new hermeneutic selves. But those who conceive of the importance of the self in these terms are mistaken. Recognition of others within the public space provides comfort whereas the maintenance of hiddenness creates social tension.<sup>76</sup> The modern strives, dialectically, to find and expose hiddenness in his aesthetic constructions. De Silentio sees his task as showing that aesthetic hiddenness and ‘the paradox of faith’ are not the same.<sup>77</sup>

There is an important dynamic between ethics and aesthetics to be considered. Ethics is not open to debate only discovery. It abides by strict universal categories that are to be discerned through dialectical thought. Ethics claims to deal with actuality and the suffering present in this actuality. It is interested in discovering the essence of responsibility in causing this suffering so to note the responsible action called for so to relieve the problem. Ethics is frustrated with that

---

<sup>75</sup>See: Ibid, 77. This is important and interesting. The book that I am reading, *on Abraham*, is public property. It is to be read by those who are raised in philosophical and poetical atmospheres. It is to be read by men and women who are attuned to psychological terror and who have concerns about ethical protection and about the path to salvation. It is as connected to the actual story of Abraham as public ownership is to God. If it is to be more than a book of the public it, as a text, must be sacrificed.

<sup>76</sup>See: Ibid, 83. The political, which is strained by the threat to the ethical, is a component of my ethical understandings.

<sup>77</sup>See: Ibid, 85.

which attempts to hide from the obvious human world of actuality. Aesthetics, as De Silentio perceives it, welcomes the hiddenness.<sup>78</sup> But this hiddenness is superficial given that the aesthetic act and creation are firmly within the bounds of contextual ethics. Ethics demands disclosure in mediated speech (there is no other type of speech). Aesthetics, even when it refuses to speak for itself, does so for ethical reasons. It keeps silent to preserve the ethical good. When it must, for ethics, speak, it does.

The universal demands disclosure, or a form of silence which supports disclosure, it wants to take away from the individual that which they which think is immediately (in an *a priori* sense) and intimately their own and show them that their faults and virtues are given to them through the contextual and ethical universal. The dialectic which works with the ethical universal will mend the faults to convert them into virtues. But, as De Silentio stresses, Christian sin and Christian faith do not belong to me in an immediate sense nor a contextual one. They are not socially constructed because they exist outside of the realm of the ethical and belong to the dictates of God. If the ethicist is right, sin would lead you to Abraham. Abraham is not who he was because of his sin, of his broaching the ethical. He was Abraham for his faith, which is post-ethical.

## **Heroes and Liars Both Keep Quiet**

This is all quite clear but it is not the end of the issue. How Kierkegaard's aesthetic charms escape the context of ethical universalism is a difficult matter. In thinking about how he would communicate, mediate, to the world about Abraham, De Silentio expresses that he would hope to

---

<sup>78</sup>See: Ibid, 86. This is the debate offered in *Either/Or*. It is the argument that Kierkegaard allowed to flourish in his name. Less than a year later, Kierkegaard has De Silentio negating both sides of the struggle.

depict the element of Abraham that has to do with fatherly love.<sup>79</sup> I must be alert to the fact that De Silentio thinks to introduce me to Abraham through an obvious ethical and aesthetic category: the love that a father has, and is to have, for his son. If this is where I am to begin how am I to view Abraham's potential sacrifice of Abraham? Not, De Silentio asserts, as a spiritual trial for this makes Abraham a spiritual and ethical failure for being willing to carry out his task. What then? The problem can be alleviated by realizing that Kierkegaard is being deceptive. He has no ability to truly talk about Abraham despite his intense desire to have someone discuss him.

This, in my view, suggests the central point of interest in *Fear and Trembling*: the tension between De Silentio's speech about the greatness of Abraham and his inability to actually say anything absolutely or universally about him. This is the tension between informing me about Abraham in order to lead me to him but not being able to say anything about him outside the dimensions of the ethical universal. This is what Kierkegaard is forced to say the story of Abraham demands I transcend.

This problem can be exemplified by very briefly considering De Silentio's comments on

---

<sup>79</sup>See: Ibid, 32. This is a peculiar choice and a peculiar endeavour. Given that contemplation of Abraham is shattering to one's being it is odd to think of correlating this path to personal redemption/destruction to the paternal bond between father and child. This is the bond, though, that is best enunciated and elaborated. For it is the relationship of a father's love for his child that is transvaluated and deepened when it is contrasted or substantiated into the love of God as the father for his creation. The allegory suggests that God may find it as hard to place me in the hands of suffering as I would with my children but this would be an immature exposition. My relationship to God with the father is not eventually comparable to the relationship of father and son. I do not know what God will do with me and if the bond is termed solely in reference to ethical action, it will fail me. But if this bond is articulated in terms of love and trust I will be able to gleam what a relationship with God *feels* like even if I do not know what it looks like or how it will be enacted. This gleaming is only partial but De Silentio feels no apparent compulsion to reject, before its time, that which is only a shadow. It is this shadow which is crucial to more weighty rejections.

Luke 14:26. I am to hate all of my friends and family if I am to serve God.<sup>80</sup> The ethical soul in me has translated this verse to not be about 'hate' but rather that I must 'love' God more than I love my friends and families. This is quite a turnaround as De Silentio notes. He concedes that they are terrible words to contemplate. But, if I were able to do it, it would be a great accomplishment. What seems to me, ethically retarded, could still be greatness in God.<sup>81</sup> My interest here is not in this other breach of the ethical (the story of Abraham is enough example of that) but in the idea of 'greatness' which De Silentio propounds.

De Silentio spends a great deal of time comparing Abraham to the tragic hero. The tragic hero, in De Silentio's reading, gives himself up to the ethical understanding.<sup>82</sup> The Knight of Faith (a designation I will discuss more fully in a moment) gives up the universal to be the single individual. I have, then, the separation of the man of faith from the ethical. But De Silentio goes further. He asserts that it is maddening to live outside the universal without any contextual reference points and that there is a tremendous security to be found in giving oneself up to the universal.<sup>83</sup> But then De Silentio writes a strange thing. He writes that the Knight of Faith knows

---

<sup>80</sup>Josipovici states this even more bluntly: to love God without hating the human is impossible. See: Josipovici, 126.

<sup>81</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 73.

<sup>82</sup>See: Ibid, 75. I think this is the case for De Silentio's example, Agamemnon. I think it is also true for Antigone. But it is not true for Oedipus or Creon.

<sup>83</sup>See: Ibid, 76.

that he is being courageous<sup>84</sup> and, one supposes, draws strength from this knowledge.<sup>85</sup> I can understand the temptation the Knight of Faith has to revel in the security of being a tragic hero but how am I to understand that the Knight of Faith still relishes notions of greatness? What does greatness mean, if anything, outside the aesthetic and its ties to the ethical? In seeing Abraham and the Knight of Faith as great, am I not understanding them through the ontic-theological lens of the ethical universal? Can I be drawn to Abraham without poetic exhibitions of his greatness? Is it the case that what draws me in like a bridge to a new country must be promptly and consciously burned behind me? In this conscious burning do I not conceive of new, man-made bridges?

My point is that in De Silentio's celebration of the madness of Abraham<sup>86</sup> I am subtly removed from what has been called the pursuit of faith. To make Abraham a figure of greatness is to solemnize the man and to not pursue a similar achievement. The actions of Abraham are meaningless and empty, as exciting as any nothing, once I am able to do the same. And I will not learn, and nor can it be taught, the faith of Abraham by admiring Abraham. I will not, it appears, learn to love Christ by being impressed.

The purposeful inadequacies of De Silentio's text can be discovered by considering faith, and its criteria of love, through Kierkegaard's, concurrently written, upbuilding discourses. These discourses do not discuss Abraham; their idols, if they can be said to have them, are the apostles

---

<sup>84</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Green adds that De Silentio lets me know, through his praiseful portrait of the ordinary tax collector, that everyone can be such a hero. See: Green, 261.

<sup>86</sup>Agacinski interestingly points out that while faith does not automatically imply madness, it also does not deny it. (See: Agacinski, 131.)

Peter and Paul and Job, the king of thankfulness. But the heroism of these three, as Kierkegaard notes, has little to do with what they said, it is that they were able to do. I am not to be drawn to the name of the example, but to the edifying illustration.

Why is it that De Silentio states astonishment at the achievement of Abraham? De Silentio can not understand how Abraham did not need to understand or justify himself to others. What Abraham did is asked of all of us, is Kierkegaard's point.. If I find it terrifying or insensible then I am ignoring the request in favour of my own enlightened panic. De Silentio does not fit with Kierkegaard's message. De Silentio's concern is not for the truth, or for aesthetic splendour, or for the preservation of an ethical code; it is for himself. How do I avoid the distracting concern for oneself? Kierkegaard's preaching is clear: you have to be thoughtless in the world not to be concerned with yourself.<sup>87</sup>

Knowledge, and the pursuit of it, because I can not fully connect it to myself in a meaningful existential way causes anxiety. Knowledge is always about your position in the world. It is always existential. Kierkegaard is not however, eventually, an existentialist.<sup>88</sup> He writes:

---

<sup>87</sup>See: "Strengthening in the Inner Being", 84. Kierkegaard's statement is: "Only a thoughtless soul can let everything around it change, give itself up as a willing prey to life's fickle, capricious changes, without being alarmed by such a world, without being concerned for itself." The tone of this passage is not made fully evident until the punch line is dropped on the next page: "Nothing is said of the rich crops or of the newly erected barns, but what is mentioned is perhaps something he forgot in all this - that he has a soul..."

<sup>88</sup>Kierkegaard does stress the individual outside of the contextual. For many obvious reasons this desire for separation from context is read as throwing the individual into their existence. But this is certainly not the onus of importance for Kierkegaard. His existentialism is similar to Augustine's idea of the will. It is my view that this will and existence are eventually surrendered thus making the existence that understands secondary to that which is understood. And the self that does this, and the existence that provides that self, disappears. Kierkegaard comes to me as an aesthetic battler, designed and hoping to lose, with Eckhart's message of disinterest. To describe this as existentialism is to be frozen in a preliminary stage. This individual

(If a person were to have in mind deciding this matter once and for all and then being finished with it, so to speak, the inner being would only be stillborn and would vanish again. But if he is truly concerned, then through God everything would serve for strengthening in the inner being, because God is faithful and does not leave himself without witness. But God is spirit and therefore can give a witness only in the spirit; it is in the inner being. Any external witness from God, if such a thing could be thought of, can just as well be a deception.<sup>89</sup>

In the next chapter I will be considering Martin Heidegger's discussion of the anxious nothing. Heidegger's comments about the problems of logic and scientific thinking are invaluable to the work I am doing here. But perhaps of even more relevance to the more radical ends of the thesis is Heidegger's failure to forget the will.

---

in their existence is secondary to the relationship of the individual in God. To make Kierkegaard an existentialist, as Sartre does, it is necessary to first secularize him. To secularize Kierkegaard is to politicize Christianity. This is the opposite of what I want to do.

Of the books and essays I have perused only Paul Ricouer shares my doubts about Kierkegaard's reputation as an existentialist. He writes:

"To begin with the first doubt: was Kierkegaard really the father of existentialism? With the hindsight of several decades, this attribution reveals itself as a pure illusion, a *trompe-l'oeil*, a convenient way of domesticating Kierkegaard by subsuming him under a familiar category. It is now quite easy to see that the supposed family of 'existentialist' philosophies never really existed, and this should enable us to restore some autonomy to Kierkegaard. (See: Paul Ricouer: "Philosophy After Kierkegaard", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* [Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998], 10.)

<sup>89</sup>See: "Strengthening in the Inner Being", 87-8.

## Chapter Three - Heidegger's Willful Question of Metaphysics

(A)nxiety is a form of wishing.

- Søren Kierkegaard

“What do you say if I come to you with nothing?”

“Fling it down to the ground.”

- Zen saying

### Introduction

This chapter attempts a reading of Martin Heidegger's discussion of *nothing* in “What is Metaphysics?”. Heidegger is invaluable to the work of this thesis. It is in Heidegger that I find one of the best and strongest understandings and critiques of scientific epistemology. But it is in considering Heidegger's reflections on the *nothing* that my thesis is given its biggest boost. From the outset it is crucial that the reader not misunderstand what is being attempted here. I do not think that it is possible to argue that Heidegger is silent in a way that is identical with the views of silence presented in the other chapters of this text. No, by emphasizing Heidegger's thinking on nothing, I wish to argue something very different. My argument consists of the claim that much of Heidegger's unsilent thinking can be connected to the possibility and the protection of the same view of Christian silence that I have found elsewhere in these pages.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>I do think that Heidegger is useful to Christian thinking. While, I am very much opposed to Brian Ingraffia's completely unsympathetic reading of Heidegger as contrary to Biblical theology; I recognize that Karl Lowith is correct in stating that Heidegger's thinking may be religious but that it is not Christian. I also agree with John Caputo when he writes that Heidegger's comment in *Der Spiegel* that only a god can save us should not be construed as referring to the God of Christianity. But I also agree with Caputo that Heidegger works in the same direction as Eckhart and that instead of God Heidegger refers to Being. (I think that this has to do with the fact that the word God is jargon.) See: Brian Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 101-66; Karl Lowith, *Nature, History and Existentialism*, edited and translated by A. Levinson (Evanston: Northwestern



This chapter is organized as follows. I will begin by considering, in some depth, Heidegger's writing on *nothing* contained in the essay "What is Metaphysics?". I will try to demonstrate that this articulation of the nothing and its relation to metaphysics is interesting in regards to the fundamental question of ontology, ethics and the same scientific, logical understanding of the universal that the other authors of my thesis also seek to address. My intentions, as I have hopefully stated, are not lawyerly in either trying to defend Heidegger or in trying to piece together the story of Heidegger's thought.<sup>2</sup>

## Epigraphs

Heidegger's view of nothing helps to explicate how I can understand the paradox of the being that moves and lives inside the gestures of nothingness without constructing an edifice around that movement or that nothing.

"What is Metaphysics?", in the translation contained in *Basic Writings*, has as an epigraph the following:

*The world's darkness never reaches to the light of Being.*<sup>3</sup>

---

University, 1966), 10; John Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), 18, 254.

