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# *Truth and Subjectivity*

The words "Truth is subjectivity" are among the most famous that Kierkegaard wrote,[1] and among the most controversial. They are also among the most misunderstood. They have been derided as confusing truth with a subjective attitude of the believer,[2] and hence as implying a relativism[3] or non-cognitivism about religious beliefs, which Kierkegaard would doubtless have rejected if it were made fully explicit. It can be shown, however, that the statement, which forms part of a chapter title in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, is not meant, in the *Postscript*, to be inconsistent with an ascription of objective truth to religious beliefs. Far from confusing objective with subjective issues, the *Postscript* places some emphasis on distinguishing them.

Understanding is not helped by the fact that the idea of "truth is subjectivity" is often presented to students by way of brief excerpts from the *Postscript*, making it impossible to recognize the dialectical structure of the *Postscript*, in which two different religious points of view are developed. The thesis that "truth is subjectivity" is devel-

[1] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 169. Parenthetical page references in the present essay are to this work.

[2] So, for example, Walter Kaufman, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 77–78.

[3] The charge of relativism is not supported, but noted, in C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript": The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983), p. 115. "Truth and Subjectivity", chapter 7 of Evans's book, is one of the best treatments of the subject known to me.

oped primarily in the exposition of "Religiousness A" and is accepted only subject to a major qualification in "Religiousness B", which is identified with Christianity and is clearly the focus of Kierkegaard's ultimate interest in the book.

There may still be grounds for criticizing the *Postscript* for excessive subjectivism. Whether the project really intended under the heading "Truth Is Subjectivity" can be carried through without infringing on a due recognition of objective rights and wrongs in religion and ethics is a serious question. I do not pretend to cover all aspects of that question here. But I believe that Kierkegaard's treatment of the theme contains insights into often neglected aspects of the relation between truth and subjectivity in religion and ethics, and I want to explore some of those insights.

In offering a reading of the *Postscript* on an important topic, I am keenly aware of the limitations of my Kierkegaard scholarship, including my ignorance of the Danish language. I also wander at times from the text into reflections that the text suggests to me. In the end, I suspect, Kierkegaard would not particularly like this essay. I am more fascinated than he probably was by the remarkable pieces of logical structure that crop up in his works, and I value reasonableness in ethics and religion in a way that Kierkegaard did not.

My main focus is on eliciting from the text possible views of ways in which the cognitive value of religious states of mind could depend on what the *Postscript* calls "subjectivity". In this I am using the *Postscript* as the book itself invites us to do. It denies that historical facts about an author's state of mind can be of any importance (or of any ethical or religious importance, at any rate) for the reader. All that an author can really give us, according to the *Postscript*, is a *possibility*, or a set of possibilities, that we may consider adopting for ourselves. That was one reason for Kierkegaard's writing under pseudonyms. In respect for his intentions, and as a reminder of the limits of my historical claims, I ascribe the *Postscript*'s contents to its fictitious author, Johannes Climacus.

## 1. Objective and Subjective Problems about Truth

The "truth is subjectivity" chapter of the *Postscript* begins with a disjunction: "Whether truth is defined more empirically, as the conformity of thought and being, or more idealistically, as the conformity of being with thought, it is, in either case, important carefully

to note what is meant by being" (p. 169). This seems to presuppose that truth consists in some sort of conformity between thought and reality. That is, it seems to presuppose a *correspondence* conception of truth—while leaving open a variety of questions about the character of the correspondence, including the questions mentioned about the priority as between thought and being, and what is meant by being or reality. Appearances could be doubted here; one might wonder whether the apparatus of correspondence is introduced only as part of the *Postscript*'s satire on academic, particularly Hegelian, philosophy. But I think the idea of "truth is subjectivity" can be understood best within the framework of a correspondence conception of truth.

A distinction between an "objective problem" and a "subjective problem" of truth regarding Christianity is important for the structure of the *Postscript*, dominating the titles of the official main divisions of the work. Book 1 is titled "The Objective Problem concerning the Truth of Christianity", and book 2 is titled "The Subjective Problem: The Relation of the Subject to the Truth of Christianity: The Problem of Becoming a Christian". The problems are "objective" and "subjective" in the sense that one is *about* the *object* of thought (in this case, Christianity, or its historical and theological claims) and the other is *about* the *subject*, the thinker: "The objective problem consists of an inquiry into the truth of Christianity. The subjective problem concerns the relationship of the individual to Christianity. To put it quite simply: How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity?" (p. 20).

It would be a mistake to suppose that only the objective problem is concerned with a correspondence between thought and reality. Consider this point in relation to Christianity, since Christianity is the announced topic of the *Postscript*. Two things are required if Johannes Climacus is to have a *true* belief in Christianity. (1) Christianity must be true; that is, to put it crudely (and the *Postscript* is not overly subtle on this point), the facts about God and Jesus must be in conformity with the affirmations of Christianity. Whether this conformity does in fact obtain is the main "objective problem" of the *Postscript*.[4] (2) Climacus must really be a Christian, must really be-

[4] That is, it is the most important objective problem for the sense of the work as I understand it; and I shall refer to it as "the objective problem". Unfortunately, Climacus muddies the water by focusing at times on a different objective problem: What are, historically, the affirmations of Christianity, or of the New Testament? (See, e.g., the first sentence of p. 25.)

lieve in Christianity. Whether he is and does is the *Postscript*'s "subjective problem" as it applies to him. This too can be seen as a question of correspondence or conformity. The question is whether Climacus, in his thinking, is in conformity with the affirmations of Christianity, and hence with the relevant facts about God and Jesus (if the correct answer to the objective problem is affirmative).

The *Postscript* is much more concerned with the subjective problem than with the objective, as is suggested by the very unequal length of the two "books" (33 pages for book 1 and 486 pages for book 2, in the English translation). In fact the introduction to the work flatly states that "our treatment of the problem does not raise the question of the truth of Christianity. It merely deals with the question of the individual's relationship to Christianity. . . . [I]t deals with the concern of the infinitely interested individual for his own relationship to such a doctrine" (pp. 18–19.). But the *Postscript* clearly does assume that the objective problem about the truth of Christianity has an answer. And, as we shall see, it sometimes supposes, at least for the sake of argument, an affirmative answer to that or some related objective problem.

