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KIERKEGAARD AND THE PARADOXICAL LOGIC OF WORLDLY FAITH

Ronald L. Hall

I argue here that Kierkegaardian faith is essentially, albeit paradoxically, worldly—that Kierkegaardian faith is a form of world-affirmation. A correlate of this claim is that faithlessness of any kind is ultimately a form of aesthetic resignation grounded in a deep seated world-alienation. The paradox of faith's worldliness is found in the fact that, for Kierkegaard, faith both excludes and includes resignation in itself. I make sense of this paradox by appealing to Kierkegaard's idea of "an annulled possibility," and conclude that faith's love of the world is an affirmation via a double negation.

Most commentators would agree that at every turn Kierkegaard's thinking is essentially paradoxical. This recognition and acknowledgment, however, does not get us very far unless we are able to find and to express the precise and peculiar logic of paradox that dominates Kierkegaard's mind. To this end, I offer the following reading of Kierkegaard's logic of paradox.

I

It is not difficult to say what a paradox, or more precisely, a paradoxical relation is. It is a peculiar kind of dialectical relation in which a positive reality is taken to include within itself what it, by its very nature, excludes. The dialectic of paradox is different from a Hegelian dialectic as follows: in Hegel, the tension of the negation of thesis and antithesis is relieved in a synthesis; in the dialectic of paradox, opposites form a structural unity in which the tension of negation is accentuated not resolved.¹

Kierkegaard's writings are replete with such paradoxical dialectical unities: despair, for example, is a structural element within faith even though faith excludes it;² spirit includes sensuality within itself by virtue of excluding it;³ the possibility of being a self both includes and excludes the possibility of not being a self;⁴ etc.

While simply stating the definition of a paradoxical relation is fairly easy, making sense of such a relation is quite another matter. How can a relational reality include within itself what it excludes? This seems to defy logic and has led some to conclude that Kierkegaard, and anyone else that thinks paradoxically, is an irrationalist.⁵ I, however, want to argue otherwise.

I contend that there is indeed a logic of paradox and that it is disclosed in Kierkegaard's notion of "an annulled possibility."⁶ I will take his concept of



an annulled possibility to explain how it makes sense for a positive relational reality to *include* within itself what it also *excludes* from itself.

Specifically, I will focus on the conception of faith that Kierkegaard—via his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio⁷—develops in *Fear and Trembling*.⁸ I will argue that for Kierkegaard resignation is a structural element *within* faith. Or to put the matter more paradoxically, I will argue that resignation is a permanent possibility *within* faith, but always an annulled (negated, excluded) possibility.

II

In the logic of the Kierkegaardian framework, to exist as spirit, as self, is to live in faith, to live as a knight of faith. Moreover, to live as a knight of faith is to take up a certain kind of relation to God and to the world. This dual relation has both a religious and an ethical component. The knight of faith's relation to God is a religious matter; his relation to the world, his neighbor, is a matter of ethics. Because it requires both components, I will say that the life of faith constitutes for Kierkegaard an ethico-religious modality of existence.

The paradox of such an ethico-religious faith is found, I claim, in the fact that it both includes and excludes within itself the possibility of taking up alternative postures toward the world. Grasping the paradoxical role that these alternatives play within faith is essential for understanding the nature of the self-world relation that the knight of faith is called upon to enter—essential, that is, for grasping that Kierkegaardian faith is fundamentally, albeit paradoxically, a worldly faith.

It is easy to provide some cryptic glosses of the paradoxical relation to the world that the knight of faith enters: her's is the most spiritual modality of existence and at the same time the most worldly mode of existence; she at once transcends the world and is essentially incarnate within it; she exists in such a way that every moment of her life includes within itself two mutually exclusive components, transcendence and immanence, both at the same time.⁹ If such easy characterizations are to have substance, however, we must specify more precisely the logic of such a paradoxical worldly faith.

