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*FELIX FALLIBILITAS:*  
THE BENEFIT OF SIN'S POSSIBILITY IN  
KIERKEGAARD'S *THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY*

Jason A. Mahn

This paper argues that anxiety, fallibility, and the possibility of sin can be used by a person to move past moral innocence and toward mature religious faith. I argue that the conflicting rhetorical voices in Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* should prevent interpreters such as Philip Quinn and Gregory Beabout from claiming that anxiety functions to explain sin. Anxiety more properly and paradoxically functions to develop faith. By adopting Kierkegaard's commendation of the "fortune of fallibility," Christian theology is able to find in anxiety not only the occasion to sin, but also a tutor of faith.

*Introduction*

A number of philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century audaciously claimed that anxiety, despite occasioning the "fall" into sin, can also carve a path to creativity, courage, authenticity, or faith. This theme of the useful—or even "saving"—function of anxiety stems back to Kierkegaard's phenomenological analysis in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844). Like its twentieth century interpreters, *The Concept of Anxiety*<sup>1</sup> (hereafter: CA) distinguishes anxiety, the discontent over one's "ownmost" freedom and the seemingly unlimited possibilities accompanying it, from fear, the more determinate and transitory response associated with a specific threat or danger. Also like his interpreters, Kierkegaard suggests that the phenomenon of anxiety often occasions an individual's leap into sin, but also suggest that anxiety might awaken an individual from the sinful "spiritlessness" of "the crowd" and thus "educate [a person] unto faith" (CA 159). Even when they do not mention his name, the twentieth century figures who explore the benefit of anxiety "repeat" (in Kierkegaard's non-identical sense) a theme that they receive from Kierkegaard.

But this idea of the philosophical or spiritual benefit of anxiety is a difficult one to maintain. If the idea now seems like a vestige of the past century, this is perhaps due to the growth in unreflective (or even anti-reflective) political discourse and civic religion. At least in the United States, the virtue of being unconditionally confident in one's moral and religious position currently overshadows and makes unrecognizable the virtues of constant self-questioning, unease, and anxiety.<sup>2</sup> And yet, while suspicion of anxiety is due largely to today's ethos, there are



also philosophical reasons to explain why the good of anxiety has faded from view. In the twentieth century, “proponents” of anxiety often either failed to convey the dangers of anxiety alongside its promises—thereby characterizing anxiety in ways that were not recognizable by those who experience it—or described anxiety’s benefit so indeterminately as compared to anxiety’s threat that readers were only able to make sense of and remember anxiety’s negative function.

Heidegger and his theological counterpart, Paul Tillich, fall into the first hazard. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the distinctive way in which *Dasein* is disclosed through anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Through anxiety, the individual senses that he or she is “not-at-home” in the world. Anxiety, with its sense of the “uncanny,” calls the individual back from absorption into the inauthentic world of the mass-man to an authentic “Being-in-the-world.” While much of this analysis is compelling, any theologian interested in the dynamics of sin should be suspicious of this unambiguously positive function of anxiety. Anxiety, for Heidegger, cannot harm to the degree to which it can help, if only because, according to his ontology, humanity is always already “fallen” into inauthenticity, and has nowhere to go than “up.” Tillich too tends to portray anxiety in *wholly* and *inevitably* beneficial terms. His *The Courage to Be*<sup>4</sup> suggests that anxiety is related to courage as non-being is related to Being. According to Tillich’s ontology, the first elements (anxiety, non-being) are derivative and productive of the second elements (courage, Being). Just as being includes and overcomes non-being in its own self-genesis, so too does courage depend on and overcome anxiety. In their portrayals of anxiety as “opening” an individual toward Being, both Tillich and Heidegger downplay the more “everyday” danger associated with anxiety—the danger of sin.

The opposing pitfall characterizes the work of Reinhold Niebuhr and Edward Farley. Whereas Heidegger and Tillich portray anxiety in overly optimistic terms (and “overly-ontological” terms—especially for the post-liberal theologian), Niebuhr portrays the dangers of anxiety in far more determinate, memorable and theological terms than he portrays anxiety’s benefit. For Niebuhr, anxiety is “a permanent concomitant of freedom, [and] is thus both the source of creativity and a temptation to sin.”<sup>5</sup> Notice here that whereas “temptation” and “sin” nicely fit within Niebuhr’s Christian tradition, “creativity” does not. The connection between anxiety and Christian salvation appears much more ambiguous and circuitous than the connection between anxiety and sin. The late twentieth-century theologian Edward Farley likewise writes of positive responses to anxiety—including creativity, vitality and wonder—in ways that are less indebted to the Christian narrative than is their negative correlate—idolatry.<sup>6</sup> Niebuhr and Farley thus give a theologically detailed account of the transition from anxiety to sin, but fail to describe the transition from anxiety to “creativity” or “wonder” in theologically compelling terms. We will return to the opposing pitfalls represented by Heidegger/Tillich and Niebuhr/Farley at the close of this paper.

The limitations of these analyses may help account for why the benefit of anxiety has not yet gripped Western consciousness. The shortcomings, however, should not overshadow the fact that these figures do well to indicate the benefit of anxiety. Without some description of the benefit

of anxiety, and with it of the possibility of sin, the Christian theologian is hard pressed to distinguish the virtue of faith as a struggle against temptation and anxiety from the untested “innocence” of one who knows neither testing nor struggle. Today, when the Church appears to many as an artificial sanctuary from real-world trouble, it is imperative that Christian theologians distinguish their visions of salvation and virtue from the wishes of the pusillanimous. This distinction between untested innocence and robust redemption has sometimes been expressed through the theme of *felix culpa*, or the fortunate Fall. Despite noteworthy variations, the *felix culpa* theme commonly articulates that the beatitude of salvation so surpasses the good of original innocence that the intervening sin comes to be known as “necessary” or even “happy.”<sup>7</sup> The redeemed, having traveled through sin and suffering, are given an outstanding joy that justifies the Fall. However, as the term “justify” suggests, the theme of the fortunate Fall often entails the philosophical enterprise of theodicy (literally, “the justification of God”), an enterprise which theologians find increasingly problematic.<sup>8</sup> The fortune of anxiety—or what I will call *felix fallibilitas*—provides an alternative, more promising way to distinguish redemption from untested innocence. The acceptance of anxiety and the battle against sin’s possibility might by themselves distinguish the mature knight of faith from the presumed “innocence” of the uninitiated.

In this paper I will develop and commend the benefits of anxiety, fallibility, and the possibility of sin to constructive Christian theology. (For the purposes of this proposal, these terms are functionally equivalent and overlap considerably: “fallibility” refers to the “non-coincidence”<sup>9</sup> of an individual with herself that makes moral failure and self-transcendence possible; “anxiety” refers to the individual’s *experience* of this non-coincidence; and “the possibility of sin” refers to this experience *as it is normally felt*—as the possibility of failure.) Kierkegaard, like Heidegger and the others, understands that anxiety is both beneficial and ethically-religiously dangerous. Unlike his twentieth-century heirs, Kierkegaard’s description of the good of anxiety, or the fortune of fallibility, is neither vaguely humanistic nor incongruously ontological. It is rather—like his analysis of the negative, sinful response of fallibility—*theological through and through*. By adopting his conception, contemporary Christian theology is able to find in human anxiety not only the temptation to sin, but also a precursor to and tutor of faith.

Before developing these initial suggestions more substantively, I must introduce one common interpretation of Kierkegaardian anxiety that this essay explicitly counters. Many have debated whether the anxiety within CA helps *explain* an individual’s “leap” into sin. Philip Quinn’s foundational essay, “Does Anxiety Explain Original Sin?” began this trend. It was responded to by Gregory Beabout in his, “Does Anxiety Explain Hereditary Sin?”<sup>10</sup> These interpreters share my assumption that anxiety can be good. They, however, assume that the “goodness” of anxiety is found in the way that it helps *explain* the onset of sin. According to them, anxiety is a tool for theologians and philosophers of religion to retrospectively *make sense of* moral evil. In confining the positive function of anxiety to an explanatory principle, interpreters such as Quinn and Beabout not only overlook the more theologically peculiar and noteworthy function of anxiety; they

also distort that function by confining it within the enterprise of theodicy, broadly construed. Because these interpretive assumptions are frequent and powerful—not to mention illuminating of much of Kierkegaard's text—a good deal of my essay will question whether they do justice to the full complexity of Kierkegaard's analysis and rhetorical voice.