There is reason to interpret Climacus as setting the importance of the objective problem (or of a correct answer to it) very high–almost as high as that of the subjective problem. He writes, "Precisely as important as the truth, and if one of the two is to be emphasized, still more important, is the manner in which the truth is to be accepted" (p. 221), "the truth" and "the manner in which [it] is to be accepted" corresponding here to the objective and subjective problems.[5] Moreover, the emphasis in both the *Postscript* (pp. 182, 378–85) and the *Philosophical Fragments* on the *risk* involved in the "objective uncertainty" of faith seems to attribute great importance to the answer to the objective problem. For the risk clearly can be identified with the danger that one's answer to the objective problem will in fact be false. Indeed one is tempted to infer that the "infinitely interested" subject idealized in the *Postscript* must care infinitely about the truth of his religion, and hence about the correctness of his answer to the objective problem. Some of the things that Climacus says in developing the idea that "truth is subjectivity" have suggested to many that he does not care much, if at all, about answers to the objective problem; but I try to show that this interpretation is not forced on us.

[5] This text is cited, in support of the same interpretive point, by Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript"*, p. 128.

## 2. Subjectivity

"Subjectivity" in "truth is subjectivity" obviously means something more than the mere reference to the subject or self who is thinking, a meaning that seems adequate to explain the sense of "subjective" in "subjective problem". But it still does signify thinking that bears a particular relation to the self of the thinker. Climacus raises, for example, the question of what it would be to think subjectively about "the problem of *what it means to die*" (p. 147).

> And if initially my human nature is merely an abstract something, it is at any rate the task which life sets me to become subjective; and in the same degree that I become subjective, the uncertainty of death comes more and more to interpenetrate my subjectivity dialectically. It thus becomes more and more important for me to think it in connection with every factor and phase of my life; for since the uncertainty is there in every moment, it can be overcome only by overcoming it in every moment. (P. 149).

Here subjectivity appears, at least in part, as an *integrative* tendency in thinking. It is part of an effort to unify one's life. The subjective thinker does not keep important questions in different pockets of the mind. If I have become subjective, I will "think" what I know about death, for example, "in connection with every factor and phase of my life". To the extent that this is what subjective thinking is, it is surely an intellectual virtue.

The effort to unify one's life and to maintain its unity through time is particularly important to Kierkegaard. In his writings it regularly characterizes "ethical" and "religious" as opposed to "aesthetic" ways of life and is to be achieved by a sort of "choice", by making and constantly reaffirming a decision. In the *Postscript* this theme is connected with an idea of "existence."

> The difficulty facing an existing individual is how to give his existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes. . . . The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision and to renew it. The eternal is the factor of continuity; but an abstract eternity is extraneous to the movement of life, and a concrete eternity within the existing individual is the maximum degree of his passion. (P. 277)

Climacus does not regard *every* question as central in this way for the integration of one's life and selfhood, and hence as an appropriate topic for subjective thinking. He distinguishes between "essen-

tial" and "accidental" knowledge: "All essential knowledge relates to existence, or only such knowledge as has an essential relationship to existence is essential knowledge. . . . Only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an essential relationship to the existence of the knower" (pp. 176–77). Mathematical and chemical knowledge, for example, would not be essential knowledge. It would be silly to try to relate the Pythagorean theorem or the periodic table of elements to "every factor and phase" of one's life. So Climacus is not arguing for subjective thinking in mathematics or chemistry. This is not to say that mathematical or chemical knowledge or beliefs lie outside the scope of an integrative ideal of thought, or that they may appropriately be isolated from ethical and religious views in a hermetically sealed pocket in the mind. One's scientific knowledge is a "factor" or "phase" of one's life, and one's ethical and religious thinking should therefore be connected with it. For Climacus, however, it is only the ethical and religious thinking that provides the framework for integration of the self by being connected with every aspect of one's life, including the scientific. Self-integration does not require any interesting connection between knowing chemistry and having the ability to recite the names of the kings of Denmark.

The integration of a human life or "existence", according to the *Postscript*, depends on decision and passion. Subjective thinking therefore cannot be isolated from volition and emotion. It will be influenced by one's *caring*, from a distinctly personal point of view, about the questions considered. For my study this is perhaps the most important aspect of what is meant by "subjectivity" in "truth is subjectivity." It is one that Climacus most vividly emphasizes. He holds that subjectivity is both inwardness (a focus on one's own selfhood) and *passion*, declaring, in one of the most characteristic sentences of the *Postscript*, that "Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness" (p. 33).

At this point an integrative ideal of subjectivity is in tension with another sort of intellectual virtue—namely, with ideals of objectivity in thinking. Climacus illustrates the tension with a vivid simile:

> In sawing wood it is important not to press down too hard on the saw; the lighter the pressure exerted by the sawyer, the better the saw operates. If a man were to press down with all his strength, he would no longer be able to saw at all. In the same way it is necessary for the philosopher to make himself objectively light; but everyone who is in

> passion infinitely interested in his eternal happiness makes himself subjectively as heavy as possible. (P. 55)

One might formulate an ideal of objectivity by saying that one's judgments and beliefs ought not to be influenced by what one cares about from a personal point of view, or perhaps that they ought not to be influenced by any desire except that of believing what is (objectively) true. The influence of any more personal desire can be seen as pressure on "the saw", interfering with one's responsiveness to evidence and thus distorting one's judgment. We must recognize this tension, I think, though I am inclined to maintain more hope than I see in Climacus for an integration of ideals of subjectivity and objectivity.

## 3. "Truth Is Subjectivity"

Having surveyed the essential background for an interpretation of the thesis that "truth is subjectivity", I begin my interpretation with the point that the *scope* of the thesis is limited. It is an answer *only* to the *subjective* problem. This is manifest in one of the most careful statements in Climacus's development of the thesis, a statement italicized in the text: "*When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true*" (p. 178). Not only does this present a recognizable version of the "subjective problem" already introduced. It is also explicitly contrasted with a version of the "objective problem" or rather with a way of treating the objective problem as decisive: "*When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth*" (p. 178).

Part of what is meant by saying that truth is subjectivity is that an individual's being "in the truth" depends on the answer to the subjective rather than the objective problem. It also signifies a particular answer to the subjective problem; but that answer is not indicated in the statements just quoted, and there are two more points to be noticed about them before we get to it. (1) The subjective approach admits the possibility of objective error, for it allows that one might

be related rightly, as regards subjectivity, "to what is not true". Thus even the subjective approach presupposes that there is (objectively, no doubt) an answer to the objective problem.