<sup>2</sup>I find Richard Rorty's critique of Heidegger very powerful in that there is a great distance between the projects of Heidegger and Rorty. In the current history of the relationship between Being and philosophy, Rorty is winning, (the world looks more like his books), therefore it is with fascination and curiosity that one finds Rorty to be so interested in Heidegger. Rorty provides a loving, and often vitriolic critique of Heidegger where Heidegger interests me most, that is where Heidegger can be separated from the rest of the modernist philosophical tradition. Rorty is used in this paper as the voice of those who demand the conversation that I am seeking to avoid and forget. This voice, I write with hesitancy, is crucial to this thesis.

<sup>3</sup>See: Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" in *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishing, 1993), 89. (Italics in original.)

While this statement, attributable it appears to Heidegger himself, is fitting for the paper it introduces, I suspect that it distracts me from the main theme of Heidegger's essay. I suggest, instead, that the following from the opening pages of *Fear and Trembling* is more to Heidegger's main point and would better suffice as the introduction to this work:

In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further. It perhaps would be rash to ask where they are going, whereas it is a sign of urbanity and culture for me to assume that everyone has faith, since otherwise it certainly would be odd to speak of going further. It was different in those ancient days. Faith was then a task for a whole lifetime, because it was assumed that proficiency in believing is not acquired either in days or in weeks. When the tried and tested oldster approached his end, had fought the good fight and kept the faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten the anxiety and trembling that disciplined the youth, that the adult learns to control, but that no man outgrows - except to the extent that he succeeds in going further as early as possible. The point attained by those venerable personages is in our age the point where everyone begins in order to go further.<sup>4</sup>

Heidegger's own citation intimates that "What is Metaphysics?" is a text about the threat of nihilism to a being that exists *a priori* to nihilism.<sup>5</sup> Read as such, the essay is a promise that the appearance of a discouraging nihilism in Heidegger's thinking is not the end of his philosophy of being but rather that being exists, perhaps optimistically, before such claims of nihilism can be weighed. This theme is very much present in his tract but I would like to begin by arguing that it

---

<sup>4</sup>See: *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

<sup>5</sup>The Post Script to "What Is Metaphysics?" published by Heidegger in 1943 continues this concern with appearing nihilistic. Heidegger is not the only person concerned with defending himself against the charge of nihilism in his work. See: Caputo, 18, 240-3. For Laszlo Versényi there is nothing to be defended, it is obvious to him that Heidegger is immersed in a tradition that celebrates and encourages the death of humanity. See: Laszlo Versényi, *Heidegger, Being and Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 193.

is not the predominant theme presented in those pages.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Richard Rorty thoroughly disagrees with me and for powerful reasons. In his “Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey” he writes:

This way of putting things may suggest that I am, like a good modern, neglecting the “ontological difference” between Being and beings...Heidegger neglects it too - and it is well for him that he does. If he did not, he would no longer have anything to differentiate his talk of Being from Kierkegaard’s talk of God and of grace. Unless Heidegger connected the history of Being with that of men and nations through such phrases as “a nation’s relation to Being,” and thus connected the history of philosophy with just plain history, he would be able to say only what Kierkegaard said: that when all the advances of modern civilization are utilized, all the dog-tricks of the Hegelian dialectic practised and perfected, and all the aspects of life and culture related by all the concepts one could imagine ever being evolved, we shall still be as far as ever from that which is *stenger als das Begriffliche* (the most severe of the representational). Without the reference to the history of nations, we should obviously have only what Versenyi suggests is all we get anyway: “an all too empty and formal, though often emotionally charged and mystically religious, thinking of absolute unity.” With this reference, we at least seem to have an analogue of an eschatological and Augustinian sort of Christianity, rather than an analogue of Kierkegaard’s private and Protestant hope that Grace may make him a New Being, able to believe the self-contradictory doctrine of the Incarnation. [See: Richard Rorty, “Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey”, in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 48. Translation mine.]

There is much of great interest in this long quotation. Rorty’s main point is that it is Heidegger’s consideration (allegiance) to being’s historical and geographical position is what sets him apart from the thoroughly negative dialectics of Kierkegaard. While this may be true of much of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, and I am not sure it is, it is not true of *Fear and Trembling* and “What is Metaphysics?” There are a number of points to be addressed and an additional number of points to be made in the main body of my text. First, Rorty has Heidegger displaying more optimism about the being that is there than Kierkegaard does. Again, this is not necessarily true for the two main texts of my discussion. I think, paradoxically, that the two are aligned in that Heidegger, in his reliance on anxiety, is not as optimistic but the possibilities of the connection between Being and beings and de Silencio is not as pessimistic in his understanding of the relationship between the ethical universal and the step of religious faith. I leave this only stated here. I will consider it in more depth in the main text. Second, it is important to note, perhaps only to separate the canon of Heidegger from “What is Metaphysics?” and the historical importance of the time that it was written that there are no references in the epigraph that I have quoted to “a nation’s relation to Being”. References are made within the text because the notion is crucial but I long to suggest that this bond between Being and being is not the crucial component of

As the above quotation from *Fear and Trembling* insinuates, I see “What is Metaphysics?” as predominantly attacking the sciences, and the logic they support, as failing to continue the asking of the question of being. Instead, the scientific, intellectual community has assumed the answer to the question of being and in so doing denied the path, the way, the *faith*, of the originary question of being. In so doing they have separated or pretended the separation of the questioner from the question.

Science asks questions. But the questions that are asked by scientists are confident questions about objects. This step away from including the questioner in the question is necessary for asking the sorts of questions that science likes. This confidence in a separation of the two, of knowing that a question about an object is not contaminated by the person asking it, is the point of departure for the modern. He has moved beyond that which previously stifled man. He has moved beyond the question: What is being? Or as Heidegger, in remembrance of Leibnitz, puts it: “Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?”<sup>7</sup> In this light, this paper of Heidegger’s is not so much a defence against nihilism but a criticism of the universal claims of logic in relation to the question of being. As David Farrell Krell puts it:

The whole force of Heidegger’s thought lies in his account of the history of

---

Heidegger’s work here. If it is what separates Heidegger from Kierkegaard (and again I am not certain that this is the case in *Fear and Trembling*) then I wish to announce that it is trumped by what unites Heidegger and de Silencio which is a concern for the stifling effects of the logic of the universal ethic. (I am almost prepared to predict that after necessary consideration that this point of separating Being and being in these two authors will become a minor and irrelevant one.) Third, I must be careful of Rorty’s understanding of Kierkegaard if he can write with seriousness that Kierkegaard is hoping for a Grace that will enable him to “believe the self-contradictory doctrine of the Incarnation”! One is hard-pressed to imagine how Kierkegaard could believe it if it wasn’t “contradictory” or paradoxical!

<sup>7</sup>See: “What is Metaphysics?”, 110. This is the last full sentence of the essay.

philosophy - as the history of Being as presencing, named but not thought in the history of metaphysics.<sup>8</sup>

I can wonder if Heidegger's use of the "nothing" is another name for the unthought.

## Nothing

"What is Metaphysics?" can be read as both an exposition of and an offering to the nothing. What is the nothing? The second that it takes to ask this question is all the time needed to replace the nothing with something. As Heidegger attests: in asking about the nothing, you must posit the nothing.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, with Heidegger, I must also conclude that when it comes to the nothing there is no question or answer.<sup>10</sup> This, while disarmingly straight-forward, is of crucial importance. In recognizing the importance of the non-askability of nothing I also, in a manner, articulate some substance to the nothing<sup>11</sup>.

Richard Rorty understands the importance of silence in regards to the nothing and attaches it to my consideration of Heidegger as a philosopher. Rorty notes that it would be good if

---

<sup>8</sup>See: David Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 144. I am encouraged to see that part of the theme of this paper is deemed by someone of the stature of Krell as the "whole force" of Heidegger's thought. I, unlike Krell and Richard Rorty, who he is writing to in this quotation, am more interested in the promise of seeing history in this sense and not just in noting that this is what Heidegger has done. There is, I think, still the hint of a problem in Krell's choice of language. His addition of "as the history of Being as presencing" is crucial and Rorty does not mention such a qualifier. What I am facing here is, in Rorty's case: a project about history; and with Krell: a project about history with a point that may be outside of that history. I think this a crucial difference.

<sup>9</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 96. As Heidegger puts it asking about the nothing "deprives itself (the question and the questioner) of its own object."

<sup>10</sup>See: *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>11</sup>Caputo is eager to make clear that the nothing should never be understood as a denial of what is. (See: Caputo, 21.) It is, I think, a denial of the privileged importance of what is.

Heidegger called what he wants something other than Thought.<sup>12</sup> In calling it Thought I am immediately confronted with a potential opposition, that between thinking and something that is not thinking. This is what Heidegger sees, as Rorty understands it, as the plagued gift that philosophy since Plato has bequeathed to us.<sup>13</sup> It is this inclination (that I can argue points to satisfactory conclusions, and that I can pick sides and identify certain groups) which is the result of thinking that I am arguing about an actual substance called an idea.<sup>14</sup> Heidegger wants to think away from this. The problem with arguments is that they presuppose an agreeable topic. As I shall soon show this confidence about my ability to delineate appropriate topics for philosophical debate is suspect.

Rorty also understands the difficulty in using a “standard” of philosophical reflection when “thinking” about Heidegger.<sup>15</sup> As soon as I seek to place Heidegger in the tradition, I have moved away from him. In the moment I aspire to identify with Heidegger I have named him and in naming him I have him and his philosophy as an object that belongs to a history rather than seeing Heidegger (and in writing this sentence I commit the crime I am articulating) as a representative of something entirely meta and other. Krell reflects the thinking I am recommending in his

---

<sup>12</sup>See: “Overcoming the Tradition”, 38. I do not deal with Thought in this paper as Rorty does in his. For the sake of easier reading I think it is possible to also see Rorty’s arguments as referring not just to Thought but to Being as well.

<sup>13</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Stanley Rosen discusses the inability to say that there is such a thing as nothingness and relates this impossibility to Plato in a way that reminds the reader of Derrida. He writes of the Platonic decree that: “to deny the thinkability or speakability of Nothingness is to think and speak it.” See: Stanley Rosen, “Thinking About Nothing”, in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Michael Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 118.

<sup>15</sup>See: “Overcoming the Tradition”, 39.

response to Rorty's criticism of the holy. Krell warns Rorty not to objectify the "holy" in a way that would be repugnant to Heidegger. I am, Krell writes, to think of the holy in the terms, or in the same terms, as the nothing which I confront in anxiety.<sup>16</sup> Considering anxiety as it connects with the nothing will assist me in explicating this crucial point.

## Anxiety

I am subtly trying to suggest that Heidegger's notion of the nothing is similar to de Silencio's view of the difficulty of faith in the way that it cannot remain true if it is touched by the labelling effects of consideration. Heidegger's thought on anxiety aids me in considering the connection between nothing and being. It also helps me to understand what is at stake in talking about the nothing.

Heidegger talks of boredom, and feelings like it, as being helpful in showing me to myself in relation to and in the context of the whole of beings. But boredom and its ilk do not show me the nothing.<sup>17</sup> There is only one mood, (and it is not a thought), that the nothing can be shown in and that is in the "fundamental mood of anxiety."<sup>18</sup> Anxiety is privileged above all other moods and is, I gather, deemed fundamental by Heidegger because it has no object<sup>19</sup> like other moods

---

<sup>16</sup>See: *Intimations of Mortality*, 141.

<sup>17</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 100.

<sup>18</sup>See: *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>See: *Ibid.* I am not immediately sure that anxiety, even in the sense that Heidegger uses it, does not have an object. I acknowledge that my consideration that there is an object to anxiety, albeit a vague premonitory object, is possibly the result of the technological continuation of the desire to name. All the same, there is a sense that when I conceive of anxiety, even if only to read Heidegger, I am aware of what he means thus understanding anxiety as an object. There is a difference between knowing that one is anxious and being anxious about something in particular. I wish to suggest that this difference is subtle, that if I am to understand anxiety as a point of

such as sadness and happiness.<sup>20</sup> When I cry I have something to cry about. I do not need to be given something to cry about when I am already in tears. When I laugh, I laugh at or with something. The object of my emotions may be vague but it is there to the me when I investigate.

This is not the case with anxiety. It can be differentiated from fear in that it is not attached to anything at all. In fact, if there is an object of apprehension I can always, in accuracy, label the mood as fear. When there is no object and I feel the fear, I am anxious.<sup>21</sup>

Heidegger writes: "Anxiety reveals the nothing."<sup>22</sup> Heidegger explicates by explaining that it is the very objectlessness of anxiety which shows the nothing. (I must be careful from the outset that I do not misunderstand Heidegger here. He is saying that anxiety *reveals* the nothing. He does not say that anxiety is the nothing.) When I am in a state of anxiety I will be confronted by the unusualness of its objectlessness. I will be confronted by the nothingness which I am anxiously apprehending. This is the closest, it would seem, that I can get to the nothing. I can glimpse it through the pinpointed indetermination of anxiety.<sup>23</sup>

The uniqueness of anxiety is also shown to me in my inability to say anything about it.<sup>24</sup>

---

reference to the nothing I am going to have parlay my own feelings of anxiety into an object of potential anxiety. In this sense I battle in, and with, the nothing about an anxiety that becomes the object of my anxiety. This is not, I must be clear, irrevocable. I raise it as another of the many traps that await the sincere student of Heidegger.

<sup>20</sup>For corroboration, see: Caputo, 19.

<sup>21</sup>See: Caputo, 22.

<sup>22</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 101.

<sup>23</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Caputo reiterates this point, see: Caputo, 23.



Heidegger writes:

Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slips away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the “is” falls silent. That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of the nothing.<sup>25</sup>

There is much that is very interesting in this passage. First, the silence that Heidegger shows to pervade in anxiety is, as I hear it, exactly the same sort of silence that Kierkegaard’s Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* exhibits. The difference here in Heidegger, and I think it is a problematic difference, is that I cannot speak. In *Fear and Trembling* the “is” is part of the temptation. Abraham, I am told, is tempted to resort to statements of the “is”. Perhaps it is impossible for Abraham to do this but the impossibility of doing this for Abraham is countered, balanced, made promising, only in relation to the fact that I do find ways to render the insensible into the “is”. If I read the passage again I may hear Heidegger to say even more. I do try to talk, compulsively. But, and this must be from the perspective of a truth that Heidegger is in, (with or without understanding but I suspect that Heidegger thinks he is in the former group) I am unable to speak the truth of the nothing *no matter how I, compulsively, try*.