The first section of this paper traces the relationship between the lure of anxiety and the leap of sin through the first part of *CA*. Here I argue that the text's conflicted narrative voice prevents the readers from aligning the phenomenology of anxiety with theological assertions about sin. The dual perspective and conflicting voices of *CA* thereby call into question discussions of whether anxiety explains sin. In the second section, I turn explicitly to the interpretations of Beabout and Quinn in order both to exhibit that their investigations are misplaced and to reintroduce the alternative role of anxiety. In the final section, I develop the alternative understanding of fortunate fallibility (*felix fallibilitas*) by understanding *CA* in light of its brief final chapter, "Anxiety as Saving through faith," and then by situating *CA* beside Kierkegaard's *Anti-Climacus* works.

### I. The Voices of *Haufniensis*

Kierkegaard wrote *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis (the "Watchman over the Harbor") during his first authorship (the corpus up to and including *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*). It is most commonly read as a psycho-theological investigation into original and subsequent sin, with "original" referring both to Adam's sin and the first sin of each individual. (Haufniensis takes pains not to place Adam "fantastically" outside human history. *Adam*—Hebrew for "the man"—is one of us, if also in idealized form.) Subtitle notwithstanding—*CA* is anything but "simple." The deliberation offers an extended phenomenological (or "psychological") account of human anxiety while gesturing toward the theological issue of hereditary sin. But the author also refuses to theorize how phenomenology and theology relate—how observing anxiety affects one's understanding (or confession) of sin. The work also entails an extended critique of "speculative" objectivity, but is ironically written through an observational psychologist—a "Watchman"—who "sits and traces the contours and calculates the angles of possibility," and who is "disturbed" no more than Archimedes (*CA* 23).

Many scholars, including the two considered below, suppose that Haufniensis's observations about anxiety directly inform Kierkegaard's understanding of sin. This assumption is mistaken on two accounts. First, it assumes a false identity, or at least an unjustifiable degree of continuity, between Haufniensis as a poetized persona who authors *CA* and Kierkegaard as a real person who "authors" Haufniensis. (The distinction between Kierkegaard and Haufniensis will become important when we contextualize *CA* among Kierkegaard's other pseudonymous works.) Second, the assumption that the phenomenology of anxiety directly contributes to a Christian hamartiology (understanding of sin) overlooks or disregards the presence of two distinct, vying perspectives or "voices" that run through-

out Haufniensis's text. These voices—one psychological/phenomenological and the other theological—do not harmonize. Haufniensis's text reads like a dialogical pursuit through mixed metaphors and a shifting narrative voice rather than as a univocal discourse from within methodological bounds. The narrator's voice is interdisciplinary, and therefore makeshift, and sometimes disjointed. One might even claim that a certain degree of "double talk" by Haufniensis reveals his own anxiety, despite his attempts not to be disturbed (p. 23).<sup>11</sup> If the phenomenology of anxiety and the doctrine of sin relate, it is only through the reciprocally-questioning antagonism between these psychological and dogmatic perspectives. In this section, I analyze the opening chapters of *CA* in order to highlight the tension between psychology's description of the anxiety-laden context that makes sin possible and the theological (or "dogmatic") assertion that sin is only presupposed by sin.<sup>12</sup>

The "theological" voice surfaces immediately in *CA*'s Introduction as Haufniensis critiques the ethical-religious assumptions of Hegelian mediation, whether of Hegel or of Danish Hegelians.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the author denounces the role that "the negative" plays in Hegelian metaphysics (pp. 12–13). Haufniensis, like other Kierkegaardian personae, generally mocks the "illusion" through which the negative "brings movement into all things" (p. 12). He critiques Hegel for confusing the immanent movement of logic, where every state is a transition and therefore merely "quantitatively" distinguished from every other state, with lived existence, where change requires a "transcendent" interruption, and where true becoming takes the form of a "qualitative leap."<sup>14</sup> Haufniensis even mockingly compares Hegel's ability to bring a qualitative state out of quantitative determinations to a children's rhyme where chanting "one-nis-ball, two-nis-balls, three-nis balls" will eventually bring about tennis balls (p. 32). But this ethereal and comical movement turns serious when it rolls into Hegel's ethics. "Here one is astonished to discover that the negative is evil," Haufniensis writes (p. 13). And so here "confusion is in full swing" (p. 13). Why is Haufniensis particularly concerned with the association between "the negative" and "evil" and the way Hegelian mediation affects ethical-religious thought?

The discrepancy involves the question of whether sin or moral evil can be understood as a mediating transition between ignorant innocence and redemptive knowledge. Sin as a "determinative negative"<sup>15</sup> plays a fruitful role in Hegel's system. This can be seen from the way Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, interprets Genesis's narrative of the Fall as depicting (in revealed religion's *Vorstellung*, or "picture thinking") the transition from listless ignorance and immediacy to spirited self-consciousness. This "transition" into sin eventually brings about the self-identity of Absolute Knowing.<sup>16</sup> Hegel here adheres to a robust and conceptualized version of *felix culpa*. The Fall serves higher forms of knowing, justifying the slaughter bench of history.

Haufniensis objects to this conception on ethical and theological grounds. By logically explaining the onset of sin, one justifies sin ethically, thereby assuaging guilt and bypassing the need for redemption. Even to situate sin within an overarching context—regardless of whether that context comprises a "System"—threatens to lessen the severity of sin. Haufniensis fears that to contextualize is to find reasons, to justify, and to excuse.

He insists that sin is an enigma that cannot be mediated by “the understanding.”<sup>17</sup> Put in Haufniensis’s favorite terms, one cannot make sense of the leap into sin without reducing its “qualitative” uniqueness to “quantitative determinations.” From this point onward in the text, Haufniensis consistently writes of sin as a “qualitative” interruption, a “sudden” and “enigmatic” “leap.” He does so in order to resist any understanding of sin that serves theodicy at the expense of moral condemnation and the need for Christian atonement.

Such is the origin and tenor of Haufniensis’s “theological” voice. But while this voice is present on nearly every page of *CA*, the text’s primary subject matter is the concept of anxiety. And it is anxiety that Haufniensis, in a second, psychological voice, introduces as the “intermediate term” necessary for understanding how the choice to sin interrupts the state of innocence (p. 49). While the leap into sin is sudden and unforeseeable, anxiety provides a *context* out of which sin arises, seemingly assuaging the absoluteness of its interruption. Moreover, whereas the onset of sin is *qualitative*, anxiety can grow in *quantitative* terms. It increases in proportion to the degree to which the object of anxiety—the “nothing” of sin’s possibility—appears “more and more [as] a something” through inherited sinfulness (p. 61). (“Sinfulness” for Haufniensis indicates the *increased possibility* for new and greater sin, not a condition or state of actual sin. Moreover, the “possibility of sin,” as will become more clear, does not necessarily correspond to the *probability* of sinning, but points instead to a volitional possibility that can be become more or less available according to the character of a moral agent.<sup>18</sup>) Through anxiety, then, the still innocent individual nonetheless “approaches” the leap into sin, and “innocence is [thereby] brought to its uttermost” (p. 45). Haufniensis here seems to make sense of sin’s actuality through sin’s possibility by suggesting that one’s anxious relationship to one’s freedom commonly (or even inevitably?) results in the choice to sin. If the theological voice condemns Hegel’s mediation, the psychological voice introduces a “mediating” concept between innocence and guilt—the concept of anxiety.

It appears that a fault-line runs through Haufniensis’s text. On the theological side, he repeatedly asserts that no quantitative determination prior to the leap into sin can lead up to or explain moral evil. Only confession of guilt “gets at” the nature of sin. On the psychological side, he nonetheless presents the phenomenon of anxiety as a way of situating or contextualizing this leap. Moreover, the psychological analysis of anxiety seems to mitigate against the theological condemnation of the sinner by suggesting that “the fall into sin always takes place in weakness” and that the one “who becomes guilty in anxiety becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to become” (p. 61). On the one side of the fault-line is the sudden “leap”—on the other a gradual “slide.”<sup>19</sup> On the one side is the qualitative interruption of a will—on the other human fallibility, which quantitatively increases and finally succumbs. Much of *CA* manically oscillates between voluntarism and infinite individual guilt for one’s sin, on the one hand, and the recognition of freedom’s limitations and of anxiety as an assuaging “explanation” for sin, on the other. The relationship between these perspectives is strained or even contentious, fundamentally and irreconcilably so. This fact must qualify any suggestion that anxiety “helps” to explain sin.