To do this, we must first adumbrate the class of relations that a human being can take up vis a vis the world that constitute the alternatives to the ethico-religious relation of faith. The Kierkegaardian alternatives to faith are well known: they are aesthetical, ethical, and religious alternatives. I will diverge in the following from this tripartite analysis in two ways.

First, in place of the usual analyses of these modalities of existence, I propose the following reinterpretation: I contend that common to all of these alternatives to faith is the structural element of *resignation*. This interpretation differs from the usual insofar as the single self-world movement of

resignation is associated almost exclusively by Kierkegaard himself with the religious alternative to faith, namely, religiousness A. After a discussion of resignation as it is at play in the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, I will argue that resignation also is an essential feature—but more subtlety—of Kierkegaard's description of the ethical modality as a form of existence that is preoccupied with the task of realizing the universal.

Secondly, I want to add another twist to the usual interpretation of Kierkegaard's stages. Instead of the usual three-fold, or multi-fold analyses of the stages, I will follow a two-fold schema that is a modification of the two-fold analysis that I learned from Stephen Crites.¹⁰ Crites proposes that there are only two basic modes of existence for Kierkegaard, namely, the aesthetic and the existential. I will accept this dichotomy with this amendment: unlike Crites, I will not take the ethical or religiousness A to fall within the existential. Rather, I will say that the ethical and religiousness A, as well as the aesthetical *per se*, are but variations of a basically aesthetic existence. As well, I will take it that for Kierkegaard the only properly existential modality of existence is the ethico-religious modality of faith (religiousness B).

Accordingly, I read Kierkegaard as proposing at least three variations within the aesthetic alternative to faith: (1) a purely aesthetic relation of hovering *detachment* from historical particularity achieved via a flight from responsible ethical choice/action and the attachments to the world such a responsible existence entails; (2) an aesthetico-ethical relation of what may appear to be an ethical *attachment* to the world, an attachment based on a choice/act in which the concrete historical actuality is fully and responsibly embraced, but which turns out to be a relation that is simply another, albeit veiled, form of world-detachment: in an aesthetico-ethical existence, attachments to historical particularity are made only insofar as they serve as the concrete occasions for manifesting a higher, deeper, a more absolute attachment—an attachment to abstract, timeless, eternal, universal, ethical principles; (3) an aesthetico-religious relation of *detachment* (religiousness A) from historical particularity—a detachment which may be based on a recognition of the failure of the aesthetico-ethical to realize the universal within the muck and mire of concrete historical actuality. It is just the failure of the aesthetico-ethical project of making the abstract universal principle absolute, of making the relative, the temporal, the concrete particular, and so forth, conform to timeless, abstract generalizations—the failed attempt at absolutizing the relative—that leads the knight of infinite resignation to seek a more perfect world elsewhere. All of these self-world relations stand in contrast to the self-world relation proposed by ethico-religious faith insofar as only in the latter do we find a true, albeit paradoxical, affirmation of our existence within the finite historical world.

Because I think that in the final analysis there is for Kierkegaard only one fully existential modality of human being, namely, faith, I adopt the convention of designating the alternatives to faith as hyphenated forms of aestheticism. And because I am convinced that faith for Kierkegaard implies a genuine love of the world, and hence an ethical engagement in it, I designate faith as an ethico-religious modality.

I say that resignation is a common element to all forms of aestheticism because I take the single self-world movement of resignation to be a retreat from, a transcendence of, our worldly human existence, our embodiment in time and place, and so forth. Such a desire to transcend the human¹¹ takes many routes, but as one Kierkegaard commentator has recently put it, all of these are forms of disengagement.¹² The drive to take up such an aesthetic posture of disengagement is contempt—a deep-seated contempt for worldly human life, a contempt generated by the inevitable disappointments, sufferings, losses, vulnerabilities, broken promises, and so forth, that are intrinsically attendant to a fragile worldly human existence.