Also, I must pay attention to Heidegger’s use of the word “malaise”. “Malaise” is a very curious thing to write about my experience of anxiety. It is peculiar in that it objectifies the experience of anxiety even if this objectification is accomplished through the subtleties of a malaise. A malaise is something, it has an object. The object here is anxiety. This is the object of my malaise. This suggests that my experience of the nothing must be willed. This passage demonstrates this silent point in Heidegger. I try to talk over anxiety and I cannot. I try to talk

---

<sup>25</sup>See: “What is Metaphysics?”, 101.

because I sense the malaise of anxiety. But I cannot talk. But of course, as I know from my experiences with people in the world, I *can talk*. To realize that I cannot address my anxiety is as willful an act as talking over it, of drowning it out. I must will, without connecting my will to logic or common sense, anxiety to show nothing.<sup>26</sup> This is not, it seems despite my willfulness, what Heidegger wishes to say. If it was, I wonder, would he write that talk “proves” the existence of the nothing? Failed talk, it seems to me, does not prove the existence of anything. The use of this scientific term by Heidegger confounds me.

Robert Bernasconi writes:

For the moment, the important point being made here is that the nothing does not arise out of beings as a whole; it is always already there, though concealed. Proof of the “presence” of the nothing is found in the compulsive chatter that attempts to shatter the silence. The nothing can be recognized in our preoccupation with beings. That we turn to beings in an attempt to escape the nothing, means that the nothing directs us to beings. The nothing is revealed as already there by our attempts to avoid it.<sup>27</sup>

Bernasconi writes that the nothing “can be recognized in our preoccupation with beings”, but it can, I think, also be avoided. The point here in Heidegger’s text is that it cannot be avoided. This is not only simply wrong but also a distraction, in my view, from Heidegger’s importance. Rather than posit a transcendental category exposed by anxiety, I suggest that Heidegger is better served (perhaps he does not need to write about it but I recommend he not write against it) by implying the necessary of a will distinct from the objectifying will. I can call it the will of a surrendered and

---

<sup>26</sup>Caputo talks of the willingness of the choice of anxiety, see: Caputo, 23.

<sup>27</sup>See: Robert Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985), 54.

faithful self in God without falling into the trap of objectivity.<sup>28</sup> As it appears here, Heidegger's view of silence is saying the same things that I have heard before.

Let me return to considering the revealing of the nothing that is accomplished by anxiety. Again, in revealing the nothing I have not grasped it. The nothing does not become the object of anxiety.<sup>29</sup>

How am I to understand this? It does seem difficult. When I am anxious, the nothing is revealed but not held. Is there a doubled nothing at work here? Is there the nothing that is apprehended in anxiety and is that nothing distinct from the nothing which underlies that experience? I am not sure. I am aware of something when I am anxious. This awareness is the result of my recognition that I am not aware of anything. The point is that I do end up with a result, thus a conclusion, thus an object.<sup>30</sup> But this object is not, supposedly, the nothing I was talking about. I raise these questions not to attempt to cripple Heidegger's explication of his approach to the nothing but to demonstrate that participation in the unknown, non-objectifiable nothing may require an act of will. I may have to willfully refuse to acknowledge the nothing that

---

<sup>28</sup>Rudolf Carnap in his consideration of Heidegger's questioning of metaphysics acknowledges that the success of metaphysical thinking in the history of man is tied to how "they serve for the *expression of the general attitude of a person toward life*." That is to say, metaphysics comes about through a willed response to our emotional state, like creating a nothing from our anxiety. See: Rudolf Carnap, "The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language", in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Michael Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 32. Italics in original.

<sup>29</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 102.

<sup>30</sup>Rudolf Carnap wrote in 1931 about Heidegger's questions about metaphysics. Though considered to be a scathing dismissal I often find Carnap's points to be well-intentioned, For instance, Carnap writes: "If something wants to lie, in principle beyond possible experience, it could neither be said nor thought nor asked." See: Carnap, 30.

I ascertain as the result of the lack of anything as being an object in the name of respecting the nothingness of nothing. It is not that I have nothing to say about the nothing that is the problem. I have nothing to say about it because it is not an object like other objects in that it is not tangible; it is beyond my experience. But it is something that I can still point at.

I wish to remind the reader of de Silencio's view of the absurd and place that thought in this context. The absurd in *Fear and Trembling* is not removed from my will (which is a long way from saying it is dependant on my will) in that I must will my acceptance of it, or more accurately my lack of validity in having any opinion about it, so to pursue that which, in sincerity, cannot be avoided.<sup>31</sup> It seems different here in Heidegger in that I must assertively refuse to call and name what I have found when I am anxious. In *Fear and Trembling* I am not faced with this choice because that which strikes as an absurd *object* remains unsatisfactory as an object. It is too absurd or ridiculous to be an object of universal sensibility. To accept anxiety as a revelation of the nothing I must willfully accept that it is not the nothing it reveals.

How does this effect the view of being that anxiety allows? Heidegger writes:

In anxiety beings as a whole become superfluous. In what sense does this happen? Beings are not annihilated by anxiety, so that nothing is left. How could they be, when anxiety finds itself precisely in utter impotence with regard to beings as a whole? Rather, the nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole.<sup>32</sup>

What is shown to me by being is removed from me in anxiety. There is an act of replacement occurring here. The being who I thought I knew is replaced by the being that is shown to me in

---

<sup>31</sup>Stanley Rosen writes: "Anyone who wishes to take seriously the problem of Nothingness must reconcile himself to a willing suspension of belief in the world of concepts, objects, quantifiers, and the like." See: Rosen, 123.

<sup>32</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 102.

anxiety. Anxiety can show me nothing about being and so being is shown to me to be nothing. But being, I am told, is not annihilated by anxiety. How not? Again, I think the reason is to be found in the will. Being is not annihilated only if I do not accept the nothing shown to me in anxiety as an object which tells me what my being is. I remain an observer of nothing when I do not accept nothing as something that is fully seen. Instead I recognize nothing in terms of context and not as an actual object of experience.<sup>33</sup>

I am arguing, that to do this requires a will akin to the religious inclination that De Silencio also recommends. This willful refusal to identify the nothing with a dictating actuality is a religious act in the same way that a person willfully gives in to infinite resignation.<sup>34</sup> I am not willing something that I believe in because I know it. I am willing, in the case of anxiety, against that which has been shown to me. To do this I must accept in faith that I am not comprehending all that is being shown to me. I must, in effect, allow that there is something bigger than what I identify. At this juncture it is not immediately clear, outside of the arguments of a phenomenological science, why I would do that.

## Science and the Illogical Nothing

In “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger is explicitly critical of the scientific approach, (and its popularity), to being and knowing. The sciences have become the way that understanding is

---

<sup>33</sup>Caputo argues that thinking has nothing to do with definition and argument at: Caputo, 3.

<sup>34</sup>Caputo denotes this move as going from needing a reason to accepting the “without why” and engaging “in a non-representational tinkering on Being which leaves metaphysical reason behind.” But Caputo is not clear here, except for mentioning without development Heidegger’s concept of awe, why I would wish to will this. See: Caputo, 8, 25.

evaluated and known and, accordingly, existence has become grounded on this model of understanding.<sup>35</sup> Science, in its method of study, has posited and assumed a representation of man whereby he is shown what and who he is. In Heidegger's language, the sciences have given beings to themselves.<sup>36</sup> This is more complicated and diabolical than I am showing. The important words to dwell on here are "posited" and "assumed". The scientific method has made *Dasein* suitable for science and is **thus** exposed by it.<sup>37</sup> Human beings have only become understandable in relation to the world, the attitudes they derive from experience in that world, and the atomism that this world encourages. Beings, in this tri-partite relationship, are examinable and what is examinable has come to be the standard of what is. If it cannot be examined it cannot be. Therefore science has

---

<sup>35</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 95.

<sup>36</sup>See: Ibid. The opposing side of scientific philosophy is equally unimpressed with Heidegger. Rudolf Carnap mocks Heidegger's use of language as too empty of content and meaning to be significantly empty. He writes of Heidegger's sentences that they are meaningless words of metaphysics dependant on depriving meaningful words of their meaning through senseless metaphors. His conclusion of Heidegger's rhetoric is that it would be contradictory and absurd if it was not already meaningless. See: Carnap, 24-5.

<sup>37</sup>See: Ibid. Heidegger defines science as working in man through a trinity of understandings. First, man has declared himself knowable only in relation to the world that he lives in. This is the natural world that science has the power to inspect. What the world shows of beings, in its natural relationships, is what beings are. Second, the "attitude" or personalities of beings are also derived wholly from their surroundings and there is nothing outside of these surroundings which can contribute to being. Third, and I think most important, the image of man that science has created and nurtured irrupts onto the community of man. With this last step the atomistic subject is invented and with his development science has a source in which to be justified. These three points from Heidegger (See: Ibid.) should not be understood chronologically. A chronological understanding of that sort would in itself be scientific. How this relationship works is not immediately clear. Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* assists in understanding how this development occurred. In that work, our crumbling relationship with God enables us to posit myself as a subject for the verifiability of the experiences of that subject. Heidegger does not write, here, explicitly about the death of God but I think that Foucault is correct in placing this data into the equation.

no interest or patience for the nothing.<sup>38</sup> But, Heidegger contends, science, in order to defend itself (which science believes should be done), needs recourse to the nothing.<sup>39</sup>

Heidegger is unwilling to see this development of the scientific understanding of being neutrally. The guiding force of Heidegger's argument is that the route that philosophy has taken, into an atomistic, scientific understanding of the self, has prevented man from pure access to Being.<sup>40</sup> It has prevented me from asking the fundamental question of ontology because it thinks it has answered that very question. For Heidegger it is my anxious apprehension of the nothing that leads me to a better path of questioning. Metaphysics is the name for that which the history of philosophy has pursued.<sup>41</sup> The metaphysical question, which results in science and is fed, negatively, by science, is: what is above being? This is not Heidegger's question. Heidegger's fundamental question, as I see it, is: what is being in? What is the Being within which beings reside? The metaphysical history of philosophy dodges this question with presumption. Heidegger sees science as refusing to acknowledge the signposts of Being in its celebration and encouragement of being without Being.

Science distracts itself from the call of the question of Being by refusing to admit the

---

<sup>38</sup>For support, see: Caputo, 18.

<sup>39</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 96. Whether this is the case or not, that science depends on the nothing, seems to be a fundamentally scientific argument of cause and effect where the causes in this instance are denied. I will be discussing the scientific bent of Heidegger shortly.

<sup>40</sup>I should explain what I mean by Being in contrast to being. The term Being, in my interpretation of Heidegger, is the absolute truth of all beings. It is that from which I derive my being. Heidegger would not use the word God for Being for any number of reasons I will not go into here. I will say that I am tempted to equate the two.

<sup>41</sup>Caputo demonstrates Heidegger's desire to leave rational argumentation outside of philosophy. See: Caputo, 4.

presence of the nothing. My contentment with the modern scientific understanding of being is the same as, in *Fear and Trembling*, my desire for the universal ethic that prevents faith. Science's understanding of being deters me from my quest for Being. This occurs when I look to being for the answers to being. It occurs the more I hold on to being as a whole onto itself. The more I do this the more I turn from the nothing.<sup>42</sup> This is very similar to De Silencio's complaint about the universal ethical. I am drawn into that which explains me, that which makes sense to me. I come to find myself living in a community where these same understandings are the currency of participation and recognition. I can only be recognized by the others in my life, I can only be granted the status of being, through participation in these standards. To attempt to get outside them requires a madness, an irrational step into be it the nothing or be it faith. Heidegger is correct to write that I am perceived as delving into "nihilation" when I seek the nothing that points me toward the Being of beings.<sup>43</sup> For Heidegger the path beyond, before, within and outside of science is not nihilistic. Rather it represents the importance of liberating myself from the idol of metaphysical truth.<sup>44</sup>

Richard Rorty identifies some important streams in Heidegger's thoughts and perceives some possible problem areas. He agrees with Heidegger that the Christian/Platonic idea of the One, distinct from the temporal many has led to the idea of certitude as metaphysics.<sup>45</sup> Through

---

<sup>42</sup>See: "What is Metaphysics?", 104.

<sup>43</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>See: Ibid, 110. Carnap, while perhaps intending to be dismissive, assists in understanding Heidegger by calling metaphysics "a kind of knowledge which is not accessible to empirical science." See: Carnap, 30.

<sup>45</sup>See: "Overcoming the Tradition", 43.



appreciation of the One, I have come to doubt the truth of appearances. This has led to concepts of Truth as defined in a negative relation to the untruth of experience. In time and history this has become transvaluated but the modern gesture of experience as truth, or empiricism, is connected to this original underpinning. The problem with this whole tradition is the ease in which it recognizes its own place. This ease for Heidegger is *hubristic*. It has also contaminated me in my approximations and appreciations of everything I participate in. This is present in the dilemma of the fact/value distinction. I, living in the modern technological world, fail to see that what I value has a symbiotic relationship with what I call a fact. There is no distinction between fact and value.<sup>46</sup> Traditional, but born in this century, arguments against the fact/value distinction have tended to argue that what I call facts are actually my values. Heidegger and Rorty, I think, argue this inversely. What I call values, and what I value, are connected to what I call facts. The relationship starts with a faith in facticity and this is what encourages me to privilege that which I claim to value.

Rorty, so far, is in sympathy with these arguments. The arguments have far reaching ramifications for the study of philosophy. Philosophy has become the rhetorical art of polemics where the superior logical argument implies truthfulness. It is these arguments, and the philosophers who provide them, that I value. But philosophers like this come from the same communities of understanding as those who are evaluating them. The circle of philosophical thought is very tight. I like the thinkers who think like I do and allow me to think as I do more persuasively.

---

<sup>46</sup>See: Ibid, 45.