Many interpreters have overlooked these dual (and dueling) perspectives, assuming that a methodological divide between psychology and dogmatics alleviates any tension between them. According to them, psychology only understands how sin is possible by examining the anxiety that ensues when freedom considers its limitless possibility. Dogmatics then proclaims that sin is actual and demands that each individual claims full responsibility for it. Haufniensis's text can encourage such demarcations. For example, the last paragraph of the work claims that "as soon as psychology has finished with anxiety, it is to be delivered to [*at afleveret til*] dogmatics" (p. 162). This might suggest complementariness between psychology and dogmatics. Yet, the clause's connotations are rather telling. The Danish "*at afleveret til*" can mean "to be delivered to," as one would deliver a message. It can also mean to surrender, or to be forced to hand over. Such plurivocity makes the reader re-question whether the relationship between psychology and dogmatics is not more strained, and more interesting, than many assume. The final paragraphs of the Introduction describe how psychology "becomes deeply absorbed in the possibility of sin, [until] it is *unwittingly* in the service of another science [theology, or "dogmatics"] that only waits for it to finish so that it can begin and assist psychology to the explanation" (p. 23, my emphasis). Here it appears as though theology overtakes psychology once it, thoroughly enamored, can offer little resistance. The "assistance" offered by theology looks more like a hostile takeover.

But it is in the first two chapters of *CA* that the reader best hears the mixed metaphors and dissonant voices of Haufniensis. There Haufniensis gives his most famous description of anxiety and the onset of sin through the analogy of a person standing over an abyss, experiencing vertigo, and succumbing to dizziness. This re-narration of the Fall—although connected and coherent—includes two sets of images that lie on either side of the fault line that we have introduced. We quote the passage in full:

Anxiety may be compared to dizziness. He whose eye [*Øie*] happens to [*kommer til at*] look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit [*vil sætte*] the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold [*griber*] of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs [*segner*] in this dizziness. Further than this, psychology cannot and will not go. In that very moment [*Øieblikke*] everything is changed, and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty. Between these two moments is the leap, which no science has explained and which no science can explain. He who becomes guilty in anxiety becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to become. Anxiety is a feminine weakness in which freedom faints. Psychologically speaking, the fall into sin always takes place in weakness. But anxiety is of all things the most selfish. (p. 61)

Throughout this passage Haufniensis uses two contrasting figures—the "eye" and "freedom"—as metonyms for the falling individual. Reference



to “the eye” portrays the failure in terms of being unable to withstand the anxious disequilibrium induced by the fathomless pit. Disequilibrium culminates in dizziness and fainting, neither of which suggests free choice of the will. This metaphor thus emphasizes the quantitative increase in anxiety that gradually overtakes a person. When Haufniensis alternatively portrays the self as “freedom,” he emphasizes the self’s volition. Freedom has motivations and desires (it “wants to posit the synthesis”) and so “lays hold” (*gribe*: to seize or clutch) of the finite for security. Whereas the eye indicates the passivity and perhaps inevitability of failure, freedom indicates the responsibility of the one who sins. Though the narrative is coherent, the metaphors within it are mixed or even competitive. Interestingly, the metonyms also exchange characteristics—without becoming unified. Haufniensis notes the eye’s responsibility for the vertigo (“it is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss”), and emphasizes alternative choices (“for suppose he had not looked down”), even though he first described the eye as having accidentally “happen[ed] to look down.” Freedom too both “leaps” into sin and faints in “feminine weakness.” It grasps after finitude but also “succumbs” to (*segner*: “drops” “sinks into”) a dizziness that gets the best of it.

Haufniensis here somewhat erratically conveys both the fallibility and the fault of sinners; he both condemns the one who falls and assuages his guilt; and he depicts moral failure as both a quantitative slide and a qualitative leap. Haufniensis even asserts that the purpose of such alternating depictions is to maximize ambiguity: “He who becomes guilty in anxiety becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to become” (p. 61). The “moment” in which this Fall occurs expresses this ambiguity perfectly. Literally, the “moment” (*Øieblikke*) means a “blink of the eye.” But in colloquial Danish it can also mean the eye’s sideways glance, a brief looking away. One suggests a failure no more intentional than blinking or needing to sneeze. The other connotes an intentional diversion—the unwillingness to be attentive.

If the disparate metaphors within Haufniensis’s Fall narrative register his dissonant voices, those voices can be heard in other key passages as well. In the first chapter, the discord arises when Haufniensis describes the human choice to sin as without context or motivation before twice denying that he is a Pelagian. In §2 Haufniensis speaks of sin presupposing itself, of “sin [coming] into the world by a sin” (p. 32). When “the understanding” wants to explain this circular self-presupposition, it gets more, not less, confused. Section 3 then shores up sin’s self-presupposition by refusing to understand innocence as having an inner teleology toward being annulled (contra Hegel). Both sections emphasize that sin comes about through a freely chosen, qualitative leap that remains incommensurable with that which precedes it. Though consistent on this point, each section concludes by appealing to a contrasting perspective. Haufniensis introduces these appeals as a defense against the charge of Pelagianism—a charge which he assures the reader is entirely misplaced (pp. 34, 37). The aspect of Pelagianism pertinent here is the idea that individuals freely sin without influence from structures of society or patterns of history.<sup>20</sup> The first protestation reads in full as follows:

It hardly needs to be said that this view is not guilty of Pelagianism, which permits every individual to play his little history in his own private theater unconcerned about the race. For the history of the race proceeds quietly on its course, and in this no individual begins at the same place as another, but every individual begins anew, and in the same moment he is at the same place where he should begin in history. (pp. 34–35)

By admitting that the history of race changes each generation's starting point, Haufniensis strives to affirm the relevance of historical and collective circumstances. But it is not clear how the historical advance and membership in the human race qualifies an individual's decision. Haufniensis only retains the contrast between external influence and individual decision by distinguishing historical circumstance from the fact that "every individual [nonetheless] begins anew."

In the second defense against Pelagianism, Haufniensis again holds divergent conceptions together by way of contrastive rhetoric: sinfulness increases, *but* innocence is only lost by a leap; one may be more or less disposed to sin, *but* this more or less cannot constitute the concept of guilt. His defense against Pelagianism appears not to change the fundamental nature of falling into sin or the way in which sin presupposes itself. Sin is explained by sin; this enigma remains indifferent if not impervious to supplemental, mediating explanations, just as the leap into sin remains undetermined by degrees of prior sinfulness. At best, theological assertions about the interruption of sin and psychological observations about the increasing possibility of sin reciprocally delimit one another. They do not lead to reciprocal reformulations of the natures of sin and anxiety.

Throughout the second chapter of *CA*, the author's rhetorical voices are especially telling: the more an increase in anxiety seems to assuage the enigma of sin, the more vehemently Haufniensis insists that it cannot or should not do so. Chapter Two focuses on postlapsarian (Haufniensis says "derived") individuals, and contrasts their situation with that of Adam (or with the first sin of each individual). He distinguishes each postlapsarian individual from Adam insofar as derived individuals can become anxious not only or especially over limitless possibility, or the "possibility of possibility" (p. 42), but also and frequently over the possibility of *sin*. Postlapsarian individuals perceive sin in the world and have a "presentiment" that they too will become sinners. They reflect on this possibility and become anxious about it. Whereas their presentiment and ensuing anxiety do not "cause" moral failure, they do seem to make sin "easier" (p. 60). Insofar as postlapsarian persons believe that they will fall, they *de facto* have already fallen.

In this context, Haufniensis is fascinated by what he twice calls the "maximum" scenario. In such a situation, sin perpetuates itself, bypassing as it were the interruption of an individual's volition. He describes the possible or ideal case in which "a person seems to become guilty merely through anxiety about himself, something that could not have happened in the case of Adam" (p. 53), or again, the case in which "an individual in anxiety about sin brings forth sin" (pp. 74–75). Such moral failure would seem like an easy transition: "The more reflective[ly] one dares to posit anxiety, the easier it may seem for anxiety to pass over [*at slaae over*] into guilt" (p.

60). At maximum, sin itself would bring about more sin—without a qualitative interruption. Haufniensis is fascinated with this worst-case scenario; he returns to it here and throughout his corpus under the figure of “the demonic.” However, one notices that it is exactly in those places where Haufniensis imagines sin to be a self-perpetuating state that he most emphatically rejects this possibility. Indeed, he rejects it quite “dogmatically,” i.e., without allowing the phenomenon of the slide into sin to influence his assertion. The voices of Haufniensis thus appear most dissonant in this chapter. Even as he presents the possibility of sin bringing about sin, he emphatically asserts on dogmatic grounds that this is impossible.

