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Re-thinking Religiousness in Kierkegaard's *Postscript*

On the Secular Relevance of the Category of Religiousness

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Abstract

In this thesis, I take up Kierkegaard's religious theory and, more specifically, his notion of religiousness. I argue that this notion, along with his overall system, carries significant value for non-religious individuals. In Kierkegaardian scholarship, there are two series of interpreters. Firstly, there are those who treat his work in a strictly religious fashion and who judge its concepts strictly for their content. Secondly, there are those scholars who pursue less strict theological readings and argue for the revival of its broader existential relevance. It is to this school of thought this thesis wishes to contribute. In the first chapter, I aim to show that Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness can hardly be grasped if we do not highlight his commitments to subjectivity. Religiousness, in the Climacus writings, is in the first place a highly subjective affair. In the second chapter, I continue by exploring the category of religiousness to see where – despite building upon – it differs from mere subjectivity. In this way, the first two chapters are more descriptive than argumentative. In a final chapter, I consider the works of Michael O'neill Burns and Andrew Torrance, who both pertain to the series of scholars who treat Kierkegaardian philosophy in a strict religious fashion. I counter both of their claims in order to substantiate my own reading of Kierkegaardian thought, stressing its secular validity. For this, I draw upon the work of Merold Westphal and Mariana Alessandri, as well as my own reading of the *Postscript*, to argue that Kierkegaard's system, despite having deeply theological grounds, offers an extraordinary foundation for all human beings to build their life-attitude on.

Introduction

In this thesis, I offer an alternative reading, or as I prefer to call it, a re-reading, of the category of religiousness in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. It is my goal to clarify for the reader, who might perhaps hold atheistic or agnostic beliefs, that there is much more to Kierkegaard's oeuvre than just his – nonetheless revolutionary – interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, his unique religious stance on Christian topics and the devoted and original way in which he addresses them. It is undoubtful that he operates from and within a theological and particularly a Christian-protestant framework. However, my goal is to take his religious worldview and consider it in such a fashion that we can reflect upon and discuss its secular relevance and what lessons it could possibly teach those who consider themselves atheist or perhaps even agnostics. This inquiry is, in the first place, an investigation into the thinker who succeeded at tricking, with great virtuosity and mild ridicule, not just his contemporaries, but all his future readers to, by offering them a Socratic mirror in which they would see the unfounded nature and fragility of their convictions, beliefs and aesthetic attitudes. I believe that Kierkegaard was far more than just another thinker of Christian thought and that his intellectual work is up until today, still of the highest philosophical and existential relevance.

In this thesis, I argue that Kierkegaard's work, despite its religious nature, has exceptional relevance for secular readers as well. This inquiry focuses around highlighting the secular relevance of the notion of religiousness. I will not pursue an interpretative reading of this notion in order to find out what religiousness precisely means in Kierkegaard's work. In light of a focus upon a secular reading, this would eventually bring us to some sort of side-stepping away from this concept and his overall religious system. I am not looking to re-interpret the content or change the meaning of the religious concepts Kierkegaard uses, in order to pursue a more liberal or moderate reading. The main question of this thesis is, 'what does religiousness *do*, according to Kierkegaard?' The answer to this question will reveal the secular relevance of his system. In this way, my reading is more ontological than it is theological. Through this process, I will at once clarify his work and hopefully, stay true to the nature of his system. The key to an analysis of his understanding of religiousness can be found in his account of subjectivity. I find that, in his system, religiousness can by no means be properly understood if it is treated in isolation from the concept of subjectivity. For this reason, an understanding of Kierkegaard's account of religiousness, as it pertains to subjectivity, is relevant for both religious and secular subjects.

After having thoroughly treated Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness, I will review a series of scholars who deal with Kierkegaard in a strictly religious fashion. First, I disagree with Burns' claim that Kierkegaard aimed to set an infinite contrast between secular and religious

existence and that these two existences oppose one another.¹ Instead, I prove that his theory of religiousness contains a valuable philosophical lesson. What we draw from his religious philosophy can be equally relevant to secular individuals, to all individuals who are interested in taking up the question of their own existence. In this way, I agree more with Alessandri's reading. One of her claims is that Kierkegaard's notion of religiousness teaches us how to develop an inner life and an attitude that is useful to tackle broader existential problems² – something which confirms its secular relevance. Secondly, I also disagree with Torrance, who argues that the transformative journey spoken of in the *Postscript* – this, I will come to clarify – is grounded in an active relationship with God, who encounters us in and through his son, Jesus Christ. We will come to see that although the first part of his claim seems to hold, the second part turns out not to be wholly true.

The main work that will be explored in this analysis, is written by Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, a self-proclaimed humorist³, and is titled *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* (hereafter *Postscript*). From Westphal⁴, we know that the focus of the *Postscript* is twofold. It considers both the task of becoming subjective and that of becoming religious. The importance of subjectivity becomes obvious as soon as we look at the *Postscript's* page layout. The first part, titled *The objective problem of Christianity's truth*⁵, is concerned with objectivity, whereas its second part, titled *The subjective problem. The subject's relation to the truth of Christianity, or what it is to become a Christian*⁶, is an extensive account of subjectivity. The part on subjectivity turns out to be more than twelve times as long than the one on objectivity. One could ask, why does Kierkegaard – or Climacus, the pseudonym of his choice hereⁱ – value subjectivity so highly? This question must be answered in advance. Early in the introduction to the *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus distinguishes between “the objective problem” and “the subjective problem”⁷. The objective problem is about Christianity's truth.⁸ If a person asks about the historical true-ness or validity of the Christian scriptures, he is taking up an objective problem and he is asking whether what is written in these scriptures is true or not. The object of one's questioning, the Christian truths,

¹ Michael O'neill Burns, “The Self and Society in Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus Writings,” *The Heythrop Journal* LI 51, no. 4 (2010): 630.

² Mariana Alessandri, “The Strenuous and Sufficient Task of Kierkegaard's Religiousness A,” *Philosophy Today* 56, vol. 4 (2012): page unknown.

³ Paul Muench, “Kierkegaard's Socratic Pseudonym. A Profile of Johannes Climacus,” in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25.

⁴ Merold Westphal, “Climacus on Subjectivity and the System,” in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138.

⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. and ed. by Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

is thus taken up in an objective fashion. In other words, the question of whether Christianity, being a historical phenomenon,⁹ is true or false, is an objective question. However, Climacus argues for another, more subjective dimension to this questioning. He claims that

Christianity is the only historical phenomenon which in spite of the historical, indeed precisely by means of the historical, has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him more than just historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical.¹⁰

This excerpt is crucial if we want to understand where Climacus' distinction between the objective and the subjective problem stems from. If one asks about the historical truth or validity of Christianity, he is taking up an objective problem, in such a way that it will hopefully enable him to find objective answers. Yet, Climacus claims, and this is also the focus of the *Postscript* and the main reason why the two parts differ so strongly in quantity, that "the problem is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual's relation to Christianity."¹¹ Christianity, for Climacus, takes up a very peculiar position in this world. Despite it being a historical phenomenon about whose truth we can ask objectively, it is also a phenomenon upon which one can base his "eternal consciousness."¹² It offers to us the promise of something very unique, namely, an "eternal happiness."¹³ He continues to show that the problem is "not about the indifferent individual's systematic eagerness to arrange the truths of Christianity in §§ [paragraphs] but about the infinitely interested individual's concern regarding his own relation to such a teaching."¹⁴ In short, the problem that we, as interested individuals, should be taking up, is not whether what is written in the Holy Scriptures is true or false but rather, if we can't ascertain whether they are true or not, how we must relate to them?