Heidegger rebels against this.<sup>47</sup> Philosophers, in Rorty's understanding of Heidegger, are not there to enhance human life.<sup>48</sup> They are there to ask the fundamental question of being. The history of metaphysics which is the history of philosophy has, in Rorty's view of Heidegger, trivialized the holy. It has done this by making Being an object which is already understood in beings.<sup>49</sup>

How does Heidegger fit with science? What sort of question is this? I think it is an inevitable but foolish question. Rorty writes that "*(t)he whole force of Heidegger's thought lies in his account of the history of philosophy.*"<sup>50</sup> What Rorty means here is that Heidegger's project is dependant on that which it is clashing with. He attributes the same tendency to Kierkegaard's insistence that the entire history of theology has been a step away from God. Rorty thinks this absurd and not worth considering. To the latter Rorty claims that there is no Christ without that which Christians have said He is.<sup>51</sup> The same goes, it follows, for Being. There is no Being except for what beings have said about it. David Farrell Krell agrees about the "guiding force" of Heidegger's thought.<sup>52</sup> More importantly, Krell is willing to add that the larger point of this force

---

<sup>47</sup>And in rebelling there is no small degree of alignment thus the impossibility of overcoming metaphysics.

<sup>48</sup>See: Ibid, 50. And every commentator I have read who would call themselves Heideggarian or at least exhibit sympathy to the Heideggarian view of philosophy always return to a discussion of the place for ethics in Heidegger. For examples, see: Rosen, 123; Caputo, 257.

<sup>49</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>See: Ibid, 52.

<sup>51</sup>See: Ibid, 53.

<sup>52</sup>See: *Intimations of Mortality*, 144.

may be outside of it. But he qualifies this by seeing that there may be some congruence between Hegel and Heidegger as regards the movement of history. He agrees that Heidegger can be read as inverting Hegel's "history of Being".<sup>53</sup> Hegel and Heidegger seek different conclusions but their methods are not disparate.<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, himself, may be trapped in the thinking of technology that he aims to expose.<sup>55</sup>

I think that both Krell and Rorty are right but I have no interest in their correctness. It is obvious, as Rorty makes clear at the beginning of his essay, that you can always try to trap a thinker or a thought into the history of metaphysics. Heidegger can be made to fit the tradition that he rejects because the tradition can encompass anything but the presence of what Heidegger asserts. The method of assertion can always be objectified. Words are always words in context. When the message is that I must be silent the fact that it is a message can always be shown to be averse to the silence it recommends.

How am I then to read Heidegger? I concede that the problem regards his relationship to the reading of history. This thesis thoroughly disagrees with Rorty's claim that Christ is who Christians have said he is. This is, to my reading, too firmly in the representational, scientific tradition. I assert that it is possible to imagine, as *Fear and Trembling* recommends, that I suspend this universal understanding in order to stand in the awe of my own ignorance about that which I have named. *Fear and Trembling* does refer to names in my Biblical lexicon but to

---

<sup>53</sup>Caputo's discussion of "What Is Metaphysics?" eventuates in a discussion of there being a deeper power than rationality at work in the history of the West. See: Caputo, 30.

<sup>54</sup>See: *Intimations of Mortality*, 139.

<sup>55</sup>See: *Ibid*, 143.

automatically infer that this places de Silencio's attempt to slide out of history into the unnamed and insensible behind that history into a category of that history requires that I accept the truth of context as the entirety of being.

My point here is that I can read Heidegger without dwelling on the "fact" that he can be connected to that which he rejects. In my reading the guiding force of Heidegger's thought is mooted. To seek a guiding force is to seek a place where reduction is possible.<sup>56</sup>

There is something important, though, to be considered in thinking of Heidegger as a reflection of scientific thinking. I would like to return to my thinking about willfulness. The present discussion also exemplifies the need for willfulness on the part of Heidegger's reader. I am, whether eventually noticed or not, forced to will a reading against this tradition. I have to consciously refuse the lull of the universal.<sup>57</sup> To do this, I do not necessarily have to make logical and correct choices, but I do, at least once, have to choose. Even though Mary, in the Biblical story of Mary and Martha, chose contemplation of Christ over human action, she still had to make this choice in relation to the other.<sup>58</sup> I could say that in the case of Mary the actual presence of Christ made her choice easier. Why do *I* choose the question of being? Why do *I* choose faith?<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>Carnap is convinced depends on exactly this confusion. (See: Carnap, 26.) Rosen provides an understanding of Heidegger from a perspective of this confusion but uninterested in it. (See: Rosen, 116.)

<sup>57</sup>Rosen asks if it is necessary to take the nothing as a concept. (See: Rosen, 120.) No, it is not necessary, but it is necessary, I am arguing, to will against the concept.

<sup>58</sup>I will consider this in greater detail in the next chapter.

<sup>59</sup>Paul Hühnerfeld provides a fascinating comment regarding these questions. He states, plainly, that leaping into God (as Eckhart recommends) is very different from leaping into Being (as Heidegger recommends). Why would anyone leap into Being? Why would awe be so powerful? See: Paul Hühnerfeld, *In Sachen Heidegger; Versuch über ein deutsches Genie*

In asking questions like this, as Rorty, Krell and numerous others do, I am showing what it *is* that I actually have chosen and in so doing refuse to choose it.

Heidegger tries to protect his thinking from a logical, intellectual reduction by showing that the nothing is not the same as nihilism. For Heidegger the “nothing is more original than the ‘not’ and negation.”<sup>60</sup>

If the nothing is to be questioned, which Heidegger recognizes he has been doing, it must be already there.<sup>61</sup> This reads like a Kantian transcendental argument or a Thomist defence of God - given that I am talking about something that something must exist.<sup>62</sup> I wish that Heidegger did not write things like this because it draws the reader’s attention to the phenomenological category. In seeking to defend the nothing he is better served by announcing, as he does later, that if I think of negation when I think of the nothing I have conceptualized the nothing but I do not have the nothing.<sup>63</sup> The latter defence is much more powerful in that it does not draw itself into

---

(Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1961), 125. (Quoted in: Caputo, 34.)

While Heidegger is not completely true to his own philosophy I do think that this is where he has an edge over Eckhart (my discussion of Eckhart follows in the next chapter). Heidegger refuses to give charms or promises to Being and as a result is unable to provide a “reason” why Being attracts.

<sup>60</sup>See: “What is Metaphysics?”, 97.

<sup>61</sup>See: Ibid. Caputo agrees that an ability to question the nothing bespeaks an approach to the question of Being. (See: Caputo, 21.)

<sup>62</sup>I think that Carnap is correct to argue that Heidegger makes a mistake in thinking that existence is a predicate. (See: Carnap, 29.) I think that this is something that Heidegger admits but has, it seems, some difficulty addressing. In “What Is Metaphysics?” there is no talk of Being shown to being as *dasein* or in the actions of existence. And yet there is, in the material under consideration here, persistence of the importance of the existential in relation to Being.

<sup>63</sup>See: “What is Metaphysics?”, 99.

logical considerations. Heidegger reiterates the previousness of nothing to negation later in his essay and this time he addresses the problem of understanding his explication as logical. Nothing is before the logical conclusion of negation. Therefore logic is not the start and there is a deeper questioning before logic that erases the pertinence of logic.<sup>64</sup>

Of course, this is still logical. I am sympathetic to what Heidegger wants to do here but I wish he would do it in other ways. He should be drawing my attention to the Being of nothing which is not just prior to but is the source of all things. Between the two devils of logic and mystical revelation Heidegger chooses the former when he is eventually going to have come back to the latter. In correcting the history of metaphysics Heidegger is metaphysical. He wants to fix, he wants to repair and this is a metaphysical inkling. He should recognize in his own pages that it is the will in contrast to the mind that he is addressing. If he aims to be persuasive he has to do it at the cost of losing the thought. Just like I do, and so all my references to the contrary must be reread in the light of this confessed awareness.

## Nothing and Being

Heidegger explicitly states the association between the nothing and being: the nothing is non-being “pure and simple.”<sup>65</sup> Even if I read this as an objective statement about the meaning of the nothing Heidegger knows it doesn’t matter much given that non-being (in a sense that is not simply negation) is not a term I can technologize anymore than the nothing. Heidegger can say that “(t)he nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings”<sup>66</sup> without fear of being called

---

<sup>64</sup>See: Ibid, 105.

<sup>65</sup>See: Ibid, 97.

<sup>66</sup>See: Ibid, 98.

a nihilist. Nihilism, as Heidegger sees it, is within the totality of beings and is negated by the nothing.<sup>67</sup>

Heidegger stresses the relationship between a being and their context in other beings as representative of my understanding of myself. I cannot understand the whole of beings, be it the social body or the whole of the self, but I can understand myself as being in “the midst of beings that are revealed somehow as a whole.”<sup>68</sup> Before I consider this complicated thought let me add to it the estimation that my existence is always in the context of the whole.<sup>69</sup> It is my view that this idea<sup>70</sup> works on a number of levels. There are two understandings of the whole at work here. There is the whole of society and the whole of the body.

It is important to Heidegger that I have some, albeit illusory, understanding of my place in the social whole. It is not important that I understand exactly what my place is because at best I can only have a vague sense of that. What is important is that I recognize that I am in relation to a social whole. This is important for my experience with anxiety. Without a social context to relate to the pangs of anxiety, the nothing that is revealed, will not have the appearance of a something that is threatened. Heidegger uses the words “hover” and “hang” to describe what happens to my association with the being as a whole. In anxiety the bottom/ground of my being drops away from

---

<sup>67</sup>Caputo writes that nothing can not be compared with Being because Being is in nothing. And being, even *dasein*, does not contribute to this but its negation is not nihilism because no essence or presence is there to be negated. (See: Caputo, 20.)

<sup>68</sup>See: “What is Metaphysics?”, 99.

<sup>69</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>I am no longer concerned, in this context, about using words like these.

me, it loses its credibility, and all I am left with is being in nothing.<sup>71</sup> This allows me to glimpse the nothing as a part of my existence. I am able to do this in retaliation against, and reliance on, the context of my understanding. It is the ground of metaphysics which is opened by the nothing. *Dasein* is present here. Being is not thrown away in this episode. Nor is being redeemed through some process of negation.<sup>72</sup> I do not see myself because I have stripped the other or the physical self away. They are the lights on the platform I am standing on, they are what allow me to see that the platform is falling away.<sup>73</sup>

It is this moment in Heidegger that I am given being. I am separated from the whole, I see them drop away in my anxiety. I am left with myself. It is not the nothing and not faith, but still through the nothing and through faith that makes “possible the revelation of beings in general.”<sup>74</sup> My previous analogy between the nothing and de Silentio’s faith has been furthered. Being is now comparable to God. It is also Being that I must will towards. This is still the case because as Heidegger puts it: “*Dasein* means being held out into the nothing.”<sup>75</sup>

This is the answer to the question of metaphysics. Metaphysics, in Heidegger’s account, is the *Dasein* that relates to the whole and it is the history of how this equation has been made.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup>See: Ibid, 101.

<sup>72</sup>See: Ibid, 103. Caputo adds that thinking must be detached from being to think of Being. (See: Caputo, 22.)

<sup>73</sup>For further agreement, see: Caputo, 20.

<sup>74</sup>See: “What is Metaphysics?”, 103.

<sup>75</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>See: Ibid, 109.



Heidegger's equation, and it might still be an equation, is the negation of all equations.<sup>77</sup> I must remember, though, that the nothing is essential to being. And as long as it is essential I have to will it against the odds of sensibility. Anxiety is not enough as I showed earlier, it is all too easily objectifiable.

Rorty points out that all I can be told about being is done through negation. The result of this is that: "Metaphysics can only be explained by showing its history, by showing how people thought to speak Being and wound up speaking of beings."<sup>78</sup> In Rorty's view Heidegger cannot get any further than this. Heidegger leaves me with beings-without-Being and with no clue as to what Thought or philosophy might truly be. This seems to me to put the cart before the horse. It is one thing to show that Heidegger discovers the ontic-theological bent of Western metaphysics. This claim is fine with me. It is another thing to castigate him for not joining in on this parade and to suggest that I have to consider other ways of considering Being and being. If Rorty does not know what Heidegger means by Thought or philosophy it is because he is still expecting the philosopher to deliver his messages in cause and effect packages and in arguments. Rorty must, if he wants to be a sincere reader of Heidegger, stop seeing Heidegger's exposure of the philosophical tradition as Heidegger's *idea* and all the baggage that that entails.<sup>79</sup>

## Finishings

---

<sup>77</sup>For Caputo, Being commands entire respect. We don't deal with Being, Being deals with us. (See: Caputo, 25.)

<sup>78</sup>See: "Overcoming the Tradition", 49.

<sup>79</sup>Heidegger's baggage, according to Paul Hühnerfeld, is Germany. He is far too much in love with rural German culture to think of Being outside of it. (See: Hühnerfeld, 110-4, in Caputo, 32.)

I am much more explicit about the importance of the will than Heidegger is. But I end up in the same position. My aim in discussing the will is to distance myself from what I read as sincere warnings in Heidegger's text about logical thinking and objectification. In my rendering, the will wants but it does not know to name that which it wants and in that ability aims to step into a blind and silent Truth by stepping out of the truth.

Next, in the final chapter, I consider Meister Eckhart's view of Christian disinterest which is similar to Heidegger's rendering of the nothing. It is to this final view of disinterest which this entire thesis has been both apprehensively and enthusiastically approaching.

## Chapter Four - Boring Eckhart<sup>1</sup>

Come to my house/stick a stone in your mouth/you can always pull it out if you like it too much

- Garbage  
"Supervixen"

Wise Meister Eckhart speaks to us about Nothingness. He who does not understand that, in him the Divine light has never shone.

- anonymous nun of Eckhart's acquaintance

### Introduction

This last chapter discusses Meister Eckhart's very short essay "About Disinterest". Eckhart is completely essential to this thesis. Eckhart assists in making the awkwardness of what I have been writing about palatable. His message appears at first glance to be a bold one, but with only a little consideration one can see that Eckhart's bizarre Christian message is not far removed from the thought of the mainstream.

In this chapter I am going to invite you to sin with me for the last time. I am inviting you to be interested, with me, in the thought of Meister Eckhart.