For example, immediately after Haufniensis introduces the maximum case, he objects:

It is nevertheless true that every individual becomes guilty only through himself; yet what is quantitative in his relation to the race in this case reaches its maximum here and will have the power to confuse every view so long as one does not hold fast [*fastholder*] to the distinction specified earlier between the quantitative accumulation and the qualitative leap. (pp. 53–54)

The reader must hold fast (*fastholder*) to the distinction between the quantitative and the qualitative precisely because the examination of the “power” of quantitative influence threatens to obscure it. And Haufniensis now can only *reassert* this distinction *despite* the ways the power of anxiety threatens to undermine it.

A second assertion of individual responsibility despite the race’s influence follows in a similar manner:

The more reflective[ly] one dares to posit anxiety, the easier it may seem for anxiety to pass over into guilt. But here it is important not to allow oneself to be deluded by determinants of approximation: a “more” cannot bring forth the leap, and no “easier” can in truth make the explanation easier. If this is not held fast [*Holder man ikke fast pass dette*], one runs the risk of suddenly meeting a phenomenon in which everything takes place so easily that the transition becomes a simple transition. . . . Therefore, although anxiety becomes more and more reflective, the guilt that breaks forth in anxiety by the qualitative leap retains the same accountability as that of Adam, and the anxiety the same ambiguity. (p. 60)

Notice again how Haufniensis implores the reader to hold fast (*fastholder*) to the distinction between qualitative sin and quantitative sinfulness, *despite* (or because of?) certain evidence that threatens to obscure it. Even as Haufniensis the psychologist describes “a phenomenon in which everything takes place so easily,” i.e., where sinfulness seems to bring about sin, Haufniensis the dogmatist continually interrupts his phenomenological observations by asserting that sinfulness cannot bring about sin, increased ease cannot assuage responsibility, no quantitative “more” can bring about qualitative difference. If, in the introductory chapter, Haufniensis presented psychology and dogmatics as somewhat mutually supportive,

and if, in the first chapter, this relationship appeared mutually delimiting, then in this second chapter the relationship borders on becoming antagonistic. The two no longer dialogue or even debate; they profess and vie for predominance. One Haufniensis is fascinated with the manner by which anxious reflections over sinfulness can issue in sin. The other Haufniensis adamantly “sticks to” (*fastholde*) the categorical distinction between fallibility and fault.

## II. Anxiety Explains Nothing

In entertaining the idea that anxiety could “explain” the leap into sin, Quinn and Beabout assume that psychology and theology are complimentary and that an advance in understanding anxiety amounts to an advance in understanding sin. The increasingly antagonistic dialectic between the mixed metaphors and two voices of Haufniensis that we traced in the preceding section undercuts this assumption. These interpreters speak with a voice that is more univocal, and less conflicted, than the rhetoric they consider.<sup>21</sup>

According to Quinn, Haufniensis’s presentation of anxiety as a “motivation” for sin seeks to explain how sin first arises. Quinn investigates how anxiety might explain sin without assuming that an adequate explanation must be cast in metaphysical terms. In his analysis, Haufniensis treads *in medio* ground between understanding sin as a causal necessity (which Quinn attributes to Schleiermacher) and renouncing all motivational factors and any ability to understand it (which Quinn attributes to Kant).

Beabout extends Quinn’s analysis by asking whether Haufniensis’s understanding of anxiety explains not only original sin but also the inheritance of sinful conditions. In the second chapter of *CA*, Haufniensis uses anxiety to characterize the “possibility of activity taking part in a distorted social structure that is already in place.”<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, this possibility is “more developed” and “more concrete” than the possibilities available to Adam. It thereby becomes the object of a more developed and reflective anxiety. Beabout concludes that anxiety not only explains the leap from innocence to guilt but also explains each subsequent leap from anxiety-producing conditions, which make one predisposed to sin, to the sinful choices themselves, which are made only through an individual’s freedom.

Quinn and Beabout thus focus on different aspects of the *explanandum* when judging whether anxiety explains sin. They share, however, the assumption that the phenomenology of anxiety in *CA* primarily functions to explain sinful choices, whether original or postlapsarian. Beabout less ambiguously than Quinn gives a positive answer to his question, “Does Anxiety Explain Hereditary Sin?” On the one hand, Beabout denies no less than Haufniensis that anxiety necessitates sin. He thus writes of how “the sinfulness of previous generations can play a conditioning factor that influences the fall from innocence without compromising human freedom,” and of how “anxiety is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sin.”<sup>23</sup> Beabout is particularly careful to distinguish subsequent generations from Adam not in terms of sin becoming more probable, but in terms of its possibility becoming “more concrete” or “more developed.”<sup>24</sup> Most commendable is his conceptual distinction between offering a “causal explanation” and a “transcendental explanation” for sin.<sup>25</sup> Beabout claims

that the accumulated sinfulness of the race and the increasingly reflective capacities of individuals "explain" sin by providing the transcendental ground of sin's possibility.

On the other hand, Beabout often coordinates the influence of quantitative determinants with qualitative freedom in ways which strict transcendental deduction would disallow. He suggests that the socio-historical environment and an individual's freedom *together* account for his or her fall into sin. He writes:

These increases in quantity [of sinfulness and anxiety] affect each new innocent individual, though they do not qualitatively change the innocent individual. This means that for each individual, though the person is born into an environment with others who are themselves sinners and into a distorted social context, it is not the parents, the environment, or the social context *alone* that *causes* the innocent person to sin. . . . The fact that there is an increased quantity of sin and anxiety in the world . . . is *not alone* what *caused* the person to sin. . . . [Rather] the individual who is guilty is always, *at least in part*, responsible for his or her sinfulness.<sup>26</sup> (my emphases)

This passage begins by repeating Haufniensis's rejection of the claim that an increase in quantity can cause a qualitative leap. It ends, however, by suggesting that together quantitative influences and qualitative freedom account for sin. The phrases italicized above suggest not only that responsibility for sin is *shared* between an individual and his or her environment, but also that the increase in sinfulness in part *causes* the fall into sin. Beabout repeats such phrasing throughout his article.<sup>27</sup> Even his final sentence, which otherwise reiterates individual responsibility for sin, ends up dispersing the causes of and responsibility for sin between the individual and his or her social context: "While quantitative changes may alter the setting and texture of the first sin of subsequent individuals, it is still the case that the qualitative change from innocence to guilt occurs in anxiety, and hence remains, *at least in part*, the responsibility of the individual" (my emphasis).<sup>28</sup>

By treating quantitative determinations and qualitative freedom as sharing responsibility and causality, Beabout implies that they are commensurable. He thus treats the difference between the quantitative and the qualitative in *quantifiable* terms. Each is allotted a "part" of sin's explanation. Not surprisingly, when the qualitative leap is (quantitatively) coordinated with the quantitative in this way, it loses its distinctive character. The individual is responsible "at least in part" because the environment cannot "wholly determine" the Fall into sin. If one follows Beabout's interpretation of Haufniensis, the qualitative leap becomes a small factor that is "added" to socio-historical circumstances so that they do not explain sin away.

Quinn is much less susceptible than Beabout to "reducing" qualitative distinctions to quantitative differences. Unlike Beabout, he equivocates in his answer to the question of whether anxiety explains original sin. Also unlike Beabout, he refuses to invoke individual freedom to fill in the remainder after psychology has tried to explain sin. Instead, he emphasizes

that psychology, not dogmatics, offers only a "little help."<sup>29</sup> On the whole, a phenomenological account of anxiety cannot explain sin; it only helps to distinguish the freedom to fall from utterly unmotivated *liberum arbitrium*. Quinn's conception, however, still indicates a direct or complementary relationship between psychological explanations and dogmatic assertions that is precluded by the conflicting voices of Haufniensis.

According to Quinn's typology, Haufniensis shares Kant's resistance to the idea that social and historical factors can explain the enigma of sin. He departs from Kant, however, by permitting psychological factors, including motivations and commitments, to influence a person's fall into sin. Like Schleiermacher, Haufniensis recognizes that the individual inherits conditions which are anterior to pure freedom and which occasion or influence the leap into sin. Unlike Schleiermacher, however (and here back toward Kant), such influences can never impel one to sin. For Haufniensis the moral vulnerability preceding free choice provides a necessary but radically insufficient condition for explaining the onset of sin.