(2) The scope of the thesis that truth is subjectivity is limited also to *essential* truth. It does not apply to mathematics and chemistry but only to ethical and religious truth. "The reader will observe", says a footnote to this passage, "that the question here is about essential truth, or about the truth which is essentially related to existence, and that it is precisely for the sake of clarifying *it* as inwardness that this contrast is drawn" (p. 178; emphasis mine).

The meaning of the thesis is further illumined by two examples Climacus gives. The first and more general is "the knowledge of God": "Objectively, reflection is directed to the problem of whether this object is the true God; subjectively, reflection is directed to the question whether the individual is related to a something *in such a manner* that his relationship is in truth a God-relationship" (p. 178). If being in the truth is approached subjectively and in relation to God, in other words, the question is what must be true of the individual if the individual is to be truly related to God. I think this may be taken without strain, in its context in the *Postscript*, as a question about correspondence or conformity of the individual with God. And this seems to presuppose that there is, objectively, a God to be conformed to.

It may be objected at this point that the subjective approach will collapse into the objective approach, on the ground that what is required for your relationship to be a God-relationship is that you intend to be related to an object that you conceive as having (enough of) the attributes that God actually has. Thus the crucial question will be, after all, whether "this object", as you conceive of it, "is the true God". This objection assumes, of course, that the conformity with God required for a true God-relationship is conceptual, a conformity of one's ideas with the divine nature. But that is just what Climacus seems to deny.

This emerges in his more particular and more vivid example, in which we hear literary echoes of the gospel parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14):

> If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most

> truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol. (P. 180)

It is implied that each of these characters has something right; note that the question raised about them is which has *most* truth.[6]

The child of Christendom has "the true conception of God in his knowledge". It could hardly be more explicit that there is a true answer to the objective problem about God, and presumably it is objectively true. Moreover, Climacus seems to think he knows the answer to the objective problem—or at least that part of the answer that consists in the true conception of God. It is the conception that prevails in Christendom.

The other person has an erroneous conception of the divine. All that is said is that "his eyes rest upon the image of an idol", and that "he worships an idol". But surely praying with eyes on an idol does not constitute worshiping an idol unless one accepts some *conception* of the idol as being, embodying, housing, or correctly representing a deity. The child of idolatry therefore has a false conception of deity but is sufficiently conformed to God to be praying "in truth to God", because he "prays with the entire passion of the infinite". And infinite passion, we have already been told (p. 33), is the maximum degree of subjectivity.

Clearly Climacus is saying that there is *more truth* in being wrong with regard to the objective question but right with regard to the subjective question than in the reverse. I take this as implying that *one's conformity or correspondence with religious reality depends more decisively on one's subjectivity, as manifested in passion, than on one's ideas about God.*

Here I face a major choice in my interpretation of the text. C. Stephen Evans, one of its best interpreters, declares that the question who has most truth, in our parable, "is about which kind of *life* can best be described as true; *it has no bearing on the question of propo-*

[6] As noted by Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript"*, p. 128. It is also worth noting that the characters in this parable are not introduced as a Christian and an idolater, but as *living in* a Christian and an idolatrous *community*, respectively. This reflects Climacus's view that the one is not a true Christian and the other is much more than an idolater. It also carries a (very Kierkegaardian) suggestion that the characters' stances on the objective problem are determined socially, by their communities, rather than individually by their struggles in thinking. This is a distraction in the present context, however. For clearly you could be theologically eccentric, holding a conception of God quite different from your community's, and still be objectively right but passionless, or objectively wrong but passionate, about God.

*sitional truth.*"[7] This is a possible reading. It may be supported by the undeniable emphasis of the book on issues of salvation, as exemplified by the fact that Climacus is prepared to state the subjective problem as "How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity?" (p. 20). A "true life" would be one that conforms to God's demands or purposes in such a way as to be headed toward participation in such happiness. On this reading the thesis that "truth is subjectivity" amounts to the relatively uncontroversial point that one's life can be more, or less, acceptable religiously than one's theology—supplemented by the more distinctively Kierkegaardian idea that the religious acceptability of one's life depends mainly on its subjectivity or passion.

I find this version of "truth is subjectivity" disappointingly tame. I also think it misleading to use "truth" as a category for the evaluation of *lives* without any particular reference to *cognitive* adequacy, and am reluctant to see the argument of the *Postscript* as depending essentially on such a usage. Moreover there are indications in the text that Climacus does think that the cognitive adequacy, or at any rate the intentional content, of one's religious thoughts is affected by the truth that depends on subjectivity. Some of these indications will emerge in my discussion. One we have already seen. Prayer and worship are religious conscious acts whose intentionality is seen as affected by passion or its absence when Climacus says that one person "prays in truth to God though he worships an idol" while another "prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol." This interpretation, on which "truth is subjectivity" is at least in large part a thesis about the cognitive adequacy or meaning of religious thinking, is the one I wish to pursue here, without claiming to establish it as the only correct one.

For this interpretation one of the most important statements in the *Postscript* is that whereas "objectively the interest is focussed merely on the thought-content", for subjectivity "it is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor and not its content, for its content is precisely itself" (p. 181). In other words, the "content" of religious passion, and its intentional object, are wholly determined by its intensity rather than by ideas associated with it. And I think the point is not merely that passion-content is better than idea-content but rather that passion is somehow the only content available for an authentic passion for the infinite. How one might think this to be true is the subject of the next two sections of the present essay.

[7] Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript"*, p. 126.

## 4. Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Climacus declares that "to bring God to light objectively . . . is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness" (p. 178). It is easy to hear the verbal echoes reverberating between "subjectivity" and "God is a subject." It is much harder to see a rational connection between the claims that "God is a subject" and that subjectivity is required for thinking of God. But Climacus does present views that might provide grounds for a belief that subjectivity is required, quite generally, for intersubjectivity—that passion is required for belief in other minds.

The idea that passion is important in some way for awareness of other people's subjectivity is not implausible. It seems likely that our beliefs and judgments about other people's states of mind rely heavily on empathy. It would be difficult to form such beliefs and judgments if we were so passionless as to care about nothing ourselves.

Climacus has a more distinctive problem about belief in other minds, however. Purely objective, speculative thought, for him, is "abstract," and its object is the possible as such: "All knowledge about reality is possibility. . . . [T]rue knowledge consists in translating the real into the possible" (p. 280). And "when I think about something that another has done, and so conceive a reality, I lift this given reality out of the real and set it into the possible; for a conceived reality is a possibility" (p. 285).