Are these opening sentences a rhetorical flourish or an admission of guilt? It is standard in much academic writing to make statements like the above hoping to shock and entice the reader into reading further. My sentence here, "I am inviting you to sin with me", is truthful and, also, hopefully, enticing. When reading Eckhart should I be learning by a method derived by Socrates

---

<sup>1</sup>I would like to especially thank Klaus Klostemaier for his assistance in his this chapter.

in the *Meno* or by Plato in *The Republic*? Should I be drawing the lesson from inside myself where it already nestles? Or do I need to create a context where such understandings are capable of resonance? Or, a third possibility, are neither of these techniques or approaches of value?

In the pages that follow I wish to consider Eckhart's short essay "About Disinterest". I have two reasons for doing so. First, the essay fascinates me and I do not wish to dilute my initial and preliminary fascination with too much specific consideration of other inputs. Second, I think all of Eckhart's theology can be found in these nine pages.<sup>2</sup> (There may be one possible and glaring exception to this trump. In other pages, completely within his sermons, there is much discussion of how I, as connected to God, can be removed from God while being within God.)

---

<sup>2</sup>I may be alone in thinking this. The secondary literature that I have been able to peruse has been mostly, appropriately, silent on this essay of Eckhart's. There is some controversy as to what the kernel of Eckhart's message. Raymond Blakney in his introduction to his translation of Eckhart writes:

It could justly be said that Meister Eckhart was a man of one idea - one very great idea, to whom nothing else mattered much. That idea was the unity of the divine and the human. (See: Raymond B. Blakney, *Meister Eckhart* [New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1941], xx.)

In another translation of Eckhart's writings, I find the following, from Edmund Colledge:

In them, Henry deals with what was to become the dominant central theme of Eckhart's teaching, the birth of the Word in the soul... (See: *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, And Defense*, Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, translators, [New York: Paulist Press, 1981], 7.)

Of course, these two views can be correlated. But even with an amalgamation, they do emphasize different things in Eckhart's work. My view of what is most important in Eckhart's work, disinterest, is akin to but also overwhelms their depictions. Blakney stresses the unity of man with God, Colledge that the Word is on my soul. The two points, basically, mean the same thing but they demonstrate that which is of interest to the two separate authors. It is the same case, I do not want to stress the unity of God and man, or that God is present in my heart as the Word. I wish to stress that, eventually, I must be disinterested and to do this I must, importantly, put aside and choose against these types of academic renderings.

This extraordinary thought does not fit, tightly, in what I wish to consider. Others<sup>3</sup> claim that Eckhart's theological position is best demonstrated in *The Defense*. I cannot understand why this would be true. In actuality, I think, *The Defense* is Eckhart at his worst and at his most analytical. The nature of a defense is explanation and justification. If one's reading of Eckhart is to be governed by the desire to explicate then *The Defense* may be an encouraging place to begin or continue one's research. But if this is a person's desire I suggest that he may as well not read Eckhart. To read Eckhart in the hope of understanding is very complicated. To consider Eckhart's influences, to consider historical context, to balance a phrase here with a phrase there, to apply the usual criteria of academic exploration is not necessarily an impossible thing to do here but I am at a loss as to why anyone would want to.

## About Disinterest

Let me begin with the title. I, as reader, am automatically greeted with a paradox. The title offers only two words: "About" and "Disinterest".<sup>4</sup> Is it possible to connect these two terms? What happens if, as I am tempted to do, I privilege the second word: "Disinterest"? Let me posit an initial definition. Disinterest is to be without interest. If I am talking *about* disinterest I am acknowledging disinterest as something, perhaps not worthy or even stated as worthy but

---

<sup>3</sup>The translator, Raymond B. Blakney, of the edition I use here, names the scholar Baeumker who is unfamiliar to me.

<sup>4</sup>The translator of the edition I am using notes that the literal translation of Eckhart's title *Von Abgescheidenheit* is best translated as "About Detachment." (See: Raymond B. Blakney, translator, *Meister Eckhart* [New York: Harper & Row, 1941], 315-6.) The points I wish to make can be made equally well with either term: detachment or disinterest. Additionally, Caputo refers to the essay as *On Detachment*. I make much of the word "about" but am confident I could do the same with "on".

something, that I can focus on. This essay is *about* disinterest. I have to wonder, then, if what is being brought to my attention is an interest, even if it is only of the sort that is only interested enough to point, in the *subject* of disinterest.

Now, let me switch my emphasis around. “About” is the focus. This changes everything. The focus now is on the holistic, that which is *all about*. It is particularized in this usage by disinterest. Disinterest is one of the possibilities of what there is that is *about*. One would think that there may be other possibilities but I suspect that this one is where the title becomes most intriguing. As I shall show later in this chapter, disinterest trumps all other virtues. It trumps them because it includes what is good about them and discludes that which is self-directed and spoiled, that is, bad about them. Disinterest is more important than humility for disinterest includes humility but humility does not include disinterest. What I can conclude, then, is that when I say “about disinterest” I am also saying something, and something more, “about love.” This will become clearer as I progress.

One of the most important contributions that Eckhart makes to this thesis is his discussion of Mary and Martha. The choice that Mary makes has a great deal to do with and about disinterest and what it is to be silent in Christ.

## Mary and Martha

The highest virtue is disinterest. This is what Eckhart writes:

Our Lord said to Martha: “*Unum est necessarium*,” which is to say: to be untroubled and pure, one thing is necessary and that is disinterest.<sup>5</sup>

In this passage the Lord is talking with Martha. Consider the scripture:

---

<sup>5</sup>See: Ibid, 82.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."<sup>6</sup>

From these verses Eckhart draws out the message that disinterest is the principle virtue. How he does this is not automatically clear. There are two pairs of actions going on in this text. One is Martha's preparations for the visit of Jesus and his disciples. The other is Mary's listening to Jesus. What Jesus is saying to Mary is not shared with me. Mary, in listening, has chosen a better task than Martha.<sup>7</sup> What is difficult to understand is how I am to connect Mary's listening to

---

<sup>6</sup>See: Luke: 10:38-42.

<sup>7</sup>This interpretation of the story of Mary and Martha by Eckhart is not the only one in existence. Eckhart provides another interpretation elsewhere in his sermons. This is only important because this "alternative" version privileges, famously, the actions of Martha over the interest of Mary. It is necessary to consider this other interpretation for it seems to counter what is being said in this chapter. If Eckhart's "true" view is that the action of Martha already places herself in a position above or equal to Christ and demonstrates that she is not fixated on the Godhead, then I may have to recast what I have done by privileging the experience of Mary.

John Caputo uses this other, much more famous, version (oddly, although he discusses the essay "About Disinterest" he does not allude to the presence of this second - or first - interpretation) and he does so in order to demonstrate how ethical structures of ordered existence are left unscathed by a presumed threat of a nihilistic disinterest. But, first, Jesus' concern with Martha in the first version is not that she is active but that she is worried; Jesus has no comment about her work. (See: Caputo, 137-9, 255. This is the same interest, as I showed in the last chapter, that he has with Heidegger.) He writes: "The whole point of the story of Mary and Martha for Eckhart is to insist upon the compatibility of mystical union with the exercise of moral virtue." Given that this would be a trump of the principle of disinterest, Caputo can not possibly be right. Is it possible that the reading I provide here is also thoroughly misleading?

I have given some thought as to the chronology of the two interpretations. I had thought that if I could discover which version came second then I would know which of the two reflected Eckhart's "true" impression. While I do not know the order in which they were thought, I do believe that the second version has to be the one that privileges Martha, and that it is the most important of the two interpretations. But it does not, I do not think, replace the first version - it is

disinterest. There is one sort of disinterest I can attribute to Mary: she is disinterested in the provisions that Martha is preparing. Jesus' single statement covers a lot of ground. He tells Martha that she is worried about *many* things, presumably more than the meal and Mary's domestic shirking.<sup>8</sup> Also, and crucially as it is the sole part of the verses that Eckhart relates, *only one thing is necessary*. I can see that Mary's choice is set opposed to not domestic labour but to things that cause worry, and that which she has chosen is the only option. It is interesting that Mary chose against that which causes worry and upset. Am I also told that Mary chose Jesus over that which causes delight and pleasure? Yes, I am in that Mary has chosen the *one* thing. If this is so, why am I not told that she has chosen against that which I might construe as positive? It is going to take some work to demonstrate the appropriateness of saying that these verses show the virtue, the prime virtue, of disinterest.

What Mary has chosen is to listen to Jesus. She is, presumably, *interested* in what Jesus has to say. There are two components of this verse that are crucial for this thesis: that Mary

---

an extension of it. Martha is Mary returned, disinterested in that which has Mary agog. But there is no way for Mary to become like Martha unless she first makes the one choice that Jesus commends her for. (Martha is premature in trying to get Mary past contemplation and Jesus does gently chastise her for this.) This chapter is about the one choice of Mary's (which must posit Martha in a potentially false but still necessary opposition). It is not about Martha because there is no chapter about Martha.

<sup>8</sup>The presentation of Martha as a worrier makes it difficult to accept that she has reached a stage of disinterest higher than Mary. There are a few points to consider here. First, I think it is interesting that Martha has only one line. After she is told that Mary has chosen the better thing, she leaves the subject alone. This can be read as a silence of defeat but this does not quite mesh with her previous brazenness. Or it can be read as disinterested acceptance. This still leaves me with the problem of Jesus' telling Martha that she is worried and upset. A way to interpret this and still maintain harmony between the two versions is to suggest that Jesus requires, in order for her to make her one choice, a counterpoint in Martha. Thus, Jesus sets Martha up as a worrier when she is, in Eckhart's actuality, beyond such concerns. A great deal may ride on who has interpreted Martha's statement as deserving an exclamation mark.



chooses correctly; and that she is seemingly interested in Jesus' words.<sup>9</sup> The two are, I think, connected.

I am tempted to think that Mary's choice is made in relation to a rejection or awareness of that which disinterests her. In fact, if Mary has indeed chosen Jesus over the domestic good work of her sister she must be aware of that which she is rejecting. Perhaps, though, she destroys that which governed her choice in the moment of choosing. This is not infeasible. Is it not possible that in rejecting I silence that which provoked me into such an action or reaction? Is the contrast necessary between that which I am to be disinterested in, (in this case the tasks of providing a suitable party but also everything except for listening to Jesus), and being interested in that which is not interesting, to distance myself from it? As long as I am to understand Mary as having chosen Jesus over her sister I am confronted with the knowledge that she must have been aware of that which she was rejecting. But I am not necessarily lost in this.

Jesus tells me and Martha that Mary *chose* the only thing. He does not have to tell Mary this. What sort of choice is this? I would be tempted to say that it is no choice at all except that Martha did not choose it which demonstrates to me that there is some notion, albeit obscure, of options. But in choosing it and choosing correctly that which is the only true choice, Mary moves past choices. She has in her single choice, it appears, removed herself from having to make more choices. She has freed herself, by rejecting that which she deems without interest, from the duality of interest/disinterest. But, and I must emphasize this, she does not and cannot begin removed from that which lacks interest.

Can I say that Mary only shifts the focus of her interest? If it is the case that Mary

---

<sup>9</sup>And this is what the second interpretation mends.

"simply", shifts her attentions from the worldly to the divine can I presume that the principles of sensory intellect and appreciation that Mary manipulates in her choice remain the same? Would they not be transformed by that which they are focused on? Does it follow that attention paid to the debased would be debased attention where attention paid to the good would be good attention? This is not an easy question but for now consider more deeply the notion that Mary has chosen the one thing that is necessary.

If one were to survey Christians on what one thing is necessary in the Christian life, what is the one choice that the Christian must make, the answers would certainly vary. Most would, I predict or guess, focus on love, forgiveness, and the good treatment of others. No one, I also predict or guess, would name disinterest as the primary virtue. Eckhart suggests disinterest is all these virtues and more. The argument that Eckhart makes is very difficult and provides for close scrutiny, for it is not entirely clear that disinterest includes these other, more commonly recognized, virtues.

## The Unity of Virtues

With a little thought I can see that the virtues of love, forgiveness and working for the good of others can be contained under a single umbrella concept. My first inkling would be that that totalizing concept would be love. It does not initially occur to me that the concept would be disinterest. One can easily see how if you are filled with love, especially love of the Christian divine, that forgiveness and the good treatment of others would inevitably follow. The thought that I would like to open up is Eckhart's view that when one is indifferent - appropriate love, forgiveness, and ethics naturally follow.

Let me begin by briefly explicating what I mean by Socrates' unity of virtues. If I consider

Socrates dismantling of the argument that defines courage in *Laches* as demonstrating the impossibility of defining virtue in isolation to the whole of virtue, I will be in an entertaining position to ponder Eckhart's thinking.

In this selection of *Laches*<sup>10</sup> I am shown that courage can be understood as the knowledge of future good and bad. Given that, the understanding (or *science*) of future knowledge means that one also has knowledge of the past and present. Courage, then, is knowledge of all good and bad. But, the thorough and complete knowledge of good and bad is virtue. And courage, which, in this dialogue, has been understood as only a part of virtue, now appears to be the whole of virtue. Courage turns out to be not, simply or only, what I thought it was: the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful.

Am I to think that because, according to the line of the argument, courage becomes the entirety of virtue that I do not actually know what courage is? I think that I am to reach a different conclusion. I suggest that I am not to be too dismayed with the conclusion that courage represents the whole of virtue. In fact I should look at other dialogues on other virtues (*Lysis* - friendship, *Euthyphro* - piety, etc.) and see if I discover the same trend. I think I will because what Socrates is suggesting is not that I am completely wrong about courage but that courage, or whatever other virtue is being considered, is connected to the whole of virtue. Thus the unity of virtues.<sup>11</sup> It is, then, at the very least, odd to think of all virtue as encompassed by disinterest in

---

<sup>10</sup>See: Plato, *Laches*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 197e-199e.

<sup>11</sup>One might think that the *Meno* disrupts this argument in that virtue itself comes away as unknown, thus challenging my ability to name the whole. In *Laches* virtue is accepted as the knowledge of all good and bad. This is also the starting point of the *Meno* but quickly becomes confused. I think the problem is mendable and has to do with the distinctions between believing

relation to the Socratic *elenchus*.<sup>12</sup> Something has to give. To elaborate, I will consider Eckhart's deceptively simple arguments in favour of the priority of disinterest.