Quinn concludes that "anxiety does not explain original sin."<sup>30</sup> This conclusion, however, fails to convey the degree to which Quinn tries to locate the "little help" that psychology offers. He finds that help and the proper function of anxiety in the way it prevents one from interpreting the leap into sin as beginning from a place of indifference. Quinn writes, "What anxiety is supposed to do for us is to preclude the possibility that the qualitative leap is made from a position of indifference, utterly unmotivated."<sup>31</sup>

In a passage to which we will return, Haufniensis does reject the thought that sin could be chosen through freedom of indifference (pp. 49–50). But Quinn and Haufniensis reject *liberum arbitrium* on different grounds. Quinn associates indifferent freedom with Kant's description of an individual's a-temporal adoption of a morally evil maxim. In his earlier analysis of Kant and original sin, Quinn confesses his "intellectual discomfort" with such abstract freedom:

Even if one agrees with Kant that such [social and historical] factors cannot be causally sufficient for the existence of a propensity for which its possessor is to be held morally responsible, it seems reasonable to feel intellectual discomfort with the idea that they are precluded from having any causal influence in moral character. Worse still, it is hard to see how Kant could allow even psychological factors to influence the atemporal choice that produces the evil propensity.<sup>32</sup>

Quinn nowhere explains his "intellectual discomfort" or why such discomfort "seems reasonable." He only appeals to readers' presumed suspicion of Kant's "unhistorical and individualistic" thought, and to their supposed uneasiness about uninfluenced, unmotivated freedom.

Has not Quinn, when appealing to the discomfort that arises with the thought of an unmotivated will, already decided how qualitative volition and quantitative determinations might correspond? He implies that to leave them utterly unrelated (or to understand them as *qualitatively* distinct) would offend human understanding. When Quinn appeals to feelings of discomfort for evidence against context-less volition, he thus allows reason in general or phenomenological psychology in particular

to judge the validity of theological claims. Though he remains more attentive than Beabout to the ambiguous relationship between psychology and dogmatics and between quantitative determinants and the qualitative leap, Quinn—by insisting on the little service which psychology might offer theology—risks judging dogmatic propositions according to human experience and thus contextualizing the qualitative leap within quantitative progressions.

In the final analysis, Quinn shares with Beabout the assumption that psychological analyses of quantitative determinants overstep their bounds only when they *fully* explain the leap into sin. So long as they leave significant room (Quinn) or at least a little space (Beabout) for human volition, they avoid “psychologizing” sin and mitigating individual responsibility. The assumption of Haufniensis, as glimpsed in his conflicted rhetoric, differs significantly. For him, the struggle between psychology and theology is a struggle over which gets to be in charge. If psychology helps explain sin, then the leap begins to look less like an immeasurable gulf and more like a wide distance made progressively narrower when one attends to socio-historical factors. Haufniensis writes, “[anxiety] no more explains the qualitative leap than it can justify it ethically” (p. 49). Even by helping to explain the leap into sin, psychology risks turning sin into something that it is not: ethically justifiable. And so, even and especially when Haufniensis considers the help of psychology, Haufniensis the theologian dogmatically insists on its necessary inadequacy: “The only science that can help a little is psychology, yet it admits that it explains nothing and also that it *cannot* and *will not* explain more” (p. 51, original emphasis).

In this light, explanations for sin risk the same ethical distortions as does Hegel’s speculative standpoint. However tenuous their conclusions, they are oriented toward the past and motivated by the desire to conceptually align the Fall into sin with the “normal” course of events. In short, they risk becoming *theodicies*, in the pejorative sense of that word. More perilous still, explanations for sin might conceal self-justification within seemingly unmotivated justifications of God—theodicy might mask *anthropodicy*.<sup>33</sup> Haufniensis at least suspects that scholarly investigations that try to explain sin conceal a hidden agenda. Some will stave off the need to confess sin by continuing to explain it.

None of this is to say that Haufniensis or any of Kierkegaard’s personae makes theological claims without appealing to socio-historical or psychological observations. It is only to say that the interests of psychology are controlled by theological interests, and not vice-versa. By ignoring the conflicted voice of Haufniensis, interpreters have assumed, first, that psychology could help dogmatic understandings of sin without also threatening to undermine them, and second, that Christian theology should welcome such assistance without radical re-appropriation. The effect of these assumptions is to make Haufniensis’s interpretation of anxiety and sin appear as a watered-down version of Hegel’s theodicy. On this view, sin is not necessary, but it is perhaps inevitable. Anxiety does not take one into sin, but it does lead one right up to it. Quantitative transitions cannot induce a qualitative leap, but they can help make sense of it. Haufniensis would be uncomfortable sitting so close to Hegel. There is therefore

reason to believe that anxiety and quantitative progression play a role clearly distinguished from “leading” to and so “explaining” sin. The final section of this essay examines how *CA* proposes an alternative, but no less positive, function of anxiety.

### III. The Benefit of Sin's Possibility

As we have seen, Haufniensis directly protests speculation about how innocence necessarily leads to sin and sin to redemptive knowledge. Through the progressive dissonance of his two voices, he also undercuts interpretive assumptions that would back away from a speculative theology but still understand anxiety as approaching and therefore explaining sin. The problem remains as to the relationship between Haufniensis's descriptions of anxiety, or quantitative increase in sin's possibility, on the one hand, and the range of possible responses by the reader, on the other. If increasing anxiety is not meant to explain sin, what is meant to do? The aim of this section is to propose an alternative reading of *CA* that is both encouraged and truncated by Haufniensis. It also forwards a central conviction shared by Beabout and Quinn but overlooked by other interpreters, namely, that the anxiety depicted in *CA* is beneficial. My interpretation claims that the possibility of sin is presented to the reader so that he or she might overcome it in developing freedom and turning to faith. Haufniensis mentions the possibility that anxiety, “when rightly used . . . plays another role” (p. 53) and periodically correlates anxiety with the possibility of religious faith. He clearly portrays anxiety as a condition of faith's possibility in his final chapter: “Anxiety as Saving through Faith.” Might not *CA* as a whole present anxiety-producing possibilities to sin as that through which or against which one builds faith?

Recall that the interpretations I have rejected suggest that qualitative sin and quantitative anxiety are commensurate, or quantitatively relatable. The alternative is to imagine that qualitative freedom employs and controls quantitative anxiety according to its own purposes. Haufniensis sometimes suggests as much, noting that anxiety can be used by individuals to strengthen and shape their freedom. For example, having described the way the “nothing” that instigates anxiety becomes “more and more a something” (or how indeterminate possibility becomes the possibility *to sin*), Haufniensis declares, “All of this *is* only for freedom, and it *is* only as the single individual himself posits sin by the qualitative leap” (p. 61, original emphasis). The comment is cryptic, but Haufniensis implies that the purpose of anxiety only becomes relevant as one takes responsibility for positing sin. He thus also implies that the struggle between observation of quantitative progression and responsibility for the qualitative leap gets resolved only when the former submits to the latter. Haufniensis may be suggesting what Paul Ricoeur will state no less cryptically in the following century—that “he who confesses that he is the author of evil discovers the reverse of that confession, namely, the *non-posit*ed in the positing of evil, the always *already* there of evil, the *other* of temptation.”<sup>34</sup> Only through the confession of full responsibility for sin do the possibilities leading to sin become relevant. Anxiety becomes meaningful and purposeful only to the repentant sinner.



In other places, Haufniensis more explicitly suggests that the progression of anxiety is good insofar as it provides resistance against which one develops his or her freedom. The following passage describes the slide into sin as that which is meant to be overcome:

Christianity has never assented to giving each particular individual the privilege of starting from the beginning in an external sense. Each individual begins in an historical nexus, and the consequences of nature hold true. The difference, however, [between Christianity and paganism] consists in that Christianity teaches him to lift himself above this “more,” and it judges him who does not do so as being unwilling. (p. 73)

Occasions to sin are here beneficial insofar as they might be surmounted. One might infer that all the quantitative progressions that Haufniensis considers—the accumulation of sinfulness in the race, the “nothing” of possibility becoming more and more of a “something,” the advancing anxiety which seems to lead right up to sin—might provide that which Christians must actively resist. Notice that Haufniensis does not merely suggest that increasing anxiety cannot make one sin. He also and more boldly suggests that anxiety can help the earnest develop faith. In the latter scenario, fallibility, anxiety, and the possibility of sin function much as the Fall functions for Hegel. They initiate a transformation from ignorant and untested “innocence” to spirited and intentional faith. In place of Hegel’s *felix culpa*, Haufniensis thus begins to develop a strong version of what might be called *felix fallibilitas*. The human capacity to sin that denotes finite freedom and that elicits subjective anxiety is “necessary” or even “happy”—insofar as the individual actively resists it. Yet, the differences between Haufniensis and Hegel must not be obscured by the analogous role of fallibility and Fall. Haufniensis recognizes the positive function of anxiety, but he does so without exhibiting a “false mood”—the self-justification risked by theodicy—to which Hegel and interpreters of CA are prone. To better glimpse the novelty and irony of fortunate fallibility, we return to Haufniensis’s critique of feigned objectivity, which encompasses a critique of “indifferent” freedom.