This gives rise to the question how one can think the reality of anything over and above its possibility. One's own reality one knows, for one experiences it, and the experience doubtless contains something more than the thought of its possibility: "The ethical, as being the internal, cannot be observed by an outsider. It can be realized only by the individual subject, who alone can know what it is that moves within him. This ethical reality is the only reality which does not become a mere possibility through being known . . . ; for it is the individual's own reality" (p. 284). But how can this subject know, or believe, or even think the reality of another being?

> In the case of another person's reality he could have no knowledge about it until he transformed it from a reality into a possibility.
>
> With respect to every reality external to myself, I can get hold of it only through thinking it. In order to get hold of it really, I should have to be able to make myself into the other, the acting individual, and

> make the foreign reality my own reality, which is impossible. For if I make the foreign reality my own, this does not mean that I become the other through knowing his reality, but it means that I acquire a new reality, which belongs to me as opposed to him. (Pp. 284–85)

From these epistemological considerations Climacus develops an ethical point, that "there is no immediate relationship, ethically, between subject and subject. When I understand another person, his reality is for me a possibility, and in its aspect of possibility this conceived reality is related to me precisely as the thought of something I have not done is related to the doing of it" (p. 285). Ethically, Climacus claims, it is not important whether a conceived reality is in fact the reality of another person's inner life. What is important is that it is a possibility that I must choose whether to realize in my own life. "To be concerned ethically about another's reality is also a misunderstanding, since the only question of reality that is ethically pertinent, is the question of one's own reality" (p. 287). Obviously one might take issue with this ethical judgment.

My present concern, however, is with a more semantical point. What would it mean to believe that a certain conception expresses not just a possibility but the reality of another person's inner life (whether or not it is ethically good to hold such beliefs)? What would be the content of the belief? To say that "a conceived reality is a possibility", after all, is to make the point that there is no more content in a proposition thought of as true than in the same proposition thought of as possible. The point is not new. Kant expressed it in his famous remark that a hundred real dollars contain not a penny more than a hundred possible dollars.[8]

Climacus offers no *general* solution to this problem, since he does not in general approve of an interest in other realities than one's own. He thinks differently about belief in *God's* reality, however. The concerns of religion, or at least of Christianity, are different from those of ethics. "The believer differs from the ethicist in being infinitely interested in the reality of another (in the fact, for example, that God has existed in time)."[9] Indeed this can provide a virtual definition of faith: "To ask with infinite interest about a reality which is not one's own, is faith" (p. 288). We can gather from this a suggestion about what it might be to believe in the reality of God or to believe something about the reality of God. If Climacus equates faith

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 599/B 627.

[9] God (the eternal) existing in time is for Climacus a formula for the Incarnation.

with "ask[ing] with infinite interest about a reality which is not one's own", perhaps he thinks that the difference between thinking of a God-concept as expressing a mere possibility and thinking of it as actually characterizing a reality is to be found in a passionate interest that is required in the latter case.

Something of the same sort may be true about our belief in the reality of other *human* minds, if we are less abstemious in that than Climacus advises. It seems to be virtually universally true that if we think of another being as really having a mind or consciousness like our own, we will *care* about what happens to that being in a way that we would not if we regarded its mindedness or consciousness as a mere logical possibility. This is as true when our caring is hostile as when it is friendly. And it is tempting to call this point to our aid if we are perplexed in trying to understand the difference between thinking of another being as possible and as real. We may be reminded here of Wittgenstein's aphorism, "My attitude toward him is an attitude toward a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul."[10] Wittgenstein's ideas in this area are doubtless quite different from those of the *Postscript*, but this is common to them: they try to deal with a problem about what it would be to believe in the reality of another mind by appealing to an *attitude* that one might have toward a being as having a mind or soul—an attitude not specified in Wittgenstein's aphorism but identified by Climacus with a passionate interest.

Of course belief in the reality of a merely human mind would presumably not be marked by an *infinite* passionate interest. An infinite passion would signify belief in the reality of a divine mind. In other ways, however, this line of argument does not seem likely to establish a unique relation of subjectivity to religious truth. If subjectivity is required for thinking of God as real because "God is a subject", then it would seem to be required also for thinking of other persons as real, since they are subjects too.

## 5. Divinity and Passion

I do not think the thesis that religious truth is subjectivity is adequately explained by the relevance of passion to the difference be-

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, and translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, 2d ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 178[e].

tween thinking of something as a possibility and believing in it as a reality (even apart from any qualms we may have about the reductivism with which the notion of reality would be treated in such an explanation). The statement that the "content" or intentionality of the passion of the infinite "is precisely itself" suggests that purely intellectual concepts are viewed as inadequate to express even the possibility of an infinite Good. This is connected with Climacus's objection to any "immediate" or "direct" relationship with God. "The immediate relationship with God is paganism," he declares, "and only after the breach has taken place can there be any question of a true God-relationship" (p. 218).

Immediacy, in this context, is at least partly a matter of cognitive content. "All paganism consists in this, that God is related to man directly, as the obviously extraordinary to the astonished observer" (p. 219). Climacus imagines, and mocks, a very conventional person who would suppose that God could be met immediately and would notice God only if God were the obviously extraordinary, "if God, for example, had taken on the figure of a very rare and tremendously large green bird, with a red beak, sitting in a tree on the mound, and perhaps even whistling in an unheard of manner" (p. 219).

We should not let this example mislead us into supposing that the immediacy rejected here is only sensory. Climacus associates the speculative or intellectual with the aesthetic (pp. 283, 288), and an idea that can in principle be given, at one viewing, to speculative thought is for him just as much a part of immediacy as the giant green bird with its red bill. We also should not suppose that immediacy is meant here in the usual epistemological sense. Climacus is certainly *not* saying that religious beliefs cannot be "basic" but must be supported by other beliefs that serve as evidence or grounds for them.

It may, however, be part of his meaning that God cannot be directly experienced. This seems to be implied when Climacus says that, in contrast with the purported direct relationship of paganism, "the spiritual relationship to God in the truth, i.e. in inwardness, is conditioned by a prior irruption of inwardness, which corresponds to the divine elusiveness that God has absolutely nothing obvious about Him, that God is so far from being obvious that He is invisible. It cannot immediately occur to anyone that He exists, although His invisibility is again His omnipresence" (p. 219). This statement can glide smoothly enough past eyes versed in the literature of theism; of course God is invisible. But we do well to hesitate at this

point. What about the mystics? Is all direct experience of God to be denied even to them?

In Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Judge William, the fictitious author of the second volume, presents a somewhat respectful but still very negative critique of mysticism from his "ethical" point of view. That text contains enough disclaimers regarding the limitations of its point of view to alert us to the likelihood that Kierkegaard himself, and Johannes Climacus as a "religious" writer, would not wholly agree with Judge William's criticisms. But I think Climacus would endorse the Judge's main idea, as it climaxes the following bit of argument: "Therefore, if a mystic were asked what the meaning of life is, he perhaps would answer: The meaning of life is to learn to know God and to fall in love with him. But this is not an answer to the question, for here the meaning of life is understood as an instant, not as succession."[11] The answer attributed to the mystic here, "to learn to know God and to fall in love with him", could perhaps be interpreted in a sense that would win Climacus's approval. Judge William, however, interprets the knowing and the falling in love as instantaneous, as things that are complete in a moment of time. And Climacus will agree with him that the meaning of life requires "succession"; that is, it must be found in something that takes time. That is a main theme in the *Postscript*'s discussions of "existence". For Climacus, as I have noted, an existing individual's goal "is to arrive at a decision and to renew it" (p. 277)—a formulation with which Judge William would heartily agree.

This may help us understand the "prior irruption of inwardness" that is supposed to distinguish a "spiritual relationship to God in the truth" from pagan immediacy (p. 219). I take it that what Climacus means is that no momentary experience is sufficient of itself to put a person truly in relationship with God. A genuine God-relationship can be constituted only by a *history*, which takes time. Something "prior" must have happened before any experience that is to have religious significance; and something had better happen after it, as Climacus would doubtless be willing to add. This history is to be an "inner history",[12] involving an "irruption", a bursting in, of "inwardness", as Climacus puts it (p. 219). And of course he has already

[11] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, part 2, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 249 (SV II, 224—reference to the standard Danish edition is given in the margins of the new Princeton translations).

[12] On "inner history," see Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, part 2, p. 134 (SV II, 121–22).

told us that "inwardness is subjectivity, [and] subjectivity is essentially passion" (p. 33). His view, I think, is that what is required to constitute a true God-relationship is an inner history marked by persistent passionate (indeed infinitely passionate) striving.

Many mystics would agree that the authenticity of experiences of God is not independent of the persisting religious character of the lives in which they are embedded and that something that might be called religious passion is important to a religious life. Perhaps this agreement would not satisfy Climacus; perhaps he would insist that there is some error in what even these mystics claim about their experiences. I shall not pursue that possible disagreement, except to say that I would be inclined to defend the mystics in it. Here I am more interested in Climacus's positive thesis, that an inner history of religious passion is necessary if God is to be truly the object of one's religious consciousness.

There is something to be said for this thesis. Theistic beliefs are not necessarily *religious* beliefs. Belief in a first cause, "which all call God", can be just a piece of metaphysics. Even belief in a divine command theory could be just a piece of metaethics. And belief in a supernatural agent of eschatological fulfillment, if the eschatology really offers nothing more than "pie in the sky", is not necessarily more religious than the daily horoscope. It's not that I am against metaphysics, metaethics, or eschatology; on the contrary, I am for all of them. But if these beliefs are not connected with any impulse to *worship* God, I am inclined to say that religiously, they have missed the point.

Religiously there is at least something essential missing from one's conception of God if one does not understand that God is the Supreme Good. And that does not mean something just a little bit better than anything else. It means something transcendently wonderful. How does one understand that? One recognizes, of course, that it means that God is *much* better than anything else, actual or possible. Even so I think it is plausible to suppose that it is only in *love* for such a Good that one gets a real glimmering of what one is talking about—that without any impulse to worship the supreme Good, one does not really get the point. In other words, *caring* about God is important to a religious understanding of the concept of God.

This poses a problem for anyone who aspires to pure objectivity in thinking about God. Wallace Matson begins his book about *The Existence of God* by saying that he will try to discuss the subject "dispassionately and judiciously, as if we were arguing about the existence

of the Himalayan Snowman, or the antineutrino."[13] He goes on to acknowledge that hardly anyone writes or reads a book on this subject without caring much more about it than about the Himalayan Snowman. But we may think that this leaves a more fundamental difference unacknowledged. It's not just that we in fact care more about God than about the Yeti. Our concept of the Yeti does not depend on our caring about it; whereas one's conception of God commonly is, and arguably should be, shaped by the way in which one cares about God.

Suppose that God does in fact exist, and thus that the answer to the "objective problem", in the *Postscript*'s sense, about the truth of theism is affirmative. Suppose also that one does not "get the point" of theism, or adequately grasp the concept of God, unless one has enough religious passion about it to have an impulse to worship God. Then it would seem to follow, as a legitimate answer to the "subjective problem" about the truth of theistic belief, that such passion is required if one's religious consciousness is to conform to the divine object and thus really attain to religious truth. Correct ideas about God would doubtless constitute a measure of truth (whether or not Climacus would admit it). Without passion, however, they may fall short of the truth in the most important respect.

I agree with Matson that it is commonly possible and desirable, though difficult, to discuss objectively a topic that engages one's passions.[14] But where religion is concerned (and also in ethics), it may be that only thinking that is shaped in some way by a sort of passion can be adequate to its subject matter. Religious (and ethical) truth may be wood that we cannot cut if we take all pressure off the saw (cf. *Postscript*, p. 55). This is not to say, of course, that believing whatever we want to believe is the way to truth in these subjects. It is only to say that some influence of passion on our thinking, and especially on our conceptions, may be needed here if our thought is to conform to its object.

Here I have wandered, intentionally, some distance from the text of the *Postscript*, pursuing what seems to me most reasonable in the idea that (ethical and religious) truth is subjectivity. I am purposely ignoring some related theses of the *Postscript*, about which I have serious doubts. Climacus seems to hold that the subjectivity re-

[13] Wallace I. Matson, *The Existence of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. xi.