## Love and Mercy and Ethics

Eckhart shows disinterest to trump three traditional virtues. Disinterest is above love.<sup>13</sup> Disinterest is better than humility.<sup>14</sup> Disinterest is superior to mercy.<sup>15</sup> The reasons why disinterest is superior to these other virtues is that disinterest includes that which is virtuous about them, is still more than them, and avoids the dual vice that is connected to every virtue.<sup>16</sup> I plan to only discuss love and mercy. Eckhart's discussion of humility is interesting in how it relates to my recognition of other things but this discussion is better, for brevity and the avoidance of repetition, focused on love and mercy.

Disinterest is higher than love because love, eventually, focuses on the lover. Eckhart writes:

I put disinterest above love because love compels me to suffer for God's sake, whereas disinterest makes me sensitive only to God. This ranks far above suffering *for* God or *in* God; for, when, he suffers, man pays some attention to the creature from which his suffering comes, but being disinterested, he is quite detached from

---

and knowing.

<sup>12</sup>Odder yet is physicist Gary Zukav's method of turning Eckhart's unity of virtue into a recommendation of a unifying theory of cosmology. See: Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: Morrow, 1979).

<sup>13</sup>See: "About Detachment", 82.

<sup>14</sup>See: Ibid, 83.

<sup>15</sup>See: Ibid, 84.

<sup>16</sup>Caputo concurs. He writes of detachment as the trump of all virtues. See: Caputo, 11.

the creature.<sup>17</sup>

Love is a distraction away from God. It is crucial to consider the idea of suffering for God's sake. It is Eckhart's view, at least here, that suffering in the name of God creates a distinction between you and God that will inevitably result in the highlighting, even if in pejorative terms, of oneself in opposition to God.<sup>18</sup> All suffering, it follows, should be done in God and as the sons (and daughters<sup>19</sup>) of God. To accept this view of human love and how it may correlate to Christian virtue, in the Eckhartian sense, will entail a radical transfiguration of how I have come to understand Christian ethics.<sup>20</sup> It seems unlikely that I will be able to use any standard of affection for one another as a measure of my status in God. But this does not mean that I will become a social monster. There is no reason, here, to presume that. There is no reason why disinterest leads to cruelty. This is interesting, important and difficult. Is evil, as Hannah Arendt showed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the result of banality? Can I understand banality as disinterest? Or is it the case that evil requires not a lack of attention or interest but particular attention? Again, this

---

<sup>17</sup>See: "About Detachment", 82. (Italics mine.)

<sup>18</sup>See: Caputo, 13.

<sup>19</sup>I include daughters for gender inclusivity. It is not entirely clear to me that Eckhart would do the same. For an even more fascinating deliberation of daughters, suffering and being a child of God, please see: Andre Dubus, "A Father's Story" in *Selected Stories* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishers, 1988) 455-76.

<sup>20</sup>Of the two editions I have of Eckhart's writing both introductions seek to make a place for ethics in Eckhart's thought. Blakney is very concerned too distance Eckhart from any Nazi use of Eckhart. (See: *Meister Eckhart*, xv.) Colledge devotes a section of his introduction to what he calls: "Eckhart's Ethics and Mysticism". While Colledge recognizes the difficulty of finding an ethics in an Eckhart that denies the ultimate importance of prayer or human action, he still tries. It is my argument that the mere attempt demonstrates a profound interest in something other than Christian disinterest. (See: Edmund Colledge, 59-61.)

would seem to lead in the direction of Socrates in that no one, except the pathological, chooses evil for the sake of evil. But the question is whether evil is being chosen or whether it occurs when there are no choices made. I may also do well to not be so interested in evil.

In considering questions like this I have to be careful to make sure that I am consistent with my terms. If I am to begin with the language of complete disinterest it is not appropriate to raise the spectre of the monstrosity of action which requires an interest to be noted.<sup>21</sup> I was too quick to say that disinterest includes love, at least I was too quick if by love I mean the love I have in interest. I shall show that this is the trend with mercy as well.

The argument that Eckhart makes in regards to the superiority of disinterest to mercy is identical to the one on love. Mercy, too, requires that I pay attention to you, as Eckhart puts it, to “creatures.” He writes:

I also put disinterest above mercy, for mercy is *nothing* but a man’s going out to the want of a fellow and the heart is disturbed by it. Disinterest, however, is exempt from this, being self-contained and allowing nothing to disturb. To speak briefly: When I survey the virtues, I find none as flawless, as conducive to God as disinterest.<sup>22</sup>

It is going to be very hard to find a view of workable political ethics in these words.<sup>23</sup> The *dictum*

---

<sup>21</sup>This is a confusion that Bancroft I think enters, see: Anne Bancroft, *The Luminous Vision: Six Medieval Mystics and their Teachings* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 136, 142.

<sup>22</sup>See: “About Detachment”, 84. (Italics mine.)

<sup>23</sup>Evelyn Underhill, in her remarkable but eventually discouraging book *Mysticism*, confronts the completeness of self-denial in the mystical “tradition”. Her intention appears to find a way to have the mystics provide if not some ground for ethics, then no outrage against them, she is, though, (in distinction to someone like Bernard McGinn) honest in appraising the difficulty of doing so. She writes:

Others have reconciled self-surrender with a more moderate abandonment of

is clear: I am not to pay attention to the sufferings of others for if I do I will disturb my heart away from God<sup>24</sup>. Should this lack of emphasis or, more accurately, denigration of ethics perturb me? Or, a better question, what does it mean if this portrayal of the absence of ethical value does bother me? Does it mean that I am privileging the human over the divine?

I have no great opinion on these questions. I raise them only to make a point about raising them. The mere raising of the question betrays the asker. In querying I am suggesting that there is something possible outside of God that may need to be considered before I derive an appropriate understanding of God. *This is the step too far.*

This can be easily explained. Imagine mainstream Christianity's response to the discussion above.<sup>25</sup> It might raise the commandment by Jesus:

You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul,

---

outward things; for possessions take different rank for almost every human soul. The true rule of poverty consists in giving up those things which enchain the spirit, divide its interests, and deflect it on its road to God - whether these things be riches, habits, religious observances, friends, interests, distastes or desires - not in mere outward destitution for its own sake. (See: Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, [New York: Meridian Books, 1995], 211.)

The casual scanner of titles would be very disappointed with "Blessed are the Poor" for in the first page any hopes for an egalitarian ethics is shown to be not an interest of Eckhart's. He writes there:

"Bishop Albert says: 'To be poor is to take no pleasure in anything God ever created,' and that is well said. But we shall say it better and take 'poverty' in a higher sense. He is a poor man who wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing." (See: *Meister Eckhart*, 227.)

<sup>24</sup>Anne Bancroft adds that seeing God in other beings brings darkness. See: Bancroft, 143. John Caputo articulates God as higher than ethical or moral virtue. See: Caputo, 11.

<sup>25</sup>I do this hesitantly given that I have no clear idea what mainstream Christianity is or how it would speak.

and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well.<sup>26</sup>

There is much in these verses that is of interest. I will not care about that here. Let it suffice that there is a dictate by the Lord that I should love my neighbour and whether or not this love is to contain mercy is not stated. The point I wish to make is about what I am to do when scripture gives me a contrary command like (for the last time):

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.<sup>27</sup>

My interest is not in striking a balance between the two commands. I am interested in what I might say and how I might think when confronted with this latter sort of verse. My first impulse is to preserve the essence of the first verse in the second. Why do I seek to do this? There are probably a number of reasons. Among them, I think, is the comfort in a learned lesson and the desire to feel connected, in the sense of achieving something, to my own salvation, to lessen the amount of fear and trembling. The sole point I wish to make is that in doing this and recognizing that I could do this, I can see more clearly Eckhart's point.

The point I am making about Eckhart isn't about whether or not his theology makes room for an ethics. The point I hope I am making, and which this whole thesis is designed to make, is what is at stake in even recognizing the distinction.<sup>28</sup> It is in noticing that ethics has disappeared

---

<sup>26</sup>See: Matthew 22:37-40.

<sup>27</sup>See: Luke 14:26.

<sup>28</sup>I am going to make a similar argument in contrast to Derrida's apt criticisms of Eckhart and negative theology in the closing pages of this paper.



and possessing the desire to bring them back that reveals what is of most importance and interest to me. The problem is not that ethics goes missing in these passages, the problem is that I am noticing its absence.

That I might miss and long for an ethical standard raises other interesting points about inquiry and living in the world. In *Laches* Socrates announced that courage represented virtue as a whole. There appears to be an entirely different view of virtue in the pages of Eckhart. But this isn't the case. What happens in Eckhart is that the correlation of the virtues into a unity is accomplished negatively. It is what the supposed virtues are not which shows me what virtue is. The unity of virtues for Eckhart is that they expose their own distance from God. Thus, it is then fitting that virtue is not knowledge of good and bad but apathy about the knowledge of good and bad. As my standard of virtue is opposite to Socrates, the method by which it is shown is transvaluated. The erotic pull towards philosophical wisdom is replaced with a divine command of indifference.

What sort of image of God is created by this understanding of virtue? Of course, it is always problematic to think about images of God and as I wade through Eckhart's musings I must be careful about how much is being attempted or being said in way of portrait.

## Some Points About What God Is

The path of disinterest is recommended because as God lives in purity and unity, He must be disinterested. This is very bold and deserves quoting in full:

Disinterest brings God to me and I can demonstrate it this way: Everything likes its own habitat best; God's habitat is purity and unity, which are due to disinterest.

Therefore God necessarily gives himself to the disinterested heart.<sup>29</sup>

God is disinterested, solely, because He lives in purity and unity. I am not able to approach the purity and unity within myself and in God without being disinterested.<sup>30</sup> Disinterest should not be understood as purity and unity itself, but as a path to this divine realization. Or should it? The above text states that purity and unity are *due* to disinterest. Now, God lives in purity and unity and therefore in disinterest but God can not be limited by the place He lives within.

According to Eckhart, I would be in error to make claims about which one is more in God. I would be wrong to think that I could posit a connection with myself and God as a result of some benevolent *more* that is God. I would be erroneous if I were to think that God is moved by His creation. I would be mistaken to think that God is interested in my prayers and works. Before considering these wild and radical claims, let me present what Eckhart writes:

Bear in mind also that God has been immovably disinterested from the beginning and still is and that his creation of the heavens and the earth affected him as little as if he had not made a single creature. *But I go further.* All the prayers a man may offer and the good works he may do will affect the disinterested God as little as if there were neither prayers nor works, not will God be any more compassionate or stoop down to man any more because of his prayers and works than if they were omitted.

Furthermore, I say that when the Son in the Godhead willed to be human and became so, suffering martyrdom, the immovable disinterest of God was affected as little as if the Son had never become human at all.<sup>31</sup>

This single passage bears enough fruit for a long thesis of its own. When Eckhart writes: “*but I go further*”, between his claim that God is disinterested in his creation and my prayers and works, I

---

<sup>29</sup>See: “About Detachment”, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Caputo describes Eckhart’s God as “pure detachment”. See: Caputo, 11.

<sup>31</sup>See: “About Detachment”, 85.

see that Eckhart knew that this was bold and radical stuff, and his text turns into a dare.

For ease of consideration allow me to restate the points presented in this passage. 1. God is not interested in the world that He created. As far as He is concerned it is as if He did not create it. 2. Prayers will not have an effect on God. 3. Works will not have an effect on God. 4. The performance or non-performance of prayers or works will bring God no closer or further away. 5. The suffering and martyrdom of Jesus has no affect on God. 6. To God it is as if Jesus never existed.<sup>32</sup>

I will first consider points one through four. Eckhart justifies his statements as follows:

To God there is neither past nor future and he loves the saints, having foreseen them before the world began. Then, when events, foreseen by God in eternity, come to pass in time, people think that God has taken a new departure, either to anger or toward some agreeable end; but it is we who change, while he remains unchanged. Sunshine hurts ailing eyes but is agreeable to sound ones, and yet it is the same sunshine in both cases. God does not see through time, nor does anything new happen in his sight.<sup>33</sup>

This is agreeable but I wonder why it is necessary to state. Eckhart mentions it in reference to how it is still meritable to pray and perform good works but that God has noted you in eternity and not in the moment. Even if that is so, and I am not sure that Eckhart can mean it, there is another reading of Eckhart's diatribe against time.<sup>34</sup> Time can be seen here as a metaphor for meaningfulness. The word "time" and my use of it bespeaks a respect for context and specificity which are only relevant to a mind captivated by that which occurs in this temporal, human realm.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup>For correspondence, see: Caputo, 11-2.

<sup>33</sup>See: "About Detachment", 86.

<sup>34</sup>Time, along with the number, are the prime targets of Eckhart's pastoral condemnation.

<sup>35</sup>For a larger discussion of how time is a lie in Eckhart, see: Bancroft, 152.

God in being outside of time is also outside of context and, it follows, outside of that which is interesting and humanly important. That God is outside of time, that God is eternal, is *known* to me through Christian edicts. And if I “know” the eternal nature of God to be true then I can not, in good faith, connect God to the wandering specificities of my daily actions, supplications and interests.

There are many directions that I can go here. But before I consider those other paths I should consider points five and six. On first reading these points are outrageous. How am I to understand them? Or better yet, how am I not to reject them?

The actuality of Jesus’ existence is of no interest to God.<sup>36</sup> To make sense of this I must consider Eckhart’s reflections on time. For if I don’t I am faced with an extremely difficult thought - that the idea that Jesus died for sins and was resurrected thus showing the truth of his sacrifice, is meaningless and of no interest to God. Now this thought, for the Christian<sup>37</sup>, is unthinkable. Without a meaningful Christ there can be no Christianity.

Consider how God views Jesus in Eckhart’s deliberation. The existence and martyrdom of Jesus Christ is not, as I have come to think of it, a special and specific moment in time. It too is presented to God in the collapse of time which is eternity. I can understand, then, why it may be of no interest to God in the sense that things have to be in time to be of contextual interest. But, and importantly, is Jesus to be important to me? Whether He is or not, is preordained and preknown by God, but how am I to best think of it? It seems, if I am to follow the stream of

---

<sup>36</sup>For a congruent consideration of how Eckhart sees the role of Jesus, see: Caputo, 119.