One of the burdens of my argument here is to show that—contra Crites and most others—the ethical is but a variation within the aesthetical modality. I assume that while most would agree that the pure aesthete simply hovers above the world in a perpetual flight from worldly commitment, and that the knight of infinite resignation withdraws from the world in spiritual transcendence, the general consensus is that, for Kierkegaard, the ethical is a worldly form of existence that takes seriously the existential force of personal choice and responsibility. I take it, however, that the ethical for Kierkegaard is ultimately an aesthetico-ethical modality, insofar as “the ethical person,” for him, like the knight of infinite resignation, attempts to transcend the temporal world of historical particularity: the former would transform the temporal world into conformity with the abstract timeless principles of the ethical absolutes; the latter would simply withdraw from the historical world via a spiritual technique of denial.

These forms of aestheticism differ radically from faith. In both aesthetico-ethical and aesthetico-religious existence, there is but a single self-world movement. In both cases, there is a giving up, or better, a giving up on, the finite historical world. Accordingly, I call the aesthetico-ethical modality a form of resignation, even in the face of “ethical” pretensions, such as Judge William’s, of worldly responsibility and concern. Faith, however, is really world-affirming insofar as it consists of two self-world movements: faith is a matter of recognizing the possibility of being able to give up the finite temporal world and our human existence within it, *and* of recognizing that only on such condition are we able truly to affirm it, to affirm our existence within it.

But let me leave the matter of ethics for a moment and turn to a closer analysis of the aesthetico-religious, especially its conception of existence as a spiritual resignation from the world.

III

As I interpret Kierkegaard, faith is not a completion of resignation but must be radically distinguished from it; faith is not simply a matter of adding a second step to the first step of world-denial. The knight of infinite resignation does not fail because he does not go far enough, he goes in the wrong direction completely (FT,48). Here is where I find the paradox of faith: faith goes in a direction that is the opposite from resignation: resignation is a form of transcending the world, faith a form of embracing it; as such, faith excludes resignation. At the same time, faith includes resignation as a structural element within itself insofar as faith would be impossible if resignation were not a real existential possibility (FT,46). Or as I would put it, faith includes resignation within itself as an annulled possibility.

Again allow me some general glosses on the distinction between faith and religious resignation beyond those given by *Silentio* (FT,46ff): resignation is a technique, but faith is not; resignation is a way of mastering time, faith is not. Faith is a real attachment to history, to finitude, to the world, to others, resignation is world-transcendence. Faith makes full and unequivocal worldly claims in the full awareness of the vulnerabilities, risks, threats, mortality, fortune, and uncertainties of worldly existence, resignation forswears all proprietary claims. Unlike the knight of resignation, the knight of faith does not rise above, even inwardly, finitude or historical temporality; unlike the knight of resignation, the knight of faith lives in commitment to the historical actuality; indeed, she is fully aware that the context of historical particularity provides the conditions of the possibility of faith's full realization.

But these broad characterizations need unpacking. For this let us turn our focus to Kierkegaard's interpretation of the biblical story of Abraham's call to sacrifice his only son Isaac.

While we cannot forget that Isaac is Abraham's son, his only son, we must remember that in the biblical story and in Kierkegaard's interpretation of it, he is also a symbol of worldly attachments in general. Does the story aim to tell us that Abraham's attachment to Isaac is wrong? that worldly attachments in general are wrong? Does Abraham care too much for Isaac? the world? It has seemed to some that Abraham's love for his son is wrong, that Abraham is guilty of possessiveness, a kind of will-to-power, a desire to control his son. God is not only out to humble Abraham, to knock him down a peg or two, he also wants to teach him the lesson of how fathers must learn to let their children go, to liberate them from parental proprietary claims, to undo possessiveness.¹³

I do not think that Kierkegaard thinks that Abraham is guilty of loving his son too possessively—of making inappropriate claims on him; or that he is in some way guilty of idolatry, or guilty of absolutizing “the relative.” Indeed, Abraham never hesitated one moment in obeying God’s command to sacrifice Isaac; and never did he flinch one moment in believing that God would fulfill his promise to him that he would be the father of a great nation. As I see it, Abraham does not need to be humbled, or knocked down, for he is from the beginning to the end a knight of faith.