The recognition that anxiety might serve freedom and faith depends on a standpoint that is more committed than is neutral observation. Haufniensis asserts that the proper mood for dealing with sin is “courageous resistance” and contrasts such resistance with the wrong mood of psychology’s “antipathetic curiosity” (p. 15). Given this fact, one wonders whether Haufniensis rejects *liberum arbitrium* not because he, like Quinn, finds it offensive to reason, but because he suspects that people who hypothesize about unmotivated volition do so to obfuscate their motivations and self-justifications. The passage in which Haufniensis critiques freedom of indifference suggests exactly this. Although he begins by calling such freedom absurd (a “nuisance for thought”), he ends by connecting it to the avoidance of earnest self-examination:

If sin has come into the world by necessity (which is a contradiction), there can be no anxiety. Nor can there be any anxiety if sin came into

the world by an act of an abstract *liberum arbitrium* (which no more existed in the world in the beginning than in a late period, because it is a nuisance for thought). To want to give a logical explanation of the coming of sin into the world is a stupidity that can occur only to people who are comically worried about finding an explanation. (pp. 49–50)

By rejecting this cognitive nuisance Haufniensis certainly refuses to reduce freedom to the muscular effort of pure volition.<sup>35</sup> But he also traces belief in freedom of indifference to a *worried* (i.e., concerned, interested) attempt to find logical explanations for sin. In an earlier draft of CA, Kierkegaard further characterizes those individuals who anxiously justify themselves under the shroud of theodicy. They who are “comically worried about finding an explanation” for sin are also

indifferent to the fact that the explanation is so inhuman that no person who has lived or who wishes to live can understand it, because it also proposes to explain him. If the explanation of Adam and his fall does not concern me as a *fabula, quae de me narratur* [story that speaks to me], one might as well forget both Adam and the explanation.<sup>36</sup>

Explanations of sin propagated from third-person, seemingly unconcerned points of view not only fail to “capture” the reason for sin; they also ensnare the explainer, exposing his or her quest as motivated by the avoidance of personal responsibility, confession and resistance.

It is therefore in his ridicule of speculative theodicy—and in the accompanying critique of “indifferent” freedom—that Haufniensis commends anxious fallibility in a way that differs starkly from Hegel’s justification of moral evil. But the relationship between the two is even more complex. Haufniensis’s fortunate fallibility actually turns Hegel’s fortunate Fall inside-out, since it is the security accompanying speculative knowing that Haufniensis seeks to make anxious. To understand how Haufniensis parodies Hegel, we must consider CA’s examination of the allegedly anxiety-free state of “spiritlessness” (pp. 93–96).

Spiritless individuals—or rather, masses of people that resist becoming individuals—are “neither guilty nor not guilty” (94). According to *The Sickness Unto Death*, they are “too spiritless to be called sin,”<sup>37</sup> and it is difficult to know whether they are better or worse off than the self-conscious sinner. Kierkegaard refers to them in different ways at different times. They are “the crowd,” “Christendom,” “Speculation,” “the present age,” “philistines” and—most pointed and encompassing—the “spiritless” (*Aandløshed*).<sup>38</sup> Haufniensis places in the category those who try to examine sin objectively in order to divert attention from their guilt and to evade the task of resisting sin. His language here becomes “singularly direct”<sup>39</sup> as he mocks with renewed seriousness the profound comedy of spiritlessness, its mindless idolatry, the senselessness of its chatter and the superficiality of its bliss. At first glance, the spiritless are “innocent” insofar as they remain uncommitted to the task of becoming spirit and so skirt the categories of responsibility and guilt. On closer inspection, they are guilty of masquerading as innocent or of fantasizing about a return to Eden. Through self-deception and the avoidance of anxiety these Christian

pagans of Christendom “never [arrive] at sin in the deepest sense” (p. 93). Haufniensis is quick to add: “yet this is precisely sin” (p. 93).

The predominant characteristic of spiritlessness is its lack of manifest anxiety: “In spiritlessness there is no anxiety, because it is too happy, too content, and too spiritless for that” (p. 95). Those who lack spirit also lack anxiety and the possibility to sin. In light of this particular diagnosis, Haufniensis’s prescribed treatment becomes clear: a heavy dose of anxiety to revive the comatose spirit. Interpreter Vanessa Rumble describes the treatment in telling terms:

Spiritlessness, having lost its sense of the task which is posed to human existence by freedom, must be reinitiated into anxiety, the first signal of the awakening of freedom and consciousness of possibility. The usefulness of Haufniensis’s portrayal of anxiety lies in its power not only to describe but also to produce anxiety. The implicit demand of *The Concept of Anxiety* to its readers is to become anxious.<sup>40</sup>

Spiritless persons must become anxious, capable of sin for perhaps the first time.

The brief but pivotal attention that Haufniensis pays toward the spiritless manifests the benefit of anxiety vis-à-vis the condition of spiritlessness. The spiritless are doubly-removed from Christian practice—what Kierkegaard calls “the radical cure”—and so must become capable of sinning before learning to resist sin and trust the Physician’s guidance. Like Hegel, then, Haufniensis urges a break with “innocence.” Contra Hegel, this innocence is not the innocence that precedes moral evil but the *presumed* innocence that is willed by the cowardly in order to evade responsible commitment. In fact, according to Haufniensis (and Kierkegaard), it is exactly the disengaged objectivity of speculation (Hegelian or otherwise), together with the collusion of religion and culture, that sustains the self-delusions of the spiritless. In attempting to fissure this “innocence”—to “wound it from behind”<sup>41</sup>—Haufniensis turns Hegel’s *felix culpa* upon itself. The self-security of those who have justified their sin itself must be called into question. Becoming anxious and capable of sin is in this case good, or even “happy”: *O Felix Fallibilitas*.

The seemingly obvious culmination of this line of thinking is the concluding chapter of *CA*: “Anxiety as Saving through Faith” (pp. 155–62). In it, Haufniensis personifies anxiety as the educator of humanity. He again specifies the spiritless as those in need of this treatment. For them, entering into anxiety without succumbing to it requires a double-movement of faith: to “sink absolutely” in anxiety and then “emerge from the depth of the abyss” and “receive everything back, as no one in actuality ever did” (pp. 156–58).<sup>42</sup> The depths of freedom and possibility, which previously occasioned vertiginous anxiety, now promise to save all. Interestingly, when Haufniensis here returns to his analogy of vertigo, the dizziness of limitless possibility rescues those who are falling rather than occasions their original Fall. He writes:

In actuality, no one ever sank so deep that he could not sink deeper, and there may be one or many who sank deeper. But he who sank

in possibility—his eye became dizzy, his eye became confused, so he could not grasp the measuring stick that Tom, Dick, and Harry hold out as a saving straw to one sinking; his ear was closed so he could not hear what the market price of men was in his own day, did not hear that he was just as good as the majority. He sank absolutely, but then in turn he emerged from the depth of the abyss lighter than all the troublesome and terrible things in life. (p. 158)

Dizziness—along with possibility and anxiety—is now considered fortunate. Immediately after this passage, Haufniensis admits that those who sink in possibility risk “the danger of a fall, namely suicide” (pp. 158–59). Yet this aside hardly diminishes the profit of “whoever is educated [by anxiety]” (p. 159). If the journey into anxiety is dangerous, its payoff is immeasurable: “Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate” (p. 155).

This final chapter appears to bring to fruition the upbuilding function of anxiety. However, while Haufniensis does write of anxiety in honorific terms, he also here noticeably disconnects anxiety from fallibility and the possibility of *sin*. Simply put, Haufniensis ostensibly disentangles the benefit of anxiety from the possibility of sin. He does so by coupling anxiety almost exclusively with possibility *as such* rather than with the *determinate* possibility to *sin*. Recall that Haufniensis earlier had traced the progression from Adam’s objectless anxiety to the more determinate anxiety over the possibility of sin, as experienced by “derived” individuals. One would expect CA’s final chapter to value the latter form of anxiety, since it is this anxiety that is available to the reader. Yet in the final chapter the fact that “in possibility all things are equally possible” (p. 156) alone awakens the spiritless from their narrow bliss. As we have seen, the imagery of “absolutely” sinking into an indeterminate abyss of formal possibility is predominant. These images recall (and revise) the pure case scenario of Adam but not the different situation of all other “derived” persons, for whom possibility presents itself as the possibility to sin.