<sup>37</sup>Again, I presume.

disinterest, that I should not think of Jesus at all.<sup>38</sup>

Can this be? Let me consider Eckhart's comment that good works and prayers are still valuable: "Still, even if God remains forever unmoved, disinterested, the prayers and good works of people are not lost on that account, for well-doing is never without its reward."<sup>39</sup> Can I fit this with disinterest?

Let me return to my conversation about Martha and Mary. In my consideration Mary had *benefitted* by choosing the one thing that was good to do: listening to Jesus. The complexity of Eckhart increases greatly here. I argued that Mary had chosen this singular task of listening against the works, be them good or bad, of Martha. I argued that she had to be aware and have some interested knowledge of these works so in order to know to reject them as not being the Lord. In this sense these works benefitted her. (Eckhart seems to imply that the performance of good works and prayers are good because they are aligned with what God has come to expect. This is, I think, not right. If I am to think of my actions and considerations of God as connected in this way, there is no way that I can posit a free will that can alter the path of eternity. It is not as if I can fail to do that or not do that which is dictated in an everlasting time which nullifies the very context of time.)

I suggest that I am to read the experience of Jesus and of good works as beneficial in this same way. Consider the simple statement and declaration of faith: Jesus died for my sins. Should this interest me? No, at least not in the sense that the words speak a proposition. I do not have

---

<sup>38</sup>Bancroft warns those who find comfort in the presentation of Christ that their is a physical, animal comfort. See: Bancroft, 135.

<sup>39</sup>See: "About Detachment", 86.

faith in recognizing Jesus Christ. I maintain faith in being disinterested in the human image of Jesus Christ. I must, through Jesus, *get past Jesus*. Interest on the life and teachings of Jesus is not Christianity, not in the Eckhartian sense. I must be, eventually, disinterested in the life and times of Christ. To do this I surrender myself to that Christ who is shown to me in time. In that surrender the relevance of the object which provides that surrender is made empty and moot. The true Christian who has nothing in their heart but God, or so Eckhart asserts, has no need for Bibles, churches, or Jesus.

Thus the story about Mary and Martha becomes very complicated. That which Mary chose correctly to do, listen to Jesus, is not what it first appears. Her good act, which erases the need for further actions, is not listening to Jesus the man, but opening her heart to Jesus, the Lord. And to do this requires that Mary have disinterest in Jesus, the man she is listening to and Martha is not.

Interest relates itself to time and time relates me to the world and the world is apart from Jesus.<sup>40</sup> The words for how I am to listen do not and can not exist. To seek to describe this movement is to make it a moment. It is to categorize it and place myself in a position of curious inspection and wonder and not in God.

### Purity and Emptiness = Disinterest

Disinterest is not the end of human existence. For it to be that, it would have the potential to be something of interest. Instead, disinterest is a path to purity of heart. Eckhart writes with praise:

---

<sup>40</sup>Bancroft notes that if you have a mind, you do not have God. See: Bancroft, 142, 144.

Experience must always be an experience of something, but disinterest comes so close to zero that nothing but God is rarefied enough to get into it, to enter the disinterested heart.<sup>41</sup>

The point is fairly clear: consideration of my own experience distances myself from the purity which is God.<sup>42</sup> I must clear everything from my heart. No more am I to think of you, no more am I to ache at my child's incessant cry. No longer am I to note the wounded animal that has crawled beneath the wood pile beside the garage. No more am I to worry about the paper that has yet to be written, the books left unread. No more am I to be concerned with the text that appears before me and the words that I have placed upon it. No more am I to be concerned with applications and with scholarships. No more am I to be happy with the ideas and thinking that my ancestral reading has shared with me. The dialectic stops here. The imagination of the poet stops here. The new medicine from the new lab is not to be delivered here. How can I do it? How can anyone do it? How can I believe it needs to be done?

The last question is the easiest and the hardest of them all. But the first two questions can be quickly considered. Note that Eckhart does not say that I become zero. He writes that I *come close* to zero. Perfection is not demanded of I. This is not a relief or an excuse. To name this impossibility as a defense is not to come closer to that zero-point but to distance myself even further. The zero must be my goal, and so, yes, I must deny my own experience as telling, important and interesting.

---

<sup>41</sup>See: "About Detachment", 83, 88, 89.

<sup>42</sup>Caputo notes that through desiring nothing, selflessness, comes to be uniform with God. See: Caputo, 17. For similar sentiments, see: Bancroft, 146, 149. Bancroft adds that complete detachment will set you free. But I cannot understand how the detached person is to have interest in understanding what freedom might mean.

There is nothing in these pages, above or below, of truthful interest to me or to you. Why have I written them? If not for the pages themselves I have produced them so to maintain my status in a world that bears interest to me. I must lose this. I must quit. But to do so, am I not just propelling the same problem? (This is a difficult area to discuss as all that can be said bears the scent of justification.) To seek finality and escape, would I not be doing so in the pursuit of an idea that interests me? What I must do is become the hinge in Eckhart's metaphor of the door.<sup>43</sup> While I swing back and forth in the topicalities of modern thought, the "I", the me at my centre, must remain unmoved, untouched, a virgin bride for penetration by God. This "I" cannot invest itself in the movements of the moment.<sup>44</sup> This "I" can nurse his baby's tears, feed the wounded animal, read the book and write the poem, fill out the forms but he cannot become that which he is doing. The inner man, in his purity that invites and allows the presence of God, allows him to guard against the affects of the experiences of the outer man.<sup>45</sup>

How am I to consider the third question: How can I believe it needs to be done? I need to open this question up. How am I to wage my own salvation? How am I to conceive of worship, of fellowship, of Christian ethics? Can it be done by forgetting or negating that I need to know any such thing? The idea of disinterest is a step away from the measurement of plausibility and desirability.<sup>46</sup> I believe it because I am told to. But, you might ask, how can you know that this is what you have been told? Because the scriptures, that gigantic crossed out book, do nothing but

---

<sup>43</sup>See: "About Detachment", 89.

<sup>44</sup>For corroboration, see: Bancroft, 146, 148; Caputo, 14.

<sup>45</sup>See: "About Detachment", 87.

<sup>46</sup>Caputo writes that to be detached is to not wish for anything at all. See: Caputo, 14.



tell you this. But, again you might ask, the scriptures tell me many things, some things that are in complete contradiction to this view, why this view? Because it is the only way to reconcile both sides of possible interpretation. One cannot conform the call to disinterest of the Bible into the ethical components but one can bring the ethics into alignment with disinterest. Is it then approved to you because of its exegetical and hermeneutic superiority; because of its apologetic finesse?

I am not to think that weekly Sunday observance, care for the poor, active love of good, consideration of the nature of virtue and the good, courageous pursuit of the holy, are by nature sinful. They are not, they are, apparently, a part of the God that is eternally pleased. But I cannot or should not make them the gauge by which I am. The only gauge for that is my empty receptiveness to God. The commandment to love one another, I recall, is the second of two commandments. The first is to love God. The satisfaction of the first requires that the second commandment never vie for first place in the heart.

### The Christian Does Not Know That He Is

Nor am I to think about the goodness that is disinterest. Doing so will negatively qualify all that which I have attained. I think that this is a crucial component of Eckhart's theology, a component that is neglected by many in the theological traditions that came before and after him.

This step of further silence moots the possibility of making the Christian life a pragmatic endeavour, thus qualifying it as humanly attractive. By not being interested in my disinterest I sidestep an interest in myself and my own redemption. By being disinterested in my own redemption I am further able to disengage myself from the clutter that threatens to surround my

heart.<sup>47</sup> Eckhart explains:

If, however, she had said: "He hath regarded my disinterest," her disinterest would have been qualified by the thought and not perfect, for she would have departed from it. Any departure from disinterest, however small, disturbs it; and there you have the reason why our Lady gloried in humility rather than in disinterest.<sup>48</sup>

Ignorance, I think, comes into play.<sup>49</sup> If I am to fully clear my heart of distractions and open it to God I cannot be aware that this is what I am doing, or if I am, I cannot be smitten, enticed, or interested in doing it. I am to seek my salvation but I am not to think of myself as an entity seeking salvation. If I do think in these terms the line between being a person who is disinterested in the human elements of his own existence and of his eschatological future and a person who wages his salvation in the hope of what he conceives as an eschatological promise is easier to cross. If I am to sincerely be of the former category there is no such term or delineation of a line. There is no existence, and despite Evelyn Underhill's interesting comments<sup>50</sup>, no duality. For there to be duality there must be a self outside of God.

If this is so there can be no self seeking to approach God. Eckhart puts it more bluntly:

The prophet says: "*Audiam, qui loquatur in me Dominus Deus,*" which means "I will be silent and hear what God the Lord will utter within me" - as if to say, "If God the Lord wants to speak to me, let him come in, for I shall not go out."<sup>51</sup>

This silence in which God speaks is a true silence, and not just a form of quiet, in that I am not to

---

<sup>47</sup>For clarification, see: Caputo, 16.

<sup>48</sup>See: "About Detachment", 84.

<sup>49</sup>Again, if you have a mind, you do not have God. See: Bancroft, 142.

<sup>50</sup>See: Underhill, 37-8.

<sup>51</sup>See: "About Detachment", 84.

acknowledge in my own ears the moment that God speaks. My silence is not appropriate *until* God speaks. It is a silence that must be maintained. I must shut up for God to speak to the heart and when God does speak, I as a human being living in a human world, am unable to hear or translate that which is being said back into my everyday life.

Much of theology that speaks highly of a silence of the parishioner in relation to their God is not careful to avoid, what I will call, the step back. This step back always allows the critic to pragmatize the theology in question. When one is able to answer the question: why?, even partially, one has opened oneself to accusations of pragmatism. To avoid this question, I must undercut that which lies as a source or trace of that question. This cannot be done if the end of theological contemplation is again rooted in the ontic self that it sought to *escape*. Of course, my terminology of *escape* is poorly chosen. I have chosen it to show how poor it is.

The word *escape* immediately brings to mind that which is being escaped. If I am to consider the theology of Eckhart as an escape from the self bound by human constraints, I am going to be irrevocably tied to that which I was hoping to get past. This is why it is so important that I not be interested in my disinterest, for in not being interested in anything I can be fully silent. In a thorough silence the question of *escape* and the place I wish to escape from are mooted. It is not that they cease to be irrelevant, it is that they cease to be interesting and in that moment they cease to be criteria. Of course, this step requires a step. But as I have shown Eckhart to show in the story of Mary and Martha I only need to acknowledge this choice once. In that choice I can remove myself, and moot, all future choices and the recollection of the choice

that I did make.<sup>52</sup>

I am to be, Eckhart recommends, dead to the world but with God living within me.<sup>53</sup> How am I to live like this? Why should I live at all? Eckhart does not recommend that in being dead to the world that I stop living.<sup>54</sup> I, as I have already stated, can continue to live but I am no longer to notice or consider my life to be of interest. I may continue to study but no longer with an interested eye on self-improvement or career. I can have my career but I am not to confuse what I do with who I am, in essence. I am not to confuse who I am in my life with the self that is connected to God. I, as Eckhart puts it, can learn as I will but on the inside I am not to care.<sup>55</sup>

Allow me to illustrate: I have an “interest” in early Greek tragedy. I try to read all of the latest commentaries and become excited by new translations. In casual conversation, when I hear about the adventures of a friend, I may be prone to relate what I hear to a text by Sophocles. I am often tickled and “moved” by the ideas and emotions expressed in these texts but they are not at my centre. Eventually, I don’t think these wonderful tragedies explain anything. I swing in them as the Grecian breeze blows, but my hinge remains unknown and untouched. I am not interested in approaching or defining this hinge.

It strikes me as odd, then, to read, in at least two translations, of how important Eckhart is. Eckhart, *if I have him right*, is not and cannot be important. As stated earlier, as things and

---

<sup>52</sup>I will return to this topic in my conclusions where I pit Eckhart against Derrida’s vision of the trace.

<sup>53</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Bancroft is careful to state that Eckhart’s aim is not to destroy but to transcend. I am not firm about the difference between the two. See: Bancroft, 135.

<sup>55</sup>See: “About Detachment”, 87.

events offer themselves to me, I can swing with them as a door does, but my interior self, the hinge, must remain untouched and unmoved. Blakney may be right in stating that the union of God and man is Eckhart's central theme but that should not concern me at all.

Again, I raise the question of ethics which surely by this point, despite the emphasis of other commentators, is ceasing to be a question. Eckhart is careful in his writing:

Now both in Christ and our Lady, there was an outward man and an inner person and, while they taught about external matters, they were outwardly active but inwardly unmoved and disinterested. This is how it was when Christ said: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." And whatever the lamentations and other speeches of our Lady, inwardly she was still unmoved and disinterested.<sup>56</sup>

There is no law in Eckhart against external actions but there is certainly no privileging of them.

What we do to become good men and women in our daily exchanges and charity has no bearing on our disinterested core.<sup>57</sup> Again, it is as if I had done nothing. Noble goals for egalitarian causes and human emancipation are fine but they are nothing to be interested in. They are certainly not to be at the centre of my existence. If you happen to be ethical that is fine, but there is no essential importance to becoming an ethical person. It is likely that with God in one's heart that one is likely to be a loving, generous, kind, charitable person but this relationship flows, if it flows at all, only this one way. One does not place God in one's heart through good works. One does not seek to have God in one's heart so to perpetuate ethical goodness.

## Eckhart Begins To Say Too Much

It is time to bring Derrida and the *trace* into this text. There is a great deal in Eckhart that

---

<sup>56</sup>See: Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>In fact, according to Bancroft, habituation is an asset to living the detached life given that a routine solves the need for consideration. See: Bancroft, 146.

is susceptible to Derrida's consideration of trace. This is especially the case if you view Eckhart's central theme as the Word of God in our souls; a unity between the human and the divine; or demonstrating the power of mysticism in relation to modern epistemology and other theological traditions.<sup>58</sup> I think that I have avoided this return to language and human structures by privileging disinterest, in the way that I have, but I shall see.