What then is the point of the story of the sacrifice? What is it that God is trying to teach Abraham? I suggest that he is not trying to get Abraham to put an inward distance between himself and his son, as though God suspected that Isaac may be interfering with Abraham’s faith, as though he suspected that Abraham was becoming too attached to finitude. Rather, and to the contrary, I claim that it is precisely the point of the story that God is attempting to deepen Abraham’s attachment to finitude, to his son, to historical particularity, to this world.¹⁴ He does this not by instructing Abraham to love and care without making proprietary claims, but by teaching him two lessons of faith. The first lesson is that faith does not demand that he withdraw his claim on his son; rather, that he deepen it! This deepening of his claim on his son is a matter of particularizing it: “Faith is the paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal” (FT,55). This particularizing is an element within Abraham’s deepening awareness of his own (and Isaac’s) personal presence. He realizes that God is calling him (in the first person) to make his claim on Isaac also in the first person; he realizes that God is calling him to make his son all the more *his own*.

The biblical text and context make it perfectly clear that the particularity of first person presence is a central element of the story. As the account has it, Abraham is repeatedly addressed in his own name (by God, by Isaac, by the angel) and he repeatedly responds in the first person present: “Here am I.” Context suggests that the biblical story intends to present God’s address as directed to this single individual, who is faced with (the threat of the loss of) another single individual, his own, his only, son.

Another way to put this is to say that the lesson God would teach Abraham and us about faith is that it is not a *techné* for transcending the contingencies and vulnerabilities of historical particularity, of worldly human existence. To live in faith is not to live above the threat of loss, of suffering, of death; it is not to live inured to change, unaffected by chance events that lie beyond our control, beyond our choice. Or more concretely put, the lesson that Kierkegaard would teach me, through the story of Abraham, is that to live in faith, *I* must choose—in full recognition of its fragilities and vulnerabilities—my own humanity among others; *I* must really invest myself fully and without reservation in the concrete, finite, historical actuality. To live in faith

requires that *I* recognize and welcome my worldly condition among others as my own, that *I* do not resign myself to it or from it as an inevitable limitation of my human being or to my being truly human.

The second lesson is that such a personal claiming is ongoing, indeed, that it is a continual claiming; or what amounts to the same thing, the second lesson is that faith is *repetition*! This wholehearted embrace of the world that the knight of faith engages in is something that she must continually choose; faith is an intrinsically temporal modality of existence. The faithful reception of the world from the hands of the Eternal presupposes an ongoing possibility of doing otherwise—an ever-present temptation not to receive it. Moreover, this temptation to turn away from the world in resignation—perhaps just because we know we can—never goes away. But this is necessarily so, since faith is a choice and choice presupposes a context of temporal possibility.

It would have been easy for Abraham to have come to rest with the birth of Isaac in the belief that now everything was safe, that the fulfillment of God's promise had effectively ended anxiety, indeed, even ended the need for further faith.¹⁵ But faith is not like this, God instructs, it is not a momentary, once-for-all choice, an emergency measure to get us through some crisis of uncertainty, some passing anxiety. The fact is, human existence is intrinsically subject to possibility, and hence to anxiety, to vulnerability, to loss. The faithful self does not put these elements to rest, she plunges forward through them. The faithful self is continually called to embrace the world in all of its fragility, for she recognizes that it is, at any moment, in her power to refuse. The knight knows that such a refusal would bring with it a form of existence that would be other than human; to this possibility she must continually say "no!"

And so we arrive at the truth of resignation. We can own or truly possess something only if we have chosen it in the first person; such a choice always implies a context of historical possibility and hence repetition; and finally, we can own or truly possess only what it is possible for us to disown, to dispossess, to resign. This last point focuses the paradoxical aspect of faith: while resignation is not faith, faith must include resignation within itself as an ever-present possibility that the knight of faith must be prepared continually to annul.