[14] Matson, *The Existence of God*, p. xii.

quired for religious truth is an *infinite* passion. But what is an infinite passion? And are we humans, in our finitude, any more capable of it than of adequate *ideas* of an infinite deity? About these questions, and about Climacus's view that an adequate religious subjectivity necessarily involves believing something uncertain or even highly improbable, I shall have nothing to say here; they are not my present topic.[15]

## 6. Idolatry Revisited

Let us return to the child of idolatry who "prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol" (p. 180). Can Climacus really mean, without qualification, that he "prays in truth to God", given that his ideas of God are erroneous according to Climacus? Remembering that Climacus's question about the case was whether there is *more* truth there than in the case of a person who has the right ideas about God without the right sort of passion, we may be tempted to read an implicit qualification into the claim. *In a way* the prayer that rises with such passion from the temple of idolatry is directed to the true God (by its passion); but in another way, less important to Climacus, it is directed to a false God (by its ideas).

I suspect, however, that Climacus should be read as asserting something more extreme. In line with his claim that the "content" of the passion of the infinite "is precisely itself" (p. 181), he may mean that it is *only* the quality of the passion that determines to what deity a prayer is directed—that defective ideas cannot deflect a prayer of infinite passion from the true God or even add an idol as a secondary object, nor can sound ideas present the true God as object in a passionless prayer. I would not wish to defend such a view for myself, but it may be worth inquiring how it might be developed within the conceptual framework of the *Postscript*.

It virtually forces on us a question that is often raised as a challenge to the statement "Truth is subjectivity." Is it implied that fanatical devotion to any end whatever is true religion? That would clearly be an unacceptable consequence. It is also a consequence that Climacus clearly means not to accept.

[15] I have discussed these questions in "Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion", *The Monist* 60 (1976): 228–43; reprinted in Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 33–40.

His discussion of this problem, or of one very like it, is in terms of madness, but what he says can easily be applied to fanaticism too. He observes that "the objective way . . . thinks to escape a danger which threatens the subjective way, and this danger is at its maximum: madness. In a merely subjective determination of the truth, madness and truth become in the last analysis indistinguishable, since they may both have inwardness" (pp. 173–74). The text goes on to argue that the objective way is not so safe as it thinks, since "the absence of inwardness is also madness" (p. 174). The point that presently concerns me, however, is addressed in a footnote:

> Even this [that madness and truth are indistinguishable] is not really true, however, for madness never has the specific inwardness of the infinite. Its fixed idea is precisely some sort of objectivity, and the contradiction of madness consists in embracing this with passion. The critical point in such madness is thus again not the subjective, but the little finitude which has become a fixed idea, which is something that can never happen to the infinite. (P. 174)

"Madness never has the specific inwardness of the infinite." Neither presumably does Nazism or any other fanaticism. But why not? What is the specific inwardness of the infinite? Climacus appears to be claiming that it is contradictory, and hence impossible, to embrace with infinite passion a sort of thing variously described as an "objectivity" or a "little finitude"; but how are we to understand that?

Here we may seek help from the elaborate theory of the nature of religion (or at least of a type of religion, "Religiousness A") presented in the *Postscript* under the heading of "Existential Pathos". "The 'initial' expression for existential pathos" is identified there with "the absolute direction (respect) toward the absolute *telos*" (p. 347). This "absolute direction toward the absolute *telos*" is virtually the *Postscript*'s definition of religiousness in general, echoed in the twentieth century by Paul Tillich's definition of religion as "ultimate concern".

The absolute direction is understood as an inner transformation of the individual's existence (pp. 347–52). And its definition and manifestation are primarily negative. "The first genuine expression for the relationship to the absolute *telos* is a total renunciation" (p. 362). This means a renunciation of every finite end, and of everything that can be presented to us outwardly as an object—hence of every "objectivity" or "little finitude". This is explicitly applied to the finite

and outward aspect of religious phenomena and practices as much as to obviously secular finitudes and objectivities. Not that the religious individual altogether ceases to have finite and outward ends; in order to do that one would have to cease altogether to live a human life. What is required is that one *detach* oneself from the finite ends (p. 367), "making the relationship to the absolute *telos* absolute, and the relationship to the relative ends relative" (p. 365). In this sort of religious devotion "all finite satisfactions are volitionally relegated to the status of what may have to be renounced in favor of an eternal happiness" (p. 350).

It is a complication, unwelcome in relation to my present interest, that the absolute *telos* is typically identified in the *Postscript*, as in the passage last quoted, with "an eternal happiness", rather than with God. But Climacus does hold the two in the closest relationship, declaring that

> the significance of worship is, that God is absolutely all for the worshiper; and the worshiper is again one who makes the absolute distinction.
>
> One who distinguishes absolutely has a relationship to the absolute *telos*, and *ipso facto* also a relationship to God. (P. 369)

Given this closeness, we may venture to use things that Climacus says about the concept of an eternal happiness as clues to his view of the conception of God that goes with true religion.

His concept of an eternal happiness is shaped by the need to make "the absolute distinction" between it and all the finite ends that are to be renounced and relativized. This results in a very abstract conception of an eternal happiness.

> [The] highest end is not a particular something, for then it would be relative to some other particular and be finite. . . . But to will absolutely is to will the infinite, and to will an eternal happiness is to will absolutely. . . . And this is the reason it is so abstract, and aesthetically the most poverty-stricken of all conceptions, because it is an absolute *telos* for an individual who proposes to strive absolutely. . . . And therefore the resolved individual does not even wish to know anything more about this *telos* than that it exists. (P. 353)

But then is any content left to the notion of an eternal happiness? Has this absolute striving any intentionality? Here Climacus applies the principle that the content of the passion of the infinite is precisely itself. For "there is nothing to be said of an eternal happiness

except that it is the good which is attained by venturing everything absolutely" (p. 382). May we also suppose that, for the theory of existential pathos at any rate, the content of the concept of God is similarly stripped down to its relation to the absolute direction or absolute striving?

If so, we get a neat answer to our questions about idolatry and fanaticism. One who has "the specific inwardness of the infinite" will be one who "makes the absolute distinction" and thus is constantly renouncing all the finite and outward ends with which she nevertheless lives. Such a person cannot be a fanatic, for fanaticism essentially involves investing a religious or quasi-religious devotion in some finite and outward end. And a qualification not obviously[16] contained in "the entire passion of the infinite" must be imposed on any prayer from the temple of idolatry (or anywhere else) that is to be "in truth to God". Your eyes may "rest upon the image of an idol" or on a page of philosophical theology, but you must make the absolute distinction between God and those representations if your prayer is to have the true God as its object.