Consider the following by Derrida:

At the moment when the question "how to avoid speaking?" is raised and articulates itself in all its modalities - whether in rhetorical or logical forms of saying, or in the simple fact of speaking - it is already, so to speak, *too late*. There is no longer any question of not speaking. Even if one speaks and says nothing, even if an apophatic discourse deprives itself of meaning or of an object, it takes place. That which committed or rendered it possible *has taken place*. The possible absence of a reverent still beckons, if not toward the thing of which one speaks (such is God, who is nothing because He takes place, *without place, beyond Being*), at least toward the other (other than Being) who calls or to whom this speech is addressed - even if it speaks only in order to speak, or to say nothing...There was no longer any question of not speaking. Language has started without us, in us and before us. This is what theology calls God, and it is necessary, it will have been necessary, to speak.<sup>59</sup>

And:

But to lose the name is not to attack it, to destroy it or wound it. On the contrary, to lose the name is quite simply to respect it: as name. That is to say, to pronounce it, which comes down to traversing it toward the other, the other whom it names and who bears it. To pronounce it without pronouncing it. To forget it by calling it, by recalling it (to oneself), which comes down to calling or recalling the

---

<sup>58</sup>These three interpretations are made, accordingly, by Colledge, Blakney, and Underhill which I refer to in an earlier footnote.

<sup>59</sup>See: Jacques Derrida, "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials" in *Languages of the Unsayable*, Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, editors, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 27-9. (Italics and parentheses Derrida's). I have limited myself to using just one, actually in this case two, selection from this very full essay.

other...<sup>60</sup>

Is this what is happening with Eckhart? Can I point at these texts on silence (at this text on indifference) and state that in that demand there is a loud voice signifying itself? I have suggested that I cannot, but, certainly, *I can*. If I could not the text would not be written, or it would already be written. If I were already detached I would not need to make that first choice, the same one Mary makes, against the world.

Derrida's deconstruction of negative theology is mostly suitable. His depictions of Dionysus the Areopagite, Eckhart, and Angelus Silesius (Eckhart's poetical impersonator<sup>61</sup>) do not, in general, challenge anything. But they are not necessary in that they are not, eventually, interesting. I dodge the Derridean bullet with my disinterest. I grant that this disinterest, this silence if you will, once relied on the other as author, on the voice of this other, but in choosing away, and privileging that, for the moment, which I chose against, I have mooted the relevancy of this other, of this eternal language which seeks to bring me back.

Derrida's statements are very useful in deconstructing prayer, virtue (especially courage), unities, and good works. But Derrida is still just another of a long line of epistemologists. His *trace* or *differance* may look and sound very different than Kantian categories or transcendental arguments but they follow the same principle. The concept and the person who thinks the concept are present before the attempt to articulate the concept. This, it seems to me, falls into the trap that Derrida sets for the phenomenologist; the inkling to think before concepts is conceptual.

---

<sup>60</sup>See: Jacques Derrida, "Sauf Le Nom" in *On the Name*, translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod, Edited by Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 58. (Parentheses Derrida's).

<sup>61</sup>See: *Meister Eckhart*, xxv.

Derrida, in these two fragments, seeks to address the other side of the phenomenological, those who reject the concept after the concept is in place. And this can always be done.

My point is that doing so bespeaks a great deal more than a logical necessity. If Derrida were at the party with Mary and Martha he would be telling Mary that she hadn't *really* separated herself from her sister, *but* Mary wouldn't be listening to Derrida and if she was his words would change nothing for her.

If Eckhart's singular theme is the unity of the human and the divine, or that the Word of God is in my heart, then there is no escaping the trace. But one does escape the trace in choosing against it, and yes, in that moment of choosing, the other is highlighted but because I am not suggesting that the original choice is the moment of interest or importance, (what is important are the non-moments that do not follow), I am left untroubled by Derrida's desire to place and situate. I am unmoved and apathetic about Derrida's claim that my silence has its thunders. I might be concerned, as Blakney and Colledge might be, if instead of being silent I wished, mostly, to hear about silence from Eckhart. If this was the case, I may as well listen to Derrida.

Derrida's thinking on the trace makes Socrates Platonic. What do I do with the Socrates who thought that through inquiry all that was already inside me could be remembered? It was Plato who, in *The Republic*, suggested that I cannot rely on the self to do this and that I must create a context where such things have meaning and relevance. Eckhart, I have argued, transvaluates Socrates, and if Plato is right about the necessary relationship between power and truth, between tyranny and truth, then a transvaluated Socrates is the only way around the contextual. Kierkegaard, in his doctoral thesis *On the Concept of Irony*, provided great steps for this transvaluation. But the best step is the one that uses Socrates to silence Socrates. This is the



step of disinterest and this is why positing disinterest as a high virtue is a wonderful way of both addressing the other and mooting it. That which is defined in distinction is here defined not in a pure distinction but in deference and authority. Disinterest is the highest of all virtues and as a virtue it disintegrates the idea of virtue. It does not seek to say no, it seeks to say yes and cease seeking. Derrida views this ceasing as a rejection at that moment/erasure of moment when it is not.

Thankfully, Eckhart, in the closing pages of the essay, tries to interest me in something other than the final interest which is disinterest.<sup>62</sup> Eckhart writes strange things:

Heed this, intelligent people: Life is good to the man who goes, on and on, disinterestedly...The steed swiftest to carry you to perfection is suffering, for none shall attain eternal life except he pass through great bitterness with Christ.<sup>63</sup>

And worse by far:

Among men, be aloof; do not engage yourself to any idea you get; free from yourself from everything chance brings to you, things that accumulate and cumber you; set your mind in virtue to contemplation, in which the God you bear in your heart shall be your steady object, the object from which your attention never wavers; and whatever else your duty may be, whether it be fasting, watching or praying, dedicate it all to this one end, doing each only as much as is necessary to your single end. Thus you shall come to the goal of perfection.<sup>64</sup>

With these words Eckhart attempts to interest me in my own salvation. It is with these words that I stop being interested.

---

<sup>62</sup>Strangely, it is this interest which has captivated many commentators. Caputo writes: "The whole argument of *On Detachment* is that in detachment all the virtues reach their fulfilment." Elsewhere he articulates the rewards of being a mystic. (See: Caputo, 255, 28.) Bancroft discusses how immersion in mysticism will make you a more sensitive citizen. (See: Bancroft, 141.)

<sup>63</sup>See: "About Detachment", 90.

<sup>64</sup>See: *Ibid*, 91.

Uninterested but also concerned by the lesson of Neville Dane and his second book of poetry published in the 1940s and entitled *W!a!!k!s! i!n! E!d!e!n!*. His first book *Angel Telegrams* had been a declaration of war on meaning from the side of language. The second book continued the fight with graphic illustration. Every letter on every page is followed by an exclamation mark. E!v!e!r!y! l!e!t!t!e!r!. It is an ecstasy of meaninglessness, of surrender to the only meaning which is language expressed and written and which is also no meaning at all, surely meant not to be read but only written. But what could Mr. Dane do then? How can he come back? To write in any other way would be to say that the punctuated text of his walks in Eden was either a mistake or a lie. Why else feel compelled to write down further words in a different dialect or method? Neville Dane wrote no more texts.

# Bibliography

## Primary Texts

Augustine. *On The Trinity*. John E. Rotelle, editor; Maria Boulding, translator (New York: New City Press, 1997).

Eckhart, Meister. "On Disinterest" in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, And Defense*. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, translators, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question of Metaphysics" in *Basic Writings* edited and translated by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling*, translated by Edna and Howard Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

## Secondary Texts

Agacinski, Sylviane. "We Are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

Aristotle. "Poetics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Jonathan Barnes, editor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Armstrong, A.H. "Form, Individual and Person in Plotinus", *Dionysus* 1.

Augustine. *The Confessions*. William Watts, translator (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

----- *On Music*.

Ballard, Bruce W. *The Role of Mood In Heidegger's Ontology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991).

Bancroft, Anne. *The Luminous Vision: Six Medieval Mystics and their Teachings* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982)

Bernasconi, Robert. *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985).

- Bernstein, Richard. "The Rage Against Reason". *Philosophy and Literature*, 10 (October 1986).
- Bigelow, Pat. *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Writing* (Tallahassee: Florida University Press, 1987).
- Blakney, Raymond B. *Meister Eckhart* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1941).
- Bogen, J. "Kierkegaard and the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical", *Inquiry*, 1962.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*. Peter Collier, translator (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
- Bourke, Vernon. *Augustine's Love of Wisdom* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1992).
- Bowra, C.F. *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944).
- Brodsky, Joseph. *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (New York: Noonday, 1995).
- Bubacz, B. "Augustine's Account of Factual Memory", *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975).
- Caputo, John D. *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).
- *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutics Project*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
- Carnap, Rudolf. "The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language", in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Michael Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978)
- Cassian, John. "The Conferences of Cassian" in *Western Asceticism*, translated by Owen Chadwick (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963).
- Chadwick, Henry. *Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- Clark, James. *The Great German Mystics* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970).
- Clive, Geoffrey. "The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical in Nineteenth-Century Literature", *The Journal of Religion* 34 (April 1954)
- Colledge, Edmund. "Introduction" in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, And Defense*. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, translators, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

- Coward, Harold "Memory and Scripture in the Convesion of Augustine" in *Grace, Politics & Desire: Essays on Augustine*, edited by Hugo A. Meynell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990).
- Crites, Stephen. *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel versus Kierkegaard on Faith and History* (Chambersburg, American Academy or Religion 1972)
- Croxall, T.H. *Kierkegaard Studies* (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1948).
- Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials" in *Languages of the Unsayable*, Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, editors (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
- "Sauf Le Nom" in *On the Name*, translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod, Edited by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- "Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
- Dionysus the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*, translated by C.E. Rolt (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920).
- Donnelly, J. "Kierkegaard's Problem I and Problem II: An Analytic Perspective" in R.L. Perkins, ed., *Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling': Critical Appraisals I* (Montgomery: University of Alabama Press, 1981).
- Dubus, Andre. "A Father's Story" in *Selected Stories* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishers, 1988).
- Duncan, Elmer. *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings In Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949)
- Elrod, John. *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
- Euben, J.P. *The Tragedy of Greek Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1990).
- Fabro, Cornelia. "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic" in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, edited by H.A. Johnson and K. Thulstrup (New York: Harper, 1962)
- Foucault, Michel. "The Battle for Chastity", translated by Robert Hurley in *Michel Foucault:*

- Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1994).
- Gerson, L.P. *Plotinus* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- Gill, Jerry. "Faith Is As Faith Does", in *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals*, edited by Robert Perkins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981).
- Gouwens, David. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).
- Grene, David. "Introduction", *Oedipus the King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).
- Grimsley, R.. *Kierkegaard* (New York: Scribner, 1973).
- Hadot, Pierre. *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, translated by M. Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Haecker, Theodore. *Soren Kierkegaard*, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).
- Haar, Michel. "The End of Distress: The End of Technology?" *Research in Phenomenology* 13 (1983).
- Hall, Harrison. "Love and Death: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on Authentic and Inauthentic Human Existence". *Inquiry*, 27 (July 1984).
- Hannay, Alastair. *Kierkegaard: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1982).
- Harrison, Carol. *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Hegel, Georg. *Hegel's Aesthetics*. T.M. Knox, translator. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
- Heinrichs, Albert. "Why Should I Dance?", *Arion* 3: 92.
- Josipovici, Gabriel. "Kierkegaard and the Novel", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
- Kelley, Carl Franklin. *Meister Eckhart On Divine Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

- Kirwan, Christopher. *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- Kovacs, George. *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990).
- Krell, David Farrell. *Intimations of Mortality* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "Existence and Ethics" in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
- Lowith, Karl. *Nature, History and Existentialism*, edited and translated by A. Levinson (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1966).
- Lowrie, Walter. *Kierkegaard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938).
- Mackey, Louis. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1971).
- Malantschuk, Gregor. *Kierkegaard's Thought*, edited and translated by Howard Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
- Marrou, Henri. *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology Of Human Values*, translated by Maria Consolata (Philadelphia: Villanova Press, 1966).
- Meagher, Robert E. *An Introduction to Augustine* (New York: New York University Press, 1978).
- Mooney, Edward. *Knights of Faith and Resignation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).
- Mortley, R. *From Word to Silence* (Bonn: Hanstein Press, 1986).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy in The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, No Date Listed).
- . *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, translated by Thomas Common in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, No Date).
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- O'Daly, Gerard. *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

- Outka, Gene. "God as the Subject of Unique Veneration", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21, 2 (Fall 1993).
- Padel, R. *Whom Gods Destroy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- Plato. "Crito" in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, editors. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- *Laches*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
- "Phaedo" in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, editors. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen MacKenna (London, England: Faber and Faber Limited, 1969).
- Poole, Roger. *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Philosophy After Kierkegaard", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
- Rist, J.M. *The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
- Richard Rorty. "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey", in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
- "The Contingency of Selfhood" in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Rosen, Stanley. "Thinking About Nothing", in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Michael Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).
- Rudd, Anthony. *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
- Schurmann, Reiner. *Meister Eckhart, mystic and philosopher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
- Seifert, Josef. "Is The Existence of Truth Dependent On Man?" *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (1982).



- Shestov, Lev. *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, translated by Elinor Hewitt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).
- Shumeli, Adi. *Kierkegaard & Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- Smith, Cyprian. *The Way of Paradox: Spiritual Life as Taught By Meister Eckhart* (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987).
- Smythe, John Vignaux. *A Question of Eros: Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard and Barthes* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1989).
- Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).
- Stock, Brian. *Augustine the Reader: Meditations, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996)
- Tobin, Frank. *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1995).
- Welte, Bernhard, "God In Heidegger's Thought", *Philosophy Today*, 26 (Spring 1982).
- Williams, Bernard. *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1993).
- Woods, Richard. *Eckhart's Way* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986).
- Wyschogrod, Michael. *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: The Ontology of Existence* [New York: Humanities Press, 1969).
- Zimmerman, Michael. *Heidegger's Confrontation With Modernity: Technology, Politics and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- Zukav, Gary. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: Morrow, 1979).