In other words, if we can't figure out with absolute certainty whether what is written in Christianity's scriptures is true or not, what can we do? The subjective asking about the truth of Christianity, is the central concern of the whole *Postscript*, or, as Climacus briefly puts it: "Quite simply, how can I, Johannes Climacus share in the happiness that Christianity promises?"¹⁵ This question, posed by the author in the introduction, shows that he is concerned, not with the possible true-ness or false-ness of Christian thought – since he will go on to show that we have no absolute certainty about these truths – but rather with how he is to relate to Christianity, which offers him the possibility of an eternal happiness. Christianity, for

⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Climacus, is not an objective undertaking, but a subjective one. In other words, the main concern of the *Postscript* can be formulated as follows: how he, Johannes Climacus, ought to organize his existence so that he can share in the eternal happiness that is promised to him by Christianity. This undertaking is, as shown, not an objective but rather a subjective affair for the existing individual. Therefore, a chapter dedicated to this notion is unavoidable.

Having touched upon the importance of subjectivity here, it should be clear that an inquiry into Kierkegaard's account of subjectivity is crucial to this undertaking, since the matter at stake here is of a subjective nature. Together with Kierkegaard, we are not interested in asking whether, for example, what is written in the Bible is true or not, but rather how we should relate to similar truths and change our existence in light of them. To the secular reader this might still sound very theological, however it is my goal to show that in Kierkegaard's religiously-oriented works we can very well draw inspiration to live valuable and worthy, non-religious lives. As I will come to show, subjectivity, teaches us crucial life-changing attitudes and character traits that are required if one wants to become a truly, faithful and passionately concerned individual – whether that means being religious or not.

Chapter 1: A Kierkegaardian approach to Subjectivity

1.1 Subjectivity, A Prelude to Religiousness

It becomes clear from looking at the *Postscript's* table of contents that Climacus highly values subjectivity and subjective truth, much more than its objective counterpart. One could ask what Climacus understands with this notion and, more specifically, of what importance it is to religious existence. First of all, I shall initiate this inquiry by looking at the following question: what precisely does Johannes Climacus mean when he talks of becoming subjective? He opens up the first chapter of the *Postscript* with the following quote: “What would there be for ethicsⁱⁱ to judge if becoming subjective were not the highest task set for a human being; what must be put aside on a closer understanding of this; examples of thinking directed towards becoming subjective.”¹⁶ From the very start, Climacus stresses the importance of becoming subjective by presupposing that it is the highest task set for a human being. There is in fact, no higher task that one could possibly have than this. A rather important aspect mentioned here is that subjectivity offers the ground for ethical judgments. However, an analysis of ethics and the way in which it pertains to subjectivity, is out of scope for thesis. For the sake of the argument, I assume that we can grasp Kierkegaard’s understanding of both subjectivity and religiousness adequately, even in bypassing the realm of ethics.

Climacus starts off from the traditional distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. When one treats things objectively, one always treats the matter at issue.¹⁷ In other words, when we ask about things in an objective way, we take the content of that object as the central concern of our investigating. For instance, when Christianity is asked about objectively, what one is really asking about is the true-ness or false-ness of the Christian scriptures. Conversely, when one asks about things subjectively, one is not asking about the matter at issue but rather about the subject and his subjectivity. Or, in other words, about the relation of the subject to that specific object. In the case of Christianity, this means that one isn’t necessarily asking about the content of *Christian Faith* but rather how one subjectively approaches or deals with its content. It isn’t about the ‘what’ of one’s questioning, but rather about the ‘how’. With regards to Christianity, Climacus states that, “what is raised here is not the question of the truth of Christianity, in the sense that if this was decided, subjectivity would be ready and willing to accept it. No, it is a question of the subject’s acceptance.”¹⁸ Climacus is not necessarily interested the content of Christian scriptures, but rather in how the subject approaches these scriptures and the message they contain. He assumes that there are two possible ways of asking

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 107.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

about the truth. One can do this objectively, in the literal sense of the word, *object-ive*, asking about a certain object, whatever that object may be. In this instance, the focus is not directed at one's relation to that particular thing, but in fact to that thing in itself.

Conversely, one also has the possibility of asking about truth in a subjective way. In this case, one is focused not necessarily on the object but rather on his subjective relation to this object and its possible truth. This becomes clear to the reader when Climacus states that

When truth is asked about objectively, reflection is directed objectively at truth as an object to which the knower relates. Reflection is not on the relation but on it being the truth, the true that he is relating to. If only this, to which he relates, is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. If the truth is asked about subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively on the individual's relation; *if only the how of this relation is in truth, then the individual is in truth*, even if he related in this way to untruth.¹⁹ [my italics]

This excerpt shows, in an extraordinary way, the difference between relating to truth in objectivity, and doing so in subjectivity. With the project that Climacus has in mind for his readers, it becomes clear why he maintains the typical distinction between objective and subjective truth. Asking about truth objectively, or accordingly, asking about the objective truth of things might bring us objective knowledge. However, as Climacus' claims, it is precisely because it is *objective* knowledge that it does not apply to human existence.²⁰ That's why his work maintains the critical distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. Both of them might be of interest to the individual, but only the latter existentially matters to him.

How does all of this relate to religion and more specifically to religiousness? In a later part of the *Postscript*, Climacus mentions that Christianity "would bestow upon the individual an eternal happiness"²¹, which he claims to be "distributed not in large consignments but only to one at a time."²² The notion of eternal happiness is crucial in understanding both subjectivity and religiousness. Despite the obvious fact that this concept has a very Christian character, some have argued that the concept of eternal happiness can be replaced with the more general

¹⁹ Ibid., 167-168.

²⁰ Anne-Marie Christensen, "Depending on Ethics: Kierkegaard's View of Philosophy and Beyond," *Res Cogitans* 4 no. 1 (2007): 4.

²¹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 108.

²² Ibid.

concept of one's own personal existence.²³ In this way, this concept also has meaning for the non-religious reader.

Even given its origin in Christian thought, the concept of a happiness that is eternal, does not immediately become depreciated within secular or non-religious frameworks. As Westphal has argued, Climacus' theory of subjectivity does not lose its value if the specifically religious notion is replaced with the more general understanding of one's own personal existence²⁴ and, as I would like to add, one's personal, secular happiness or well-being. In this way, although I will continue to employ this notion within the Kierkegaardian framework, the more secularly-oriented reader can still find meaning in this concept if he is willing to understand it as the more general concept of a personal well-being and earthly happiness.

Climacus describes the concept of an eternal happiness as "the highest good of the infinite"²⁵. It is the highest good to which an individual can relate and, in fact, has to do so in an absolute fashion. What does this mean exactly? For Climacus, there is a crucial link between subjectivity and being religious, and even more specifically, being Christian. According to the pseudonymous author, subjectivity offers us the possibility of becoming religious. It is crucial to it, in such a way that it pushes the individual to be truly and infinitely concerned with himself and more specifically, with his eternal happiness. Climacus claims that "Christianity protests against all objectivity; it wants the subject to be infinitely concerned with itself. What it asks about is subjectivity; the truth of Christianity, if it is anywhere, is only in this; objectively it is not at all."²⁶ What Kierkegaard does here is very crucial considered from a historical and philosophical perspective. He rejects all previous Christian schools of thought, like that of Anselm of Canterbury and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Both attempted to prove the existence of God and accordingly, treated the matters of Christianity as an objective problem to be solved.