If it were one’s possibility to *sin* which must be confronted and resisted, then language of “struggling” with the infinite and “overcoming” anxiety would become predominant in Haufniensis’s conclusion. As it is, metaphors of struggling are overshadowed by images of *remaining* in anxiety and *refraining* from securing oneself, trusting that one will emerge victorious. This limitation may be the result of Haufniensis’s own detached objectivity and his fear of duplicating the anxiety he investigates. Whatever the origin, the celebration of anxiety in the final short chapter noticeably differs in tone and breadth from Haufniensis’s more careful, circumspect descriptions. This disconnect is problematic for those of us wishing to tracing Haufniensis’s concept of *felix fallibilitas*. Specifically, it tempts interpreters into one of the two pitfalls that we described in our initial examination of Heidegger, Tillich, Niebuhr, and Farley. For if, with the final chapter, one portrays anxiety as educative (p. 155), masterful (p. 158), serving (p. 159), nurturing (pp. 160–61), or even salvific (pp. 158, 162), one risks obscuring the more obvious danger of sin’s possibility, repeating the shortcoming of Tillich and Heidegger. If, by contrast, one attends to the manifold perils of anxiety that comprise most of the book, dismissing the final chapter as

rhetorical flourish, one confines the religious function of anxiety to its role in occasioning sin, repeating the limitations of Niebuhr and Farley.

#### IV. From *Haufniensis* to *Anti-Climacus*

Happily, *CA* was not the only book that a fictitious persona through Kierkegaard wrote. The *Anti-Climacus* writings of Kierkegaard's "second authorship" receive and develop *Haufniensis*'s suggestions concerning the fortune of fallibility. They do not resolve the tension between fallibility's dangers and benefits, but they do further negotiate that tension and make increasingly clear that individuals must freely confront and outwit the possibility of sin. Together, *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* commend the battle against sin's possibility without either downplaying the danger of anxiety or forgetting its benefit. While my comments comprise only a sketch, they outline the ideal, theological role of anxiety, once it is fully "handed over" to dogmatics.

*The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* is the first of two works by *Anti-Climacus* (Kierkegaard's persona of a "Christian on an extraordinarily high degree"). In it the author repeatedly asks in different ways: "Is despair an excellence or a defect?" (*SD* p. 14). While the destructiveness of despair (or sin) is more obvious (it is a "sickness unto death"), its excellence is supported where *Anti-Climacus* writes of a "despair that is a thoroughfare to faith" (p. 67) and asserts that "it is the worst misfortune never to have had that sickness: it is truly a godsend to get it, even if it is the most dangerous of illnesses, if one does not want to be cured of it" (p. 26). The "regression" into intensified sin, *Anti-Climacus* suggests, may be more valuable than the cloistered life that never meets the possibility of sin—the life that is "too spiritless to be called sin" (p. 101).

Some have argued that *Anti-Climacus* here develops a unique version of the fortunate Fall.<sup>43</sup> This claim overlooks *Anti-Climacus*'s categorical distinction between the possibility and actuality of sin. Initially treating sin under the category of despair, *Anti-Climacus* writes:

Is despair an excellence or a defect? Purely dialectically, it is both. If only the abstract idea of despair is considered, without any thought of someone in despair, it must be regarded as a surpassing excellence. The possibility of this sickness is man's superiority over the animal, and this superiority distinguishes him in quite another way than does his erect walk, for it indicates infinite erectness or sublimity, that he is spirit. (*SD* p. 15)

Clearly, *Anti-Climacus* considers the possibility of despair/sin to be good or even "excellent." He contends that "to be able to despair is an infinite advantage, and yet to be in despair is not only the worst misfortune and misery—no, it is ruination" (p. 15).

*Sickness* specifically extends the insights of *CA* by differentiating between the passive absence of sin and the intentional cultivation and then destruction of sin's possibility. The "innocent" (read: "spiritless") may be without sin, but only the righteous have sought and fought its possibility:

Not to be in despair is not the same as not being lame, blind, etc. If not being in despair signifies neither more nor less than not being in despair, then it means precisely to be in despair. Not to be in despair must signify the destroyed possibility of being able to be in despair; if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility. (*SD* p. 15)

Throughout the book *Anti-Climacus* portrays the battle that belongs to “Christian heroism” (p. 5). The struggle to “destroy” the possibility of sin after having faced it distinguishes the knight of faith from more resigned or stoic forms of moral education, as exemplified by *Haufniensis’s* final chapter. Two characteristics of this text thus distinguish it from Heidegger and Tillich, and from *CA’s* conclusion. First, the descriptions by *Anti-Climacus* of the *fight* against sin’s possibility imply that salvation must be won over-and-against the danger of sin. Indeed, all of *Sickness* traces the manifold possibilities for failure in order that they be used—despite themselves—for “upbuilding and awakening.” Second, the fact that *Sickness* is an explicitly Christian work suggests that the benefit of sin’s possibility only becomes available or manageable from within a particular tradition that forms a particular kind of religious courage. This flies in the face of Heidegger’s understanding of anxiety—and to a lesser extent, that of Tillich—because Heidegger assumes that the most revelatory anxiety is indeterminate and ontological rather than determinate and ontic.<sup>44</sup> For Kierkegaard, the strongest form of freedom is shaped—through its resistance—by determinate possibilities to sin.

*Practice in Christianity*, *Anti-Climacus’s* second work, meditates on the further potentiation and determination of sin’s possibility that ensues when an individual stands *coram Christi*. The reader of *Practice* learns that the greatest spiritual danger—the possibility of taking offense at Christ—is also a necessary component of Christian faith. *Anti-Climacus* writes:

Just as the concept of “faith” is an altogether distinctively Christian term, so in turn is “offense” an altogether distinctively Christian term related to faith. The possibility of offense is the crossroad, or it is like standing at the crossroad. From the possibility of offense, one turns either to offense or to faith, but no one comes to faith except through the possibility of offense.<sup>45</sup>

If we exchange for “offense” the more general “sin,” the final clause of this passage spells out what *CA* only sketches—that the possibility of sin can pave the way to faith. Yet the crossroads analogy misleads insofar as it suggests that one merely “stands” on the possibility of offense, unconcernedly choosing between sin and faith. *Anti-Climacus* clarifies that the possibility of offense/sin provides “the repulsion [*Frastød*] in which faith can come into existence—if one does not choose to be offended” (*PC* p. 121).<sup>46</sup> This repulsing possibility helps *shape* Christian faith as a particular kind of courageous struggle.

*Practice* specifically extends *CA* by claiming that the possibility of sin is a gift from God. It claims that even the most severe temptation—the possibility of taking offense—is given by God for the purpose of being

defeated. More significant still, it claims that this gift of sin's possibility is given not only with the first gifts of creation, but also and completely with the gift of Christ and his offer of forgiveness. For Anti-Climacus, Christ himself becomes and remains the sign of offense in order also to be the object of faith (PC pp. 98–99). Whereas ideal Christian existence is classically characterized as *non posse peccare* (the impossibility of sin), Anti-Climacus characterizes it as *posse peccare potentissime*—the possibility of sin potentiated by Christ to the highest power. Blessed is the one who is not offended by the particularity of Christ and his unbounded forgiveness—having first recognized the scandalous possibility of offense.

Unlike Niebuhr and Farley, Anti-Climacus thus writes of the benefit of sin's possibility in ways that are centrally theological, and even Christological. Anxious fallibility accompanies the gift of Christ, and overcoming it belongs to the work of Christian redemption. Together the works by Anti-Climacus can expound on what Haufniensis proposes, and can do so because they understand the anxiety-producing possibilities to sin “dogmatically”—as that which *shall* be encountered and destroyed.

I hope that evoking the works of Anti-Climacus in response to the limitations of Haufniensis does not seem like lowering a *deus ex machina*. The later works do not solve a problem of CA, but gesture toward the service that fallibility and the possibility of sin increasingly give to theology once it “takes over” the findings of psychology. I hope too that drawing together two Kierkegaardian pseudonyms does not seem to conflate the various authorial perspectives. If anything, it helps to highlight important differences in the authorship between plural and singular voices, non-committed and confessional perspectives, and stoic endurance and Christian courage. I have shown that Kierkegaard shares with Hegel the conviction that full human flourishing surpasses the goal of “innocence.” Unlike Hegel—indeed, as a Hegelian inversion—Kierkegaard resists the speculative standpoint, with its ability to “grasp” a fortunate Fall. Those who have secured themselves through philosophical-religious knowing should become fallible, anxious, and capable of sin, if they too wish to surpass the entrapments of false innocence. In order to pass from untested innocence to robust righteousness, Christians need no more and no less than the possibility of sin—a gift which they accept by destroying, as they courageously cling to Christ.<sup>47</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton University Press, 1980). Hereafter cited parenthetically.