This is the paradoxical thing about human beings: we do not have to accept our humanness. We can turn away, resign from our humanness so to speak, seek to live in eternity as gods or angels, rising above the vulnerabilities of historical time and finitude, or otherwise block out historical consciousness by sinking into the brute immediacy of a series of discrete moments. But this fact, this possibility of resignation, the human possibility of not being human, the temptation to a kind of spiritual other-worldliness, profoundly qualifies the prospect of the embrace of the human and of the human world,

My claim is that the full existential import of Abraham's embrace of Isaac, or more generally the full import of the faithful embrace of the world, comes in the concrete, existential recognition of the fact that we have the power to do otherwise; it is this power to do otherwise that is a permanent possibility *within* faith, a possibility faith must continually annul. Faith requires that the faithful knight continually say "no" to what is within his power to say "yes" to; yet the awareness of this requirement to say "no" to resignation is dependent on the awareness of the possibility of a "yes." The knight of infinite resignation embraces the "no" to human existence, says "yes" to the temptation to resign from it, to flee from its hurts, its fragility; he says "yes" to the temptation to disown it, to give it up. Yet this possibility of resignation is an element necessary for faith to be vested with its full personal, existential, significance.

Abraham realized that it was possible for him to give up all that was dear to him. He found out, with God's help, that he could do it, that he could raise the knife, that he had the resources, the freedom, the power, to resign, to give up his son. And this he realized even though he never stopped believing that God would be good to his promises. And further he realized that the possibility of loss is a permanent element within human life—that the gift of Isaac would have to be continually received.

Resignation is not something that one passes through to get to faith, leaving resignation behind for good. It is rather an element *within* faith, permanently a threat to it, a possibility that must continually be annulled. The awareness of the fact that I can, that I have the power to, run away from my fragile human existence occasions the paradox of human existence: as a human being I must choose either to embrace or to reject my own humanness. The constant temptation to search for a way of transcending the world has the paradoxical effect of occasioning my decision to live in it and to embrace it.

IV

On this line of interpretation, we can draw similar differences between the aesthetico-ethical and the ethico-religious. Someone who lives within the aesthetico-ethical, does not fully embrace the particular, nor his own first person particularity, his own individual uniqueness. And this is so precisely because he has not learned how to annul the possibility of resignation from finite particularity—indeed he has found a way to transcend the finite, the particular—namely, in an absolute attachment to universal ethical principles.

Kierkegaard's Judge William, for example, is married to marriage, to a nameless wife. As a person, as an other *I*, she has no place in his defense of the abstract virtue of marriage. Two moves are unthinkable for the Judge: a teleological suspension of the ethical and divorce. One of the reasons that the aesthetico-ethical individual attaches himself absolutely to the universal

is that this lifts him above the vulnerability and risk of temporality and contingency. Whatever may happen in the world, he reasons, this eternal principle holds, this principle is reliable, it covers every possibility. To suspend the ethical is, on this way of thinking, to become suspended, to lose one's secure footing and to be toppled by the flux of temporality. From this perspective the teleological suspension of the ethical is nothing less than madness.

For similar reasons, it is inconceivable that the Judge could seriously contemplate divorce from his nameless wife, or she from him. By virtue of his unquestionable commitment to his marriage, the Judge is able, so he thinks, to absolutize the relative. This attempted absolutizing of the relative provides safety and security, but at the price of robbing the relative of its relativity, and the particular of its historical particularity. In obedience to the universal, the aesthetico-ethical individual finds a sure and secure technique for transcending the historical relativity of historical particularity with all of its inherent risks of loss, its anxieties, uncertainties, frailties, fragilities, and contingencies.

The absolute commitment to marriage that the Judge shares with his nameless wife is solid through and through. However, the commitment here is not in the first-person. The Judge has a wife all right, but certainly his defense of marriage lacks a sense of particularity, of its being *his* marriage to this particular woman whose name is... What is missing from his defense of marriage is the sense that at some particular time he actually said in his own name to some other person with a proper name and face to face: "I, William, take you, (calling her by name), as my wife." Their commitment then seems not to each other, but to the concept of marriage, to its universal principles of faithfulness, loyalty, steadfastness, comfort, and honor.