For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, the task of becoming subjective is the highest task set for any human being and, in striving for this task, we will be offered the promise of the highest reward possible, namely an eternal happiness. Something which is promised to us by Christianity. This reward, "comes to be only for the person who becomes subjective."²⁷ If one wants to become a truly religious person, and accordingly, a true Christian, one must first and foremost take up the task of becoming subjective. Here, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard doesn't just stress the importance of subjectivity for argumentative or formal reasons. He also does this because he is truly convinced that Christianity is a matter of subjectivity, rather than objectivity. Since the absolute category of God cannot be grasped objectively, we must relate to

²³ Westphal, "Kierkegaard on Subjectivity," 139.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 108.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 137.

it subjectively. In this sense, subjectivity is an introduction, perhaps even a first encounter, with the realm of the religious. As we will see, since Christianity and par excellence all forms of religious thought cannot offer us objective knowledge and understanding of its categories, we ought to relate to it in a subjective fashion. As David Wood has argued, our defining commitment or relationship is not about relating to God as such²⁸. Rather, it is the specific way in which we relate to him. This is the whole claim of Climacus' *Postscript*.

We can argue about whether God exists or not and about whether what is written in the Christian scriptures is true or false, yet even if we succeed in answering these objective questions, which is very unlikely, we haven't come any closer to grasping their existential significance. This reminds us of Wittgenstein's quote that, "even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all."²⁹ If we want to truly, by this I mean subjectively, understand the phenomena that are fundamental to human existence, we ought to look at our subjective relation to them, rather than the objectivity of their content. This, is the central claim of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*.

1.2 The 'How' of One's Subjective Relationship

In order to further clarify my analysis, in this second section I will focus on the particularities of one's subjective relation to truth. I have shown that both subjectivity and Christianity are matters of maintaining a specific relationship to certain truths or objects. However, what this 'subjectively relating' precisely means has not yet been proven by the above section on subjectivity. Therefore, I must introduce a new question: how does a subjective relationship towards the promise of eternal happiness precisely come about?

Passion & Faith as the core notions of subjectivity

An important aspect of the Kierkegaardian account of subjectivity, is the notion of passion. Climacus introduces this notion when he elaborates on the distinction between objective reflection, the reflection upon objective truths; and subjective reflection or reflection on our relation to these truths. He states that, "For objective reflection the truth becomes something objective, an object, and the thing is to disregard the subject. For subjective reflection the truth becomes appropriation, *inwardness*, subjectivity, and the thing is precisely, in existing, to deepen oneself in subjectivity."³⁰ The term 'inwardness' is crucial to his account of subjectivity. Climacus claims that when we reflect subjectively, so upon our personal relationship to certain truths, we step into the realm of personal inwardness. Here, a subject considers his personal relation to something, rather than the pure content or matter of that something. Subjectivity,

²⁸ David Wood, "Thinking God in the Wake of Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Ree and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 70.

²⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1922), 89.

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 161. [my emphasis]

in Climacus' account, is a matter of personal inwardness. He follows up on this, by saying that "in order to clarify the difference between the paths of subjective and objective reflection, I shall demonstrate subjective reflection's seeking back inwardly in inwardness. Inwardness at its highest in an existing subject is passion;"³¹

Here, Climacus introduces the notion of passion and the way in which it contributes to one's inwardness and, consequently, to his subjectivity. As David Gouwens has argued in *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, "inwardness as a long term and intensive concern constitutes a *passion*".³² I adopt his understanding that passion in the Climacus writings signifies an "extensive interest that shapes a person's life in great breadth."³³ Drawing from the *Postscript*, passion can be understood as a specific characteristic of the subjective individual. It is the personal, committed concern with oneself and one's own existence. Being passionate about something, means being infinitely concerned with yourself and your *Being*. Or, in Climacus' words, with your eternal happiness. Passion, even understood in a secular way, is the proof that one is truly and infinitely concerned with himself and his personal happiness and wellbeing. Passion as such, is our interest in something which contributes to our happiness. We do not take up a passion just for the sake of taking it up, but rather because it makes us happy and offers us a sense of fulfillment. Passion motivates us and moves us toward being happy and self-fulfilled. As Hubert Dreyfus has argued in his readings of Kierkegaard, one can be passionate about a work of art, a piece of music or, perhaps even a lover.³⁴

In the first part of this chapter, I have shown that objective reflection and everything that deals with objectivity in the broader sense, alludes to the 'what' of things, or handles objects in themselves – as pure objects. Subjectivity on the other hand, is concentrated upon the 'how' of things, or the way in which one relates to them. Further in the *Postscript*, Climacus claims that, "this 'how' at its maximum is the passion of the infinite."³⁵ The 'how' of one's relating to certain truths is maximized by means of the passion of the infinite. The category of the infinite refers to the previously mentioned concept of eternal happiness. The kind of happiness that is not contingent upon the finite. It is also the highest reward possible for an existing individual, and could only be obtained by pursuing the task of becoming subjective. By introducing the notion of passion of the infinite, Kierkegaard takes an important step on the way to defining subjectivity and eventually, also religiousness. If we want to become truly subjective, first and foremost, we ought to passionately take up the concern for our eternal happiness, if we wish to become truly religious individuals. We have to relate to this eternal happiness, which is

³¹ Ibid., 167.

³² David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 97.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hubert Dreyfus, *On the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2001), 86.

³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 170.

considered to be our absolute τέλος³⁶, in a passionate and infinitely concerned way. Or, as Climacus calls it, by “virtue of the infinite passion of inwardness.”³⁷ He considers eternal happiness as the absolute τέλος, it is the absolute end goal of our existence to which we are to relate in an absolute fashion.³⁸

As we will come to see later in the discussion on religiousness, relating absolutely to our absolute τέλος doesn't just signify turning to God for the sake of confirmation. Instead, it implies transforming our whole existence in light of this highest good. As Gouwens stated, “one turns to God not to confirm and encourage the integrity of one's own action, but to be transformed by God.”³⁹ That is what Climacus means when he states that we must relate absolutely to this absolute τέλος. Throughout the *Postscript*, it becomes clear that the task lies in relating absolutely to this absolute end and relatively to all other, relative ends. This will be further clarified in chapter 2 where I take up the category of religiousness. However, it is clear that in Kierkegaard's system, the transformation of our whole existence for the sake of an eternal happiness requires a specific attitude, one of passionate and infinite interestedness, which can only be acquired through becoming subjective.

The *Postscript* began with the crucial distinction between objectivity and subjectivity and more specifically, by distinguishing between objective and subjective reflection or, objective and subjective truth. Throughout my analysis, I have, just as Climacus himself did, used these variations interchangeably. In essence, they boil down to the critical distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. Both the *Postscript* and this thesis assumes this distinction. As seen, Climacus favors subjectivity over objectivity because of its existential relevance to the existing subject. Subjectivity, forms the necessary prelude to a religious existence, precisely because it teaches us that theological discussions, such as the existence of God or the true-ness of Christian scriptures, cannot offer us objective knowledge and accordingly should be treated as subjective affairs, in which we ought to focus on our relation to these truths, rather than the actual truths themselves. In this way, the realm of the subjective incites in us a series of existential characteristics, such as a lived interestedness and passionate commitment. These, we must certainly possess if we want to become truly religious before God. Before thinking of becoming religious, Climacus argues that we must first take up the task of becoming subjective. This is also necessary because Christianity offers us the promise of an eternal happiness, something to which we should relate with an infinite passionate concern. Or, in other words, subjectively. It is the realm of subjectivity that requires this existential pathos of us. The core

³⁶ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 111.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 172.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

³⁹ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 109.

notion of subjectivity is that of passion, and passion is, according to Climacus, the highest form of inwardness.