2. See Derek Malone-France, “Liberal Democracy and the Virtue of ‘Anxiety,’” unpublished manuscript, Duke University. I am grateful to Malone-France for a good conversation about anxiety and democracy and for sharing his manuscript with me.

3. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 228–35.

4. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

5. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation: Vol. I: Human Nature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 185.

6. Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), chaps. 6 and 8–11.

7. For the first articulation of *felix culpa*, see the “Exsultet” of the Roman Catholic liturgy (*The Sacramentary: approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See* [New York: Catholic Publishing Co. 1974], pp. 474–78), as well as G. M. Lukken, *Original Sin in the Roman Liturgy* (Lieden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 353–94. For relevant expositions and developments of the fortunate Fall theme, see John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Scott Elledge (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), Book XII, lines pp. 474–78; Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essays in The History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1948), pp. 286–87; and John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (San Francisco: Harper, 1977), pp. 243–45 and p. 364.

8. See, for example, Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991); and Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

9. Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), pp. 1–6, 141. Ricoeur analyzes fallibility in terms of the self’s “non-coincidence” with itself.

10. Philip Quinn, “Does Anxiety Explain Original Sin?” *Noûs* 24 (1990): pp. 227–44; Gregory Beabout, “Does Anxiety Explain Hereditary Sin?” *Faith and Philosophy* 11.1 (Jan. 1994): pp. 117–26.

11. See Vanessa Rumble, “The Oracle’s Ambiguity: Freedom and Original Sin in Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety*,” *Soundings* 75.4 (Winter 1992): pp. 612–13. Rumble claims that Haufniensis registers and personifies anxiety while claiming only to observe it. See also, Rumble, “Reflections of Immediacy: The Anatomy of Self-Deception in Kierkegaard’s Early Writings” (Ph. D. diss., Emory University, 1989), chap. 4.

12. “[S]in shows itself not as something that belongs only accidentally to the accidental individual, but as something that withdraws deeper and deeper as a deeper and deeper presupposition, as a presupposition that goes beyond the individual” (CA 19). See also CA p. 32: “The difficulty for the understanding is precisely the triumph of the explanation and its profound consequence, namely, that sin presupposes itself, that sin comes into the world in such a way that by the fact that it is, it is presupposed.”

13. See Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel*, trans. George Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), chapter 1; and Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). I will name “Hegel” as the object of Haufniensis’s critiques, knowing that this may also be considered shorthand for patterns of thought common among Kierkegaard’s contemporaries.

14. In many ways, the argument is between Aristotle’s metaphysic and Hegel’s ontology. Kierkegaard’s criticisms of Hegel gain prominence and incisiveness as he reads Trendelenburg’s Aristotelian critique of Hegelian mediation. See Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 405. For Trendelenburg’s influence, see Arnold Come, *Trendelenburg’s Influence on Kierkegaard’s Modal Categories* (Montreal: Inter Editions, 1991), and Come, *Kierkegaard as Humanist: Discovering My Self* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), pp. 142–45, 183–86.

15. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 36 and 51; *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 92–93.



16. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume III: The Consummate Religion*, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson and J. M. Stewart; ed. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 61–162.

17. Kierkegaard most often means by “the understanding” a human process of thought that is sinful as well as finite, because it oversteps its finitude and seeks to control its objects of thought. See C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s “Philosophical Fragments”* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 90–91.

18. This language reflects the classical virtue tradition, as used by John J. Davenport in “‘Entangled Freedom’: Ethical Authority, Original Sin, and Choice in Kierkegaard’s *Concept of Anxiety*,” *Kierkegaardiana* 21 (2000): pp. 131–51.

19. I borrow the latter term from Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, pp. 145–46. See also Ricoeur’s *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 243–60 and pp. 310–26, where he discusses the tragic “side into sin” that one observes when one takes responsibility for sin as a “leap.”

20. He is not concerned that his view be “Augustinian” in the sense of understanding sin to be transferred from the first sin (originating original sin) through biological or other non-voluntary inheritance (originated original sin). Nor is he concerned to be “Augustinian” in the sense that God’s grace be irresistible. See Quinn, “Original Sin,” pp. 227–29; Timothy P. Jackson, “Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 235–56; and Lee Barrett, “Kierkegaard’s ‘Anxiety’ and the Augustinian Doctrine of Original Sin,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 8: *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), pp. 35–62.

21. Quinn elsewhere draws on Kierkegaard to value “polyglossia” over and against the inordinate emphasis on narrative coherence. See Philip L. Quinn, “Unity and Disunity, Harmony and Discord: A Response to Lillegard and Davenport,” in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), pp. 327–37, and especially p. 335.

22. Beabout, “Hereditary Sin,” 123.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 118. See also *ibid.*, p. 125, where hereditary sinfulness “plays a conditioning role [in bringing about sin], but it is not a necessitating factor causing a qualitative change from innocence to guilt.”

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 123.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–22.

27. Beabout claims, “There are *two elements* involved when an innocent person becomes guilty” (“Hereditary Sin,” p. 122), and asserts that socio-historical quantitative differences are “never enough to make an innocent person guilty without *some* act of personal responsibility on the part of the person who becomes guilty” (p. 124). Again, after emphasizing the influence of the social context, Beabout asserts: “Still, the environment does not *wholly determine* how the individual will act” (p. 125). In each of these, Beabout’s attempts to reserve a place for individual responsibility actually mitigate guilt by sharing it with historical circumstances. All emphases are mine.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 125 (my emphasis).

29. Quinn, “Does Anxiety Explain Original Sin,” p. 238, referencing CA, p. 51

30. Quinn, “Does Anxiety Explain Original Sin,” p. 243.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

33. For the claim that “anthropodicy” (the justification of humanity) lurks behind theodicy (the justification of God), see Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 59–64. Hauerwas takes the term “anthropodicy” from Ernest Becker, in *The Structure of Evil* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 18.

34. Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 324.

35. The Kierkegaard scholar perhaps most concerned that Kierkegaard’s emphasis on freedom and language of “leap” not be mistaken for utterly unmotivated freedom of indifference is M. Jamie Ferreira. See her *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and her “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 207–34.

36. Kierkegaard’s Papers (*Pap. V B 53:13*), as cited in CA p. 186.

37. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 101. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

38. *Aandløshed* (also *Åndløshed*) commonly means dullness, fatuity or insanity. Literally, it means “looseness of the spirit,” or in colloquial English, “not being all there.” In both tone and convention, the word indicates a diffusion or obfuscation of spirit, and the resulting dullness and lack of courage.

39. Rumble, “The Oracle’s Ambiguity,” p. 617. See also Rumble, “Reflections of Immediacy,” pp. 170–75.

40. Rumble, “The Oracle’s Ambiguity,” p. 617.

41. See “Thoughts That Wound from Behind—for Upbuilding,” Part Three of Kierkegaard’s *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 161.

42. This language echoes the description that Johannes de Silentio, pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling* (trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], p. 115), gives to Abraham: “[He] makes the infinite movement of resignation and gives up Isaac . . . but next, at every moment, he makes the movement of faith.” Ronald L. Hall develops the “double movement of faith” in, “Kierkegaard and the Paradoxical Logic of Worldly Faith,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 12.1 (January 1995): pp. 40–53; and in Hall, *The Human Embrace: The Love of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Love* (University Park, PA: Penn. State University Press, 2000).

43. Arild Christensen, “Felix Culpa-Motivet hos Søren Kierkegaard,” *Meddelelser fra Søren Kierkegaard Selskabet V:I* (August, 1954): pp. 17–20; Arnold B. Come, *Kierkegaard as Theologian: Recovering My Self* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), chap. 3: “My Self: A Failure,” and especially pp. 139–40; and John D. Mullen, “The German Romantic Background of Kierkegaard’s Psychology,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 16 (Spring 1978): pp. 655–57.

44. As is well known, Heidegger claims that Kierkegaard treats anxiety “ontically” and therefore in a limited way. See *Being and Time*, p. 492, n. 4.

45. Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 81. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

46. “*Frastød*” means being physically repelled by ugliness, for example, by a hideous face. One is literally “put-off” (*støde-fra*), “thrust from” or “pushed away from” that by which one is repulsed.

47. I would like to thank Rebecca Walsh and Matt Brim of Duke University; Melissa Johnston Barrett, Saul Tobias, Mark Jordan, and Walter Lowe of Emory University; and Paul Sponheim of Luther Seminary for insightfully commenting on previous drafts of this paper.