The Judge has given himself away as a disguised aesthete insofar as he has claimed that he has never experienced any conflict between love and duty, in fact, no serious marital conflicts whatsoever. Louis Mackey gets to this issue in a pointed question:

If he [the Judge] assumes that the world will never assault him with forces too powerful to defeat, then he may well be counting too much on a deeper harmony of nature and freedom that has not always been evident to hungry and tormented people. And if his techniques of "internalization" are meant to cut the Gordian knot of affliction by simply removing to the ideal, then does he not run the risk of making conjugal love [marriage] quite as abstract as "first love," or seduction?¹⁶

This brings us to the heart and soul of Kierkegaard's critique (via the Priest from Jutland) of the aesthetico-ethical found in the closing "Ultimatum" of *Either/Or II*. Suppose, the Priest asks the Judge to consider, a real ethical conflict arose between a lover and his beloved, how could this conflict be resolved? Suppose further that the lover believed himself to be in the right, and the beloved in the wrong. Will he stick to his principles against his

beloved? will he do his duty? will he be obedient to some abstract ethical principle come what may? If he acts out of principle only, then he shows that it is ethical rectitude that he loves, not the other in her concrete particularity. If it is really this concrete other person that the lover loves, then he will be willing to be in the wrong vis a vis the ethical principle, for her sake, for the sake of their love. Love, marital or otherwise, is, or ought to be, a relation of radical particularity. As the Priest puts it:

Might it actually be this way? Why did you wish to be in the wrong in relation to a person? Because you loved. Why did you find it uplifting? Because you loved. The more you loved, the less time you had to deliberate upon whether or not you were in the right; your love had only one desire, that you might continually be in the wrong (E/O II,349).

I do not take this willingness to be in the wrong for the sake of the other, for the sake of the relationship, simply as a form of self-deprecation. Rather, I take it that the point of *Fear and Trembling* is being reiterated here, namely, the point that the particular is higher than the universal.¹⁷ In faith, in an ethico-religious modality of existence, one's ethical task is to be responsive to, and hence responsible to, the concrete needs of this other who is a unique particular individual with a proper name who stands before me here and now. This is quite different from understanding one's ethical task solely in terms of being in the right (or the wrong) relative to an abstract ethical principle.

Precisely because neither the Judge nor his wife has appeared to the other in the first person, that is, appeared to the other as a unique individual bearing a proper name, the prospect of disappearance in any concrete, existential sense, is unthinkable. For the Judge, the prospect of disappearance, of divorce, would shatter the rock of marriage for it would focus the issue existentially on his own marriage, on the concrete person to whom he is married, even if only negatively. (There is a profound sense to the idea of a negative appearance, in the idea that a person's presence can break through only negatively in her absence, in the idea that a full-fledged personal presence is possible only in a context of an actual, or at least the threat of an actual, disappearance.¹⁸)

Following the paradoxical logic of Kierkegaard's thought, I would say that the Judge's marriage—despite William's praise, against the aesthete, of the importance of choice—is no fully personal choice. The judge has not yet arrived at Abraham's faith. The Judge has not had to face the existential pathos that the possibility of the withdrawal of commitment poses. The threat of the withdrawal of the marriage commitment—the threat of divorce—brings into full consciousness not only the fragility of its bond but more importantly the full realization of the fact that the bond is grounded in first person existential choice. The bond of marriage is only as strong as the two who jointly consent to it, and continually consent to it, make it.¹⁹

On my reading, Kierkegaardian faith makes the ethical embrace of the world more profound, more complete, more truly responsible. The ethical dimension of the ethico-religious modality of faith is focused on the particular,²⁰ it is an ethics of responsibility. To live within such a faith is just to live within a full awareness of my own and the other's radical concrete particularity. My responsibility to the other in an ethics of particularity is so concrete, so tied to the historical here and now, to the contingencies of historical actuality, that the aesthetico-ethical individual, lost as he is in the abstract universal, is not able fully to realize it.