Climacus identifies the passion that is characteristic of subjectivity, with the term “existential pathos.”⁴⁰ He writes that, “in connection with an eternal happiness as the absolute good, pathos does not mean words; it means, for the one who exists, the transformation by this conception of the whole of his existence.”⁴¹ The existential pathos that is required of the subjective individual is not merely expressing one’s passion in verbal statements or expressions. Rather, it is about transforming one’s existence absolutely. In referring to Westphal, Mariana Alessandri⁴² grants us the important insight that we should not confuse Climacus’ notion of pathos with the more common understanding of passion. Both authors agree that passion is a matter of feelings, whereas pathos, in the Climacus writings, implies the actual transformation of one’s existence. This is what Climacus means when he states that, “the absolute τέλος, only is when the individual relates to it absolutely; and as an eternal happiness relating to one who is existing.”⁴³ For Climacus, relating absolutely to our absolute τέλος, means transforming our whole existence. Such a transformation is at once an active, and, a passive phenomenon. As Gouwens stated, “the passionate, concerned life is actively self-directed, involving free acts of will in envisioning possibilities and making them concrete. Yet a passionate person is not self-creating; one cannot simply generate a passion by arbitrary choice. Rather, one is engaged.”⁴⁴ This adequately captures Kierkegaard’s understanding of existential pathos as a characteristic, or an attitude that is active, transformative and engaging in nature. Climacus writes that, “if one who exists is to relate with pathos to an eternal happiness, it’s a matter of whether his existence expresses the relation. (...) Unless it [an eternal happiness] transforms his existence absolutely, he is not relating to an eternal happiness.”⁴⁵ Here, Climacus touches upon the transformative character of relating with existential pathos in subjectivity. We can only truly know that an existing subject relates absolutely with pathos to his eternal happiness, if he has transformed his existence. If he doesn’t relate to this absolutely, his existence is not transformed. This only becomes more clear in Climacus’ statement that, “the task’s maximum is to relate absolutely to the absolute τέλος and at the same time relatively to relative ends, or always to have the absolute τέλος with one.”⁴⁶ Relating absolutely to one’s absolute τέλος, for Kierkegaard, means abandoning all relative, worldly ends in light of the absolute end. In doing so, the existing individual enters “the transformation in which, in existing, the existing person changes everything in his existence in relation to that

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 325.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Alessandri, “The Strenuous and Sufficient Task,” page unknown.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 333.

⁴⁴ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as religious thinker*, 98.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 330.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

highest good.”⁴⁷ As we have seen, the way in which this transformation comes about, is by realizing one’s existential pathos in inwardness.

Besides passion, a second notion which establishes the crucial link between subjectivity and religiousness, is that of faith. Most of what Climacus has to say about subjectivity, comes to culmination in his definition of truth as subjectivity, according to Westphal.⁴⁸ When Climacus offers his definition of truth as subjectivity, he writes the following: “*the objective uncertainty maintained through appropriation in the most passionate inwardness is truth*, the highest truth there is for someone existing.”⁴⁹ In this definition of truth, the most crucial aspect is that of *objective uncertainty*. Climacus assumes that when an individual encounters certain existential matters, he often lacks objective ground to stand on. This lack of objective ground is, in fact, an “indication of the tension of inwardness.”⁵⁰ All the individual objectively has at that point, is uncertainty. However, it is precisely this presence of objective uncertainty that tightens the infinite passion of his inwardness. Then, the truth lies in “this venture of choosing an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.”⁵¹ Climacus clarifies this by introducing the example of someone observing nature in order to find God. In doing so, what he sees around him in nature is beauty, omnipotence and wisdom, but at the same time, a vast array of other conflicting things which trouble and disturb him, such as pain, suffering and death. He realizes that there are multiple conflicting phenomena out there, and that he isn’t quite sure upon which he should base the blueprint for his worldview and life-orientation. The end result, or as Climacus calls it, the *summa summarum*⁵² of this undertaking is precisely objective uncertainty. Yet, he claims, the inwardness becomes so great just because it embraces the objective uncertainty with all the passion of the infinite.⁵³

If objective reflection about the nature of the world and of God cannot give us any objective certainty about this world, the existing individual is forced to appropriate truths by virtue of a passionate inwardness – a passionate concern for his eternal happiness. Objective reflection cannot give us the stability we are looking for, so what must unavoidably follow is the individual’s appropriation of truths in a subjective manner. All of this is just another way of having faith. As Climacus states, the subjective truth must be taken up with *faith*. He argues for this by adding that,

the above definition of truth is another way of saying faith. Without risk, no faith. Faith is just this, the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective

⁴⁷ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁸ Westphal, “Climacus on Subjectivity,” 139.

⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 171. [emphasis in original]

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

uncertainty. If I can grasp God objectively, then I do not have faith, but just because I cannot do this, I must have faith.⁵⁴

By introducing the notion of faith, Climacus has taken a crucial step in finalizing his account of subjectivity. Faith is precisely this: the contradiction that exists between the individual's infinite concern for his eternal happiness and the objective uncertainty that stems from objective thought. There exists, as it were, a tension between our concern for ourselves and our inability to grasp truth objectively; more precisely the existential truths that matter to us mostly, such as the existence of God for example. It is this tension that pushes one to have faith. Gouwens adequately addresses this, in stating that "the passion of a person who seeks to relate to God despairs over reaching an objective proof that God exists, and so in faith grasps God 'by virtue of the infinite passion of inwardness.'"⁵⁵ Moreover, in Alessandri's reading we see that pathos as a transformative form of passion, is closely linked with the notion of faith as a consequence of uncertainty⁵⁶. She writes that, "faith means *living* as though something were objectively true when we can't know it."⁵⁷

It was critical to initiate an investigation into Kierkegaard's category of religiousness by dealing with his understanding of subjectivity. First and foremost, because according to Climacus, becoming subjective is the highest possible task set for a human being. There is nothing higher for an existing individual to do, than to become subjective and Climacus offers specific reasons for subjectivity's preeminence. This does not necessarily mean that Kierkegaard wanted to do away with pure reason, or with objectivity as such, and that he pleads for a philosophy or a life of pure subjectivity. All of Kierkegaard's philosophical system is rooted in the realization that objectivity and objective reflection don't offer anything of substantial relevance for the living subject to base his existence upon. Instead, the realm where one asks about his relation to truth, the realm of the subjective, is where one finds the most existentially satisfying answers.

By being the focus on the 'how of one's relating, rather than the 'what' of the things we relate to, subjectivity offers us a crucial set of characteristics, according to which we can direct our lives and become truly relating selves. These characteristics consist of: 1) a passionate commitment to, and concern for, our lives and our own being, and 2) relating to all of this through faith, given the tension that exists between the uncertainty of objective thought and our infinite concern for ourselves. All of this must be understood in light of what Climacus called *an eternal happiness*. This notion, despite of having a very Christian character, is crucial even to a non-religious or secular reading of religiousness, which I will come to highlight in the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 171-172.

⁵⁵ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 104.