## 7. "Religiousness A"

The religion thus proposed to us may be viewed as consisting principally in the rigorous rejection of all fanaticisms, idolatries, and inordinate affections for finite things, undertaken as a form of passionate striving for a very abstract end of infinite value. Perhaps this could provide an adequate answer to the charge that the *Postscript* condones fanaticism. But it may give rise to moral uneasiness on another score, since it seems to offer no positive guidance for ethical or religious living. Given that *all* finite ends are relativized and in principle renounced, how will we distinguish the good among them from the bad? What will lead us to prefer kindness, for example, to cruelty?

This is not, I think, an arbitrary question to put to Climacus. He does not quite raise such a question about the finite *moral good*, but he does discuss a related problem about finite innocent pleasures.

[16] Climacus might claim that it is already contained, though not obviously, in his original description of the case. For he argues that "it is a contradiction to will something finite absolutely, since the finite must have an end, so that there comes a time when it can no longer be willed" (p. 353). Since contradictions, as commonly understood, are impossible, he might argue that it is *impossible* to direct "the entire passion of the infinite" to anything finite. But I will not try to evaluate this argument here.

How, he asks at agonizing length, can one be religiously justified in taking an outing in the Deer Park (a favorite pleasure of Kierkegaard's own)? How can one put the idea of God together with such a finitude as an outing in the Deer Park? And yet an absolute direction to the absolute *telos* requires that everything one does be brought into relation with the idea of God. This, Climacus is prepared to say, is "the ultimate difficulty of human existence, which consists precisely in putting differences together (like the idea of God with an outing in the Deer Park)" (p. 449; cf. pp. 426–27). It is a particularly excruciating difficulty for the religious person; "he desires to do all, to express this religious absoluteness, but he cannot make the finite commensurate therefor" (p. 433). He must of course continue to perform finite actions; without doing so, one cannot live at all. The problem is that no such action measures up to the religious passion or its object.

This is one of the more strikingly original ideas of the *Postscript*: that not only the images and ideas but also the actions that we are able to realize in their full particularity or concreteness are inadequate "to express . . . religious absoluteness". If there is to be something in our lives that conforms to the divine in such a way as to satisfy the subjective side of the problem of religious truth, Climacus suggests, it must be something more inward and abstract. Most philosophers looking for something more abstract would fasten on an idea. Climacus focuses instead on a passion, the passion for the infinite, which he seems to think corresponds to the divine reality more adequately than any idea does. The thought that some other function of our minds might apprehend God better than ideas resonates with important themes of modern theology. For example, Schleiermacher and others can be read as claiming that sort of superiority for *feeling*. If Climacus claims it for *passion*, that would help explain why, in his view, the "content" of the passion of the infinite "is precisely itself".

But if a religious passion is that in us which can most adequately express the divine, it cannot itself find an adequate expression in concrete action. This is the source of a suffering that Climacus characterizes as "the 'essential' expression for existential pathos" (p. 386).

> But herein lies the profound suffering of true religiosity, the deepest thinkable, namely, to stand related to God in an absolutely decisive manner, and to be unable to find any decisive expression for this (for a happy love between human beings expresses itself in the union of the

> lovers). This inability is rooted in the necessary relativity of the most decisive external expression. (P. 440)

The religiousness that has its essential center in this suffering is what the *Postscript* calls "Religiousness A". It seems to be a form of religious life in which ultimacy has triumphed totally over concreteness—to put the matter in terms borrowed from an illuminating passage of Tillich, which I assume to have been influenced by the *Postscript*:

> The phrase 'being ultimately concerned' points to a tension in human experience. On the one hand, it is impossible to be concerned about something which cannot be encountered concretely, be it in the realm of reality or in the realm of imagination. . . . On the other hand, ultimate concern must transcend every preliminary finite and concrete concern. . . . But in transcending the finite the religious concern loses the concreteness of a being-to-being relationship. It tends to become not only absolute but also abstract, provoking reactions from the concrete element. This is the inescapable inner tension in the idea of God.[17]

Now perhaps the concrete pole has not vanished from Religiousness A so completely as I have been suggesting. In particular, it may be doubted whether what is said about an eternal happiness, that it is something about which there is nothing to be said except about the mode of striving to be related to it, is really to be applied in all strictness to God, in Religiousness A. Climacus speaks freely of God as *Creator*, for example, in passages that do not clearly step outside the bounds of Religiousness A (*Postscript*, pp. 220, 296). It seems to be assumed in the theory of existential pathos (e.g., p. 369) that God has a role as agent and cause, and not only as object of religious passion. And we have seen that the parable of the children of Christendom and idolatry, which is presented within the bounds of Religiousness A, presupposes that there are objectively right and wrong ideas of God.

The more rigorously abstract interpretation of Religiousness A remains interesting, however, for its boldness. It offers a purely formal conception of true religion, as determined solely by the form of religious motivation, of religious passion or striving. It may remind us of Kant's attempt to give a purely formal account of true morality, as determined solely by the form of reason's governance of action.

[17] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:211.

And in both cases there are problems about filling in the form so as to give definite guidance for concrete action.

## 8. "Religiousness B"

Perhaps Religiousness A, even in the less austere of the forms suggested in this essay, is too abstract to be anybody's real religion. In the *Postscript*, at any rate, it serves as a stage in the exposition of Christianity, which is presented as the sole instance of a type called "Religiousness B". And the statement "Truth is subjectivity" is initially, and in its most unqualified form, an expression of Religiousness A. Climacus indicates this by presenting Socrates as an exemplar of subjectivity as truth. Socrates has "the passion of the infinite", holding fast to his (Socratic) ignorance "with the entire passion of his inwardness" (p. 180). "In the principle that subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, there is comprehended the Socratic wisdom. . . . for this reason Socrates was in the truth by virtue of his ignorance, in the highest sense in which this was possible within paganism" (p. 183).

Socrates is the hero of *pre*-Christian religiousness, in both the *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Postscript*. The theological problem, stated at the beginning of the *Fragments*, to which both works constitute an elaborate response, is whether and how a religious advance beyond Socrates is possible. This problem is restated at this point in the *Postscript* (pp. 183–85). Having called attention to the difficulty of making such an advance and the danger that one will think one is making it but really "come out behind Socrates", Climacus asks and answers a question: "Subjectivity, inwardness, has been posited as the truth; can any expression for the truth be found which has a still higher degree of inwardness? Aye, there is such an expression, provided the principle that subjectivity or inwardness is the truth begins by positing the opposite principle: that subjectivity is untruth" (p. 185). This indicates that in the religiousness ("B") that goes beyond Socrates, the truth will still be inwardness, subjectivity,[18] but that this thesis requires some qualification or supplementation that was not needed in Religiousness A.