To live concretely as spirit is to be enabled to be *absolutely* committed to the relative (the particular) without falling into the idolatry of absolutizing it. What guards against such an absolutizing of the particular is the concrete realization of the possibility of resignation. The element of resignation brings with it the knowledge that our commitments to the particular do not necessarily entail its absolutization so long as we continually realize that they are our own commitments, commitments we make in our own name, and therefore commitments from which we are free to withdraw. Resignation is thus always at play within faith (like the possibility of divorce in marriage); it is always a possibility, a real possibility, a terrifying possibility, but a possibility that faith (and a good marriage) somehow—miraculously perhaps—is able continually to annul.

The aesthete says “no” to the finite historical world, to concrete particularity, but so do the aesthetico-ethical and the aesthetico-religious “individuals.” All live within the single movement of resignation; within the single-minded drive toward the goal of transcending the world of historical particularity, of transcending the human. The knight of faith, however, does not simply say “yes” to the world, to his own humanness among others within it: rather, he realizes that in order freely and of his own choice to say this “yes” he must first concretely face the possibility of saying “no.” The condition of the possibility of my making the world and my own humanness within it my own is the realization that I have the power to do otherwise. The knight of faith says “no” to this possibility of saying “no;” his “no” annuls the possibility of saying “no.” In the paradoxical logic of worldly faith, the “yes-to-the-world” is an affirmation via a double negation.

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NOTES

1. See Stephen Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of Stages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.8-9. Dunning distinguishes between the dialectics of contradiction, reciprocity, paradox, and mediation. I adopt his

definition of the dialectic of paradox as the mode of thinking most characteristic of Kierkegaard, even though he argues that Kierkegaard also employs, more so than even Kierkegaard acknowledged, the more Hegelian dialectic of mediation.

2. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong with Introduction and Notes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980). [Hereinafter cited as SUD] Kierkegaard has Anti-Climacus say here: "...to be able to despair is an infinite advantage [to faith]..."(SUD,15); "...Precisely because the sickness of despair is totally dialectical, it is the worst misfortune never to have had that sickness; it is a true godsend to get it..."(26); [for despair is] "...the first element of faith..."(78); "...if a person is truly not be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility..."(15).

3. *Either/Or* (Vols. I & II) edited and translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, with Introduction and Notes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). [Hereinafter cited as E/O.] Here Author A puts the dialectic as follows: "But when sensuality is viewed under the qualification of spirit, its significance is seen to be that it is to be excluded, but precisely because it is to be excluded it is defined as principle, as a power, for that which spirit, which is itself a principle, is supposed to exclude must be something that manifests itself as a principle, even though it does not manifest itself as a principle until the moment when it is excluded" (E/O I,61).

4. Anti-Climacus remarks: "Yet every moment that a self exists, it is a process of becoming, for the self...[in potentiality] does not actually exist, is simply that which ought to come into existence. Insofar, then, as the self does not become itself, it is not itself; but not be a self is precisely despair" (SUD,30). And earlier he has said: "The possibility of this sickness [despair, i.e., not being a self] is man's superiority over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian's superiority over the natural man; to be cured [i.e., to be a self before God in faith] of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness...Consequently, to be able to despair [to be aware that one has no self] is a great advantage..."(SUD,15) [in the process of becoming a self].

5. See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). He says, e.g., that "...the doctrine of *Enten-Eller* is plainly to the effect that the principles which depict the ethical way of life are to be adopted *for no reason*, but for a choice that lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count as a reason" (42).