⁵⁶ Alessandri, "The Strenuous and Sufficient Task," page unknown. [my italics]

⁵⁷ Ibid. [my italics]

final chapter. The idea of eternal happiness, is one to which we must relate absolutely. Absolutely relating to this eternal happiness, means more precisely: passionately and faithfully. Passionately, because only in a state of passion is one truly and infinitely concerned with one's own wellbeing. And likewise, faithfully, since reason and objective reflection cannot help him grasp this concept. It is faith that pushes us over the edge, into the realm of subjectivity.

With this first part carried out, we have arrived at the central aim of our thesis: a re-reading or reinterpretation of Kierkegaard's category of religiousness that, amidst its religious nature, highlights its secular relevance. In the next chapter, I will examine what makes the category of religiousness more than, or different from, mere subjectivity. I have argued that subjectivity is, in fact, a prelude or introduction to a religious existence. I noted that there are similarities between these two realms, yet it seems as if religiousness requires something extra, another step or move forward. Becoming religious, requires something more of us than mere subjectivity. This matter will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: The Category of Religiousness

In this second chapter, I take up Climacus' notion of religiousness. Recall that, at the end of the previous chapter, I stated that there seems to be a difference between mere subjectivity and religiousness. This question is crucial, and will be central, to this chapter. Also, in the preceding chapter I argued that subjectivity, in the Climacian account, constitutes a prelude or introduction to the realm of religiousness. It did so, in a way that it requires of us a set of dialectic-pathetic skills. These skills enable us to become truly religious individuals. More precisely, they are: 1) a passionate commitment to, and concern for, our personal lives and our own being, and 2) relating to all of this through faith, given the existing tension between the uncertainty of objective thought and our infinite concern for ourselves. As stressed above, these characteristics are existentially required of us if we want to relate to our absolute *τέλος*, an eternal happiness. This term obviously stems from a very Christian tradition and for that reason, will also be crucial to Climacus' account of religiousness. As I have set out in the introduction, the scope of this thesis is to offer a secular re-reading of the passages on religiousness proposed in the *Postscript*. Therefore, I make use of the structure and content of Climacus' account of subjectivity to argue for a non-religious reading of the category of religiousness. If we want to know what the exact relationship is between subjectivity and religiousness in Climacus' account, we must find out how one is introduced into religiousness.

2.1 The individual's Introduction to Religiousness

In *Kierkegaard's Anthropology of the Self: Ethico-Religious and Social Dimensions of Selfhood*, Domingo Sousa states that, according to Kierkegaard, "the religious life begins precisely with the task of seeking the highest good."⁵⁸ This means that, as soon as an individual takes up the task of seeking the highest good, he has taken the first step on the path to religiousness. Relating ourselves to an eternal happiness was also the task of subjectivity. In this way, it validates our claim that subjectivity is, in fact, a necessary prelude to a religious life, but also, that the notion of an eternal happiness is of equal importance to both accounts. What is religiousness exactly, in Kierkegaard's understanding? Throughout the *Postscript*, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard is out to criticize the religious spirit of his contemporaries and previous Christian traditions. More precisely, his criticism lies in his claim that, in his historical and geographical context, Christianity is considered to be something given. That it is, "assumed that we are all Christians."⁵⁹ The problem of his era, he claims, is that being Christian is so much taken for granted, that no one goes on questioning it anymore. Let alone that anyone truly lives a truly religious, Christian existence. This criticism goes even further when Climacus writes, with regards to the man that doubts his Christianity, that

⁵⁸ Domingos Sousa, "Kierkegaard's Anthropology of the Self: Ethico-Religious and Social Dimensions of Selfhood." *The Heythrop Journal* LIII 53, vol. 1 (2012): 42.

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 44.

if someone were to say plainly and innocently that he was worried for himself, that as far he was concerned it might not be quite right for him to call himself a Christian, he would not exactly suffer persecution or be put to death. But angry glances would come his way and people would say: 'How tiresome to make such a fuss about nothing; why can't he behave like the rest of us who are all Christians? He's just like F. F. who can't wear a hat on his head but wants to be out of the ordinary.' And should he happen to be married, his wife would say to him, 'Dearest husband, how can you get such notions into your head? Aren't you a Christian? Aren't you a Dane, and doesn't the geography book tell us that the prevailing religion in Denmark is Lutheran Christianity? You aren't a Jew, or a Mohammedan; so what can you be?'⁶⁰

Kierkegaard himself was dissatisfied with the false and simplistic religious lives of his contemporaries. By using the humorist approach of his pseudonym, he writes that,

it is a childish form of religiousness, for example, once a week to seek as it were God's permission to make merry all the following week, and then again the following Sunday to beg leave for the next week, by going to church and hearing the priest say that we are always to keep in mind that a human being is capable of absolutely nothingⁱⁱⁱ. (...) All religiousness of this kind, by going to church once a week, absolves itself from taking the God-relationship along in everything every day. On Sunday, it obtains permission – not quite like the child, to make merry all week long – but all week long not thinking more about God.⁶¹

As Westphal has argued, Climacus' satirical account is "a lucid confluence of Kierkegaard's criticism of both Hegelianism and Christendom."⁶² With the passage above, we can grasp Kierkegaard's own understanding of what he believed religiousness should be. It is precisely in light of the critique of, and discontent with, the a-religious spirit of his temporaries that Kierkegaard will develop his own understanding of what it means to be a truly religious individual. He states this in the following way: "So the religiousness that is to go further than the Middle Ages must, in its godly reflection, find an expression to the effect that on Monday the religious person is to exist in the same, and must exist on Monday in the same categories."⁶³ In this primordial outset of Climacus' understanding of religiousness, he introduces the idea that true religiousness is not just about going to church every Sunday, asking for God's redemption, while pursuing other, more earthly ends for the rest of the week. Instead, for

⁶⁰ Ibid., 44-45.

⁶¹ Ibid., 398.

⁶² Westphal, "Climacus on Subjectivity," 139

⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 398.

Kierkegaard, a truly religious individual must reside in religious categories at all times, not just for the brief moment of Sunday mornings, but for every other day of the week as well. Being truly religious, according to Kierkegaard, means being constantly aware of the relationship we have with God, and, accordingly, constantly acting and behaving towards this relationship. Not just on Sunday must one reside in religious categories, but also all other days of the week must he be aware of his unavoidable relationship with God. Being religious, in this way, is not just something one does occasionally. Rather, it must be done on an everyday basis, or in other words: in existing.

2.2 Religiousness as an Absolute Relation with the Absolute

One is thus introduced into a religious existence by taking up the task of highest good. Taking up this task, the relation to an eternal happiness, must be done by virtue of a set of existential characteristics and virtues that one appropriates by becoming subjective. Climacus writes that, “the highly honoured speaker forgets that religiousness is inwardness, that inwardness is the individual’s relation to himself before God”⁶⁴ This shows that, in Climacus’ account, religiousness, as an individual relation to God, is a matter of personal inwardness and requires subjectivity of us. Inwardness is subjectivity at its highest. That religiousness, just like subjectivity, is an affair of inwardness, becomes even more clear from Climacus’ statement that, “hidden religiousness is true religiousness, the hidden inwardness in one who is truly religious, who even uses all his skill just so that no one will notice anything special about him.”⁶⁵ From this, we conclude that religiousness is also a matter of the shaping of the heart, the development of long-term personal emotions and a set of particular virtues, something which Gouwens⁶⁶ has argued. Consequently, and in light of what we have shown before, there exist similarities between a subjective attitude and a religious one. Religiousness is about the existing subject’s absolute relation to God. Besides that, the ontological necessity of our relation with God is most clear in one of his other pseudonymous works, titled *The Sickness unto Death* (hereafter *Sickness*). At the very beginning of the first chapter of the *Sickness*, Kierkegaard offers an outline of the structure of the Self. He writes that, “man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors.”⁶⁷ Although a substantial analysis of his anthropology is out of scope for this research, an important aspect to touch upon here is the established nature of the *Self* which Kierkegaard offers. To his definition, he adds that,

Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another. If this relation which relates itself

⁶⁴ Ibid., 366.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 398.