Climacus immediately stresses that he is not, like "speculative philosophy", making a move "in the direction of the principle that

[18] This is confirmed when Climacus says that Christianity "fits perfectly" with the thesis that "subjectivity is the truth" (p. 206).

objectivity is the truth" but aims rather at "making the inwardness far more intensive", because more paradoxical. He proceeds (in agreement with the first chapter of the *Fragments*) to identify the "untruth" in which the individual begins as *sin*—indeed, original sin (p. 186). This may tempt us to make an easy reconciliation of his claims that "subjectivity is the truth" and "subjectivity is untruth." We would do this by taking 'subjectivity' in different senses in the two claims, as meaning infinite passion in the first claim, and one's attitude on religious issues, whatever it may be, in the second claim. Then we could interpret "subjectivity is untruth" as meaning that one's attitude in relation to religion is sinful precisely because it is *not* infinitely passionate, whereas "subjectivity is truth" means that one would be in the truth, religiously, if one did have infinite passion.

This interpretation is unattractive, inasmuch as it has Kierkegaard palming off on us a mere equivocation as if it were a paradox. There is also a powerful argument against it. Climacus conceives of Christianity as exclusive in the sense that it "extends sin-consciousness to the whole race, and at the same time does not know the whole race [but only true Christians] as saved" (p. 518; see pp. 210–15, 515–19). And since he identifies salvation with coming to be in the truth,[19] this implies that non-Christians are not in the truth. Despite his "passion of the infinite" (p. 180), therefore, Socrates, as a non-Christian, cannot be in the truth, according to Christianity (or Religiousness B) as Climacus conceives of it.

The indicated conclusion, I think, is that subjectivity, infinite passion, is *necessary*[20] but *not sufficient* for being in the truth, or in conformity with God, according to Religiousness B. This fits very well with what Climacus says about the relation between Religiousness A and B.

> Religiousness A is the dialectic of inward transformation; it is the relation to an eternal happiness which is not conditioned by anything but is the dialectic inward appropriation of the relationship, and so is conditioned only by the inwardness of the appropriation and its dialectic. (P. 494)

[19] See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, published in one volume with the Hongs' translation of Kierkegaard's *Johannes Climacus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 18–19 (SV IV, 188).

[20] For the necessity, see p. 512: "He who does not possess this highest subjective passion is not a Christian."

In other words, this is the religiousness for which "there is nothing to be said of an eternal happiness except that it is the good which is attained by venturing everything absolutely" (p. 382).

> Religiousness B . . . does on the contrary posit conditions, of such a sort that they are not merely deeper dialectical apprehensions of inwardness, but are a definite something which defines more closely the eternal happiness. (P. 494).

It seems fair to infer that it is not as true of Religiousness B as of Religiousness A that "it is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor and not its content, for its content is precisely itself" (p. 181).

It is clear enough what Climacus thinks is the "definite something which defines more closely", not only the eternal happiness, but also the God-relationship for an individual in Religiousness B. It is "a something outside the individual", a historical fact—namely, "the determination of God in time as the individual man" (p. 498). It appears thus that the answer to the subjective problem of being in the truth, within Christianity as conceived by Climacus, requires *both* having the right inwardness, an infinite passion, *and* being related to the right object, the historic Incarnation. Concreteness also is not so totally obliterated by ultimacy in Religiousness B as in Religiousness A. The history of Jesus provides concrete content for Christianity; and we may speculate that Climacus, like Kierkegaard, would expect it to give concrete guidance for living the Christian life. This may afford some hope of solving the problem (noted at the beginning of section 7) of a religious basis for distinguishing the good from the bad among finite ends.

Climacus would think it much too easygoing, however, to rest content with the formula that (the right) subjectivity is necessary but not sufficient for truth in Religiousness B. He describes Religiousness B as "paradoxical"; and the "tension", as Tillich called it, between concreteness and ultimacy is central to the paradox. "The paradox consists in the fact that this apparently aesthetic relationship (the individual being related to something outside himself) is nevertheless the right relationship" (*Postscript*, p. 498). The stricture that an immediate relationship to God is paganism remains in full force in Religiousness B: "A direct God-relationship is aesthetic and is not really a God-relationship, any more than a direct relationship to the absolute is an absolute relationship, because the discrimination of the absolute has not been accomplished" (p. 497*n*). How is

this failure of the God-relationship through inappropriate directness to be avoided in Religiousness B? How is an Incarnation different from meeting God as a huge green bird with a red beak? And is Religiousness B as well equipped as Religiousness A to escape the dangers of fanaticism?

Climacus seeks a solution to these problems in the paradoxical character of Religiousness B. The paradox is found in the fact that "the determination of God in time as the individual man" is believed, but "it is not possible to think this." And "if the paradox is not held fast in this sense, Religiousness A is higher, and Christianity as a whole is reduced to aesthetic terms" (p. 498). I take this to mean that the absolute distinction must be made, and the absolute *telos* respected by relativizing the finite, *within* the object of Christian faith. Only so will idolatry and fanaticism be avoided. One way in which Climacus thinks the Christian must do this is indicated in the *Fragments* (especially chapter 4). The believer must not suppose that anything that is or could be known historically, even by the closest contemporary of the supposed incarnate God, could establish the truth of an Incarnation of God, because of the incommensurability between the finitude of everything historically observable and the infinitude of the deity that is believed thus to enter human history.[21] A different sort of basis is needed for faith in an Incarnation.

This, in Climacus's view, is a paradoxical stance: seriously, indeed passionately, to believe in a revelation of the infinite and eternal God in something finite and historical, and at the same time to make the absolute distinction between finite and infinite. If not strictly a paradox, it is at least a very difficult tension to live with. Yet I believe that it is religiously wiser to accept this tension than to settle, as in the more extreme form of Religiousness A, for a totally one-sided triumph of ultimacy over concreteness. I do not think, as Climacus seems to, that this tension is peculiar to Christianity,[22] but rather, as Tillich holds, that it is an inescapable part of any approach to God that is worthy of serious religious attention.

[21] This point could be related to the Chalcedonian doctrine of the distinctness of the divine and human natures in Christ, but Climacus does not comment on that.

[22] Indeed I do not mean to give a general endorsement of Climacus's conception of Christianity.