6. Since the following note plays so large a part in my interpretation here, I will quote the full text: "Note that here despair over sin is dialectically understood as pointing toward faith. The existence of this dialectic must never be forgotten (even though this book deals only with despair as sickness); in fact, it is implied in despair's also being the first element in faith. But when the direction is away from faith, away from the God-relationship, then despair over sin is the new sin. In the life of the spirit, everything is dialectical. Indeed, offense as *annulled possibility* is an element in faith, but offense directed away from faith is sin. That a person never once is capable of being offended by Christianity can be held against him. To speak that way implies that being offended is something good. But it must be said that to be offended is sin (SUD,116n, italics added).

7. My reading of the pseudonymous authorship has it that it is Kierkegaard himself that speaks indirectly through his fictitious authors. Although we can articulate no explicit technique for sorting out his voice from the pseudonyms, we can, I submit, discern SK's voice, *his* presence, *his* point, if we so attune ourselves to his philosophical agenda.

8. *Fear and Trembling/Repetition* Edited and Translated by Howard V and Edna H. Hong with Introduction and Notes (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983). [Hereinafter cited as FT.]

9. In other places I have called this paradoxical relation of the self to the world a sundered/bonded relation. See, *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

10. See Stephen Crites "Pseudonymous Authorship as Art and as Act," in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Josiah Thompson (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1972) where he says: "...in certain respects one best grasps the intent behind the notion of the stages in reducing the scheme to the distinction between the aesthetic and the existential, regarding the ethical and religious as existential discriminations" (p.202).

11. See Martha Nussbaum's excellent article "Transcending Humanity" in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.365-391.

12. Anthony Rudd *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (New York: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1993).

13. For an interpretation along these lines see Edward F. Mooney *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, (Albany, N.Y.: State University Press of New York, 1991).

14. "Yet Abraham had faith, and had faith for *this* life. In fact, if his faith had been only for a life to come, he certainly would have more readily discarded everything in order to rush out of a world to which he did not belong. But Abraham's faith was not of this sort..." (FT,20 italics added).

15. This would have made faith into nothing essentially different than infinite resignation insofar as in the latter "...there is peace and rest" (FT,45).

16. Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p.86.

17. I think that Kierkegaard has in mind here something like the situation in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* wherein Agamemnon is required to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon is on an expedition commanded by Zeus and it is his pious duty to fulfill that mission. Yet the expedition is halted when the seas are becalmed. A prophet tells Agamemnon that the only way that the mission can be resumed is by the sacrifice of his daughter. For the sake of his civic and pious duty, Agamemnon does the deed. Here the principle of duty swallows up this individual child—and moreover without any real fear and trembling on Agamemnon's part. See Martha Nussbaum's discussion of this story in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.33-39.

18. See William H. Poteat's excellent treatment of this theme in "The Absence of God," *The Hibbert Journal* LV (1956-57), pp. 115-123. Commenting on T.S. Elliot's *Cocktail*

Party he says of Lavinia Chamberlayne's abrupt leaving of her husband Edward: "...Edward is shattered by her departure, not so much, it would appear, because he has lost face, but because of the profoundly disturbing discovery that Lavinia is an 'otherness that can say "I"...Lavinia *absents* herself, and by so doing *presents* herself as an unfathomable *person*, with depths which have been forgotten or ignored by Edward."

19. See Stanley Cavell *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). In his analysis of "The Awful Truth" he says of the leading male: "As long as he *can* choose he *is* free—free for example to choose faithfulness. This would be creating a logical space within marriage in which to choose to be married, a way in which not to feel trapped in it" (p.245).

20. Kierkegaard's critique of the universal is always, I contend, a critique of the *abstract* universal. What I mean to convey by the "abstract" qualification is the idea of the universal as a set of general principles fixed in advance of any particular case. There is room for the universal in a Kierkegaardian ethico-religious life, but given the priority of the particular in Kierkegaardian faith, that universal is always concrete. The concrete universal moves in an opposite direction from the abstract universal of an aesthetico-ethical ethics. In faith, particular sound ethical judgments are universalizable to be sure, but they are not sound because they instantiate some general ethical principle. See Martha Nussbaum on this point in *Love's Knowledge*, op. cit., p.38.