⁶⁶ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 93.

⁶⁷ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 9.

to its own self is constituted by another, the relation doubtless is the third term, but this relation (the third term) is in turn a relation relating itself *to that which constituted the whole relation*.⁶⁸

In this passage, Kierkegaard mentions that the human self, which is on a first level already a relationship with itself, has to be either self-constituted or constituted by another, independent power. Although Kierkegaard, or at least his pseudonym Anti-Climacus, seriously considers both options and proposes both options, it is undoubtable that he is convinced that the only way man could have come to exist is by being established by another. This understanding draws upon the Christian idea that God is the absolute creator of all life, including that of man. Our own existence, along with all of life on earth, is grounded in God, and thus it is God who established the relation which man is. In this way, our relationship with God, within the Kierkegaardian framework is of an ontological necessity, since it makes up the foundations of the *Self* that one is.

Even though his anthropological account is less crucial to our analysis, I introduced it here because it shows the necessary ontological ground of man's relation with God in Kierkegaard's religious philosophy. Because of his ground in God, man is a self which has to relate to Him if he wants to become a true self. We have to enter a relationship with God in order to become true selves. In other words, man has to become religious. For Kierkegaard, becoming religious essentially comes down to establishing an absolute relation with the Absolute⁶⁹, with God. The first step towards establishing this relationship with God is taking up the task of an eternal happiness, which, in other words, means taking up the task of becoming subjective. In this way, we see where the category of subjectivity relates to that of religiousness and how these two presuppose one another.

Maintaining a relationship with God is ontologically grounded in man's being. Like this, if one wants to become a true self, one must enter into a relationship with the power that established him. Becoming religious begins with taking up the task of the highest good, an eternal happiness. This was proof of the crucial primordially of subjectivity. In this way, subjectivity and religiousness are closely related to one another, perhaps even indistinguishable. The one cannot be thought without the other. The specific outline of a religious attitude is essentially the same as the outline of subjectivity. Religiousness is a matter of maintaining an absolute relation with the Absolute and it is subjectivity that incites in us the precise requirements for this relationship. However, what religiousness means in Kierkegaard's work does not just become clear from its fundamental affiliation with the notion

⁶⁸ Ibid. [my italics]

⁶⁹ Brayton Polka, "The Single Individual in Kierkegaard: Religious or Secular? Part 1, *The European Legacy*, no 19 vol. 3 (2014): 313.

of subjectivity, but becomes even more clear when we look at the specific form or actual content of this relation with God, which the existing subject must maintain in existing.

2.3 The Pathetic-Dialectic Characteristics of Religiousness

The characteristics of a religious attitude become more distinguished in light of what we have seen earlier in the Postscript with regards to subjectivity. Climacus mentions that, any existence-problem, like that of a relation to an eternal happiness, requires a set of pathetic-dialectic skills.⁷⁰ “The element of pathos”, he writes, “is in the first part, since a person’s passion culminates in the relation of pathos to an eternal happiness.”⁷¹ The main focus of the work is whether an eternal happiness can be based on something historical, in this case Christianity – a historical phenomenon which offers its followers the promise of an eternal happiness. This problem, for Climacus, is pathetic-dialectic in nature. First of all, the element of pathos which he describes here, refers to what we have shown earlier, that pathos is the exact mode of subjectivity which is expressed in the existing individual’s relation to an eternal happiness. “To love is straightforward pathos; to relate to an eternal happiness is, (...) straightforward pathos.”⁷² For this reason, the problem of an eternal happiness is pathetic in nature, since it requires an existential pathos of the individual who wishes to relate to his eternal happiness. Relating to an eternal happiness, must be done with pathos, in such a way that our whole existence is transformed. This shows that subjectivity is not merely a prelude or a preparation for becoming religious, but rather that these two categories are so intertwined with one another that they cannot be thought separately in Kierkegaard’s system. As I have shown, subjectivity is a matter of taking up the task of an eternal happiness with existential pathos. As soon as we do this, we are introduced into a religious existence, for this eternal happiness is something promised to us by Christianity. As shown, it is by virtue of deepening oneself in subjectivity and inwardness that one truly comes to relate to his absolute τέλος.

The second aspect of the problem is dialectic and is, however, closely intertwined with the pathetic aspect. According to Climacus, its dialectic element “lies in the fact that the eternal happiness to which the individual is assumed to relate with proper pathos is itself *subject to a dialectic* through further conceptual characteristic which in turn have the effect of an incitement to bring the passion to its extreme.”⁷³ In this passage, Climacus clarifies the dialectical aspect of the existing subject’s relation to the promise of an eternal happiness. He writes that the pathos that is required for relating to an eternal happiness is “subject to a dialectic” and precisely because it is subject to this dialectic, it has “the effect of an incitement

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 323.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. [my italics]

to bring the passion to its extreme.”⁷⁴ What precisely is the dialectic he is here speaking of? I follow Arnold Come in his understanding that the dialectic to which Kierkegaard commits himself does not have its roots in a process of thought, but rather in concrete human existence⁷⁵. More precisely, this means that dialectics as the resolving of contradictions is not a purely reflective process or one of pure thought, as was the case in Hegel, for example. Come argues that, for Kierkegaard, “dialectic does not describe a mode of thought which by abstraction, deduction and speculation, one uses as a method for finding and capturing a unity that overcomes the bewildering contradictions or antitheses of human existence.”⁷⁶ How should we understand Kierkegaard’s dialectics? He continues by adding that “rather, ‘dialectic’ refers to the dynamics of ‘movement’ (*kinesis*) between or among the ‘factors’ (*Moment*) or ‘determinants’ (*Bestemmelse*) that are operative in human existence, not conceived as a general universal but in the life of a particular, unique individual (...).”⁷⁷ This means that, in Kierkegaard’s thought, dialectics is in the first place grounded in human existence. Rather than being a rational and cognitive process of overcoming certain contradictions, resolving them into a higher unity, it is a matter of real and actual movement, a *kinesis* that occurs between the factors or determinants of human existence. In light of what I sketched earlier – that the individual relating to an absolute $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ in an absolute way, must transform his existence absolutely – we now come to understand that precisely this is the dialectical aspect of the problem. Dialectics, for Kierkegaard, is the process that occurs when the individual makes the passionate decision of transforming his whole existence, and, on the ground of this, overcomes, or at least makes an attempt to overcome, the contradictions that lie at the roots of his existence. Come continues that “for him [Kierkegaard] the resolution of the ‘immense contradiction’ will be achieved only as thinking ends with passionate act, a willful leap, within and not outside the realm of stubborn irreducible actuality or existence.”⁷⁸ In light of Hegelian dialectics – which considers dialectics to be a rational affair, and, by virtue of thought, possibly enables us to overcome and mediate life’s contradictions⁷⁹ – Kierkegaard formulates his own dialectic as the unavoidable consequence of passionately relating to our absolute $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ and transforming our whole existence in light of this. Precisely this, is the dialectical element described in the *Postscript*. Pathos and dialectics are so intertwined and critical to subjectivity and religiousness, that Kierkegaard speaks about the pathetic-dialectic.

In this way, we have come to better understand why Kierkegaard precisely speaks of the pathetic-dialectic. Recall that in the introduction to the *Postscript*, he distinguished between

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Arnold B Come, “Kierkegaard’s Method: Does He Have One?” *Kierkegaardiana* 14 (1988): 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Julie E. Maybee, “Hegel’s Dialectics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta. URL: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/hegel-dialectics/>>.

an objective and a subjective problem. The former, is about Christianity's truth.⁸⁰ It is about asking whether the doctrine of Christianity is true or false. In contradistinction with this, he defines the subjective problem, which he considers not to be about the truth of Christianity, but rather about "the individual's relation to Christianity."⁸¹ Although Climacus offers both possibilities, he still clearly states that his personal preference goes out, not to the actual truth of Christianity, but to the individual's "own relation to such a teaching."⁸² The reason for this, as I have demonstrated, is because Christianity is the historical phenomenon which bestows upon the individual the promise of an eternal happiness. He writes that, "there awaits a highest good called an eternal happiness" and that "Christianity contracts to provide one with that good."⁸³ It is Christianity which "wants to make the single individual eternally happy".⁸⁴ It is precisely for that reason, that Kierkegaard favors the subjective problem over the objective problem. As the work continues, the problem which Kierkegaard keeps on mentioning is the subjective, it is about whether the individual's eternal happiness can be based on something historical, namely Christianity. This subjective existence problem is pathetic-dialectic in nature according to the author. The element of pathos, referred to the fact that taking up the task of relating to our absolute $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ is one of a passionate, infinite concern for one's eternal happiness. This was also the prerequisite for subjectivity: by passionately relating oneself to his eternal happiness, one deepens oneself in subjectivity.

The dialectical element, on the other hand, can be accredited to the fact that in relating passionately, or absolutely to one's absolute $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, one evokes the changing or transforming of one's whole existence, in order to resolve its contradictions. Relating absolutely, for Climacus, means renouncing all relative ends in order to achieve the absolute end of one's existence: an eternal happiness. In this way, one moves through a dialectical process of kinesis, or movement, and realizes the possibility of overcoming the contradictions of one's existence. Kierkegaard's understanding of dialectics differs from that of Hegel, who sees dialectics as a rational thought process. Instead, for Kierkegaard, dialectics is a process through which, in existing and by virtue of an infinite passionate concern, one transforms one's whole existence. As a consequence, one renounces all relative ends and initiates a movement of change in which one's existence is transformed dialectically.

2.4 Finalizing the Project: Two Types of Religiousness

Towards the end of the *Postscript*, Climacus comes to finalize his understanding of religiousness and the way in which it draws upon the individual's becoming subjective. He

⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 18.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

makes a distinction between two types of religiousness, which he respectively calls Religiousness A and Religiousness B.

On the one hand, there is Religiousness A, which is precisely the type of religiousness that has been extensively described in these pages, as well as in most of the *Postscript*. Westphal defines it in terms of a task and a threefold pathos.⁸⁵ First of all, the task he describes, refers to the existential task of relating “at one time absolutely to one’s absolute τέλος and relatively to what is relative.”⁸⁶ This “desiring and hoping absolutely for only the absolute good and only relatively for all finite goods”⁸⁷ meant “the transformation in which, in existing, the existing person changes everything in his existence in relation to that highest good.”⁸⁸ The pathetic character of this type of religiousness became visible when an existing individual relates absolutely to the notion of an eternal happiness. Relating absolutely, required an existential pathos, a passionate concern for the infinite. Or, in other words, for the Absolute. As I have argued, Kierkegaard focuses on the ‘how’ of one’s relating rather than the ‘what’ of this relating. The *Postscript*’s main concern is the way in which one relates to the infinite category of God, rather than the specific content or truth hood of what one is relating to. As the author mentions, the “how at its maximum is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is itself the truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and in this way, subjectivity is truth.”⁸⁹ In Kierkegaard’s account, it is precisely by maximizing the ‘how’ of our relation by virtue of the passion of the infinite, along with the objective uncertainty involved in this existential task, that one becomes subjective. Accordingly, this will also enable him to become religious. Towards the end, Kierkegaard comes to conclude his system of religiousness as subjectivity, or subjective religiousness. I speak here of subjective religiousness because I have emphasized the closed nature of Kierkegaard’s system. I refer to the idea that subjectivity and religiousness are not two distinct categories in which one can reside. According to this system, becoming religious happens by virtue of taking up the relation to one’s eternal happiness and thus unavoidably, by taking up the task of becoming subjective. Some remarks on this will be made later in the conclusion.

Kierkegaard finalizes his project as he continues to clarify the distinction between Religiousness A and Religiousness B. The former, as said before, is precisely the type of religiousness described in this thesis, as well as the one handled most extensively in the *Postscript*. Westphal categorized this specific type of religiousness as being “defined in terms of a task and a threefold pathos.”⁹⁰ The task he mentions and which should have been made

⁸⁵ Westphal, “Climacus on Subjectivity,” 145.

⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 325.

⁸⁷ Westphal, “Climacus on Subjectivity,” 145.

⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 327.

⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 170-171.

⁹⁰ Westphal, “Climacus on Subjectivity,” 145.

clear by now, is that of relating “at one time absolutely to one’s absolute τέλος and relatively to what is relative.”⁹¹ Besides the task of religiousness, which I have highlighted extensively, a second important aspect of the category of religiousness is the threefold pathos that is associated with it.

The first kind of pathos that comes with this task is that of *resignation*. Gouwens describes it as the “willingness to sacrifice the relative for the sake of one’s relation to the absolute.”⁹² Resignation refers to the individual’s willingness to resign from all that is relative, so that he can acquire and enjoy the absolute good, namely an eternal happiness. He writes that, to “relate absolutely to the absolute τέλος the individual must have practiced the renunciation of relative ends.”⁹³ It is by renouncing, or resigning from, relative ends, that one becomes truly capable of entering into an absolute relation with God. Climacus names resignation the “*initial* expression of existential pathos”⁹⁴ because it marks the beginning of our relating to an eternal happiness. It *initiates* us into something, namely into an absolute relation with our absolute τέλος. Like this, resignation is presupposed in Climacus’ understanding of religiousness, where the task is “to relate absolutely to the absolute τέλος and at the same time relatively to relative ends.”⁹⁵ An absolute relation to our absolute τέλος entails this resignation.

The second element that makes up the pathos of religiousness, is that of *suffering*. According to Climacus, it is not the initial, but the “essential expression of existential pathos.”⁹⁶ Suffering is critical to religiousness, as Climacus writes that “that what marks religious action is suffering.”⁹⁷ According to Gouwens, this religious suffering is the result that follows as soon as one realizes the difficult nature of the task⁹⁸. The difficulty lies precisely in this, that the existing religious individual is situated in immediacy, in a world of finite, relative ends and in taking up the existential task, has to resign from and even renounce these immediate, relative ends. Precisely because of this resignation he is continually dying in immediacy by wanting to relate absolutely to the absolute category of eternal happiness. The pain that comes from this continual dying, is what Climacus describes as the religious pathos of suffering. This is exactly why, for Kierkegaard, “that what marks religious action is suffering.”⁹⁹

⁹¹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 325.

⁹² Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 111.

⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 362.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 325. [my italics]

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁹⁸ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 111.

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 363.

Finally, the third pathos described by Climacus, is the pathos of *guilt*.¹⁰⁰ He defines guilt as the “*decisive* expression of existential pathos.”¹⁰¹ Just as suffering marked the individual’s relating to an eternal happiness, guilt is the decisive expression of the relationship.¹⁰² It is in the category of guilt that the relation of the individual to his eternal happiness becomes most apparent. Climacus writes that “the totality of guilt comes about for the individual by putting his guilt, be it a single one, however trivial, together with the relation to an eternal happiness. (...) The person who does not relate to this never comes to grasp himself as totally or essentially guilty.”¹⁰³ Kierkegaard remains rather obscure in his definition of guilt, so in order to know what guilt precisely means here, we need to look at what other scholars have said about this. According to Gouwens¹⁰⁴ and Westphal¹⁰⁵, guilt marks the individual’s awareness that one has not done what he should have done in order to come into a relation with the absolute. Or, in other words, that because of the shortcomings of his efforts, he is still removed far away from relating absolutely to an eternal happiness. In this way, guilt builds upon the category of suffering.

By defining this threefold pathos, Kierkegaard concludes his understanding of Religiousness A. However, he does not end his project here. In addition, he goes on to define another form of religiousness, which he calls religiousness B. Both religiousness A as well as B, are pathetic-dialectic in nature, however they still differ from one another. Religiousness B is different from religiousness A, in such a way that the former is considered a “paradoxical religiousness.”¹⁰⁶ He claims that “religiousness A is by no means undialectical, but it is not paradoxically dialectical.”¹⁰⁷ Religiousness B, just like religiousness A, is dialectical, however it has “the dialectical in second place”¹⁰⁸ and the paradoxical in first. What does Climacus precisely mean with this? With regards to religiousness A, he writes that it is “the dialectic of taking to heart, it is the relation to an eternal happiness that *is not conditioned by something*, but is the dialectical taking to heart of the relation itself conditioned alone, that is, by the taking to heart.”¹⁰⁹ Climacus’ mentioning of the fact that “it is not conditioned by something”, informs us that religiousness A is, in fact, an immanent religion, since it is not conditioned by, or depending on, a transcendent or historical revelation of God.¹¹⁰ Rather, religiousness A is the existing individual’s *attempt* to stake his eternal happiness on God, without him having any

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 440. [my italics]

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 442.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 443.

¹⁰⁴ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 118.

¹⁰⁵ Westphal, “Climacus on Subjectivity,” 146.

¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 465.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. [my emphasis]

¹¹⁰ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 110.

transcendent or historical ground to do so.¹¹¹ This is where religiousness B differs from A, since religiousness B,

the paradoxical religiousness, (...) or the religiousness that has the dialectical in second place, does, on the other hand, posit conditions in such a way that they are not inwardness's deeper dialectical taking to heart, but a definite something which more closely defines the eternal happiness (...), not by defining the individual's appropriation of it more closely, but defining more closely the eternal happiness itself, though not as a task for thinking, but precisely as paradox, as repulsing, for there to be new pathos¹¹²

Kierkegaard makes use of a typical Christian vocabulary, especially the term of paradox, in order to introduce religiousness B as the specifically Christian religion. Religiousness B, must be understood as actual Christian Faith. That "religiousness B has the dialectical in second place"¹¹³, becomes clearer further, when he states that what is "specific to Christianity is the dialectical in the second place."¹¹⁴ Religiousness A is also dialectic in nature, however is different from religiousness B, since it is not paradoxically dialectical. Religiousness A, as an immanent religion, is merely an attempt of staking one's eternal happiness on God, without there being any historical ground to do so. It is a matter of pure personal inwardness. In other words, in religiousness A, the individual finds the edifying – the God-relationship – within himself. While in religiousness B, which is actual Christianity, God reveals himself historically, in his son, Jesus Christ. Climacus states that, as one enters religiousness B,

the edifying is a something outside the individual; the individual does not find the edifying by finding the God-relationship within himself but relates to something outside in order to find the edification. The paradox is that this apparently aesthetic relationship, the individual relating to something outside himself, should nevertheless be the absolute God-relationship.¹¹⁵

This is a very interesting passage, because here we come to truly understand Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness in all of its forms. Religiousness A is a matter of a personal, faithful relation to God without there having occurred a historical or transcendental revelation. It is a purely immanent form of religiousness. A personal, passionate, and faithful relation of the individual to his absolute τέλος. Religiousness B, on the other hand, implies the historical revelation of that transcendent being, outside of the individual. This is of great importance,

¹¹¹ Stephen C Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Amherst, New York: Humanities Press, 1983; reprinted by Humanity Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 1999).

¹¹² Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 465-466.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 465.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 469-470.

given that Climacus focuses on the adverbial character of both subjectivity and religiousness.¹¹⁶ In subjectivity, the focus is on the 'how' of one's relating, rather than the 'what' or the object to which one relate. Climacus' philosophy is, before anything else, one of subjectivity, of personal inwardness, mostly characterized by a passionate, infinite concern for one's eternal happiness. This was most evident in the case of religiousness A, which I believe to be nothing more than the culmination of his outlook on subjectivity. With the introduction of religiousness B, Climacus takes a surprising turn. He no longer focuses purely on this 'how' of our relating, but introduces the outside presence of a transcendent being and shifts his focus to the 'what'. His project changes as soon as he claims that religiousness B, in being the true Christianity, posit certain conditions which more closely define the eternal happiness, "not by defining the individual's appropriation of it more closely, but [by] defining more closely the eternal happiness itself".¹¹⁷ Strangely enough, with the concept of religiousness B, Kierkegaard turns from defining the 'how' of our relation to an eternal happiness, to more closely wanting to define 'what' of this relation, namely an eternal happiness. He does this by naming an eternal happiness "precisely as paradox, as repulsing, for there to be now pathos."¹¹⁸ It is his use of the familiar Christian theology, and more specifically his use of the term paradox, which points to the requisite of the presence of God for true Religiousness B, or true Christianity.

Climacus counters this step from religiousness A to religiousness B, however, the latter requires the former: A must first be present in the individual before there is even a possibility of entering B.¹¹⁹ He acknowledges honestly the sufficiency of religiousness A, by saying that "my own opinion is that religiousness A (within whose boundaries I have my existence) is so strenuous for a human being as always to be task enough."¹²⁰ Even despite the fact that he describes religiousness B as true Christianity and that it is most likely of a higher order than A, "it is possible for someone existing religiously to express their relation to an eternal happiness (immortality, eternal life) outside Christianity, and that surely has been the case."¹²¹ Strangely enough, Climacus counters the step that is required from religiousness A to B. Even though he considers religiousness B of a higher order than religiousness A, he does admit that religiousness A is in a way, strenuous and sufficient enough for the existing individual to attempt to realize. I believe that this peculiar movement, adds to the argument of this thesis. It affirms that according to Kierkegaard, what truly matters is not the object, or the 'what' of our relating. What matters rather is that in existing, relating to something, whether it is an absolute God or something else, is a matter of 'how' we do it.

¹¹⁶ Westphal, "Climacus on Subjectivity," 141.

¹¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 466.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 468.

Kierkegaard is mostly concerned with formulating the specific characteristics of this 'how', and therefore, builds upon the realm of subjectivity. He introduces religiousness B to finalize his Christian project, however, still admits that a more premature form of religiousness, one that is not depending on the revelation of a transcendent being, is already sufficient enough for the existing individual. This claim becomes even more assertible if we look at another statement in the *Postscript*. In this, Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness as subjectivity comes to its culmination. It goes as follows:

If someone living in the midst of Christianity enters the house of God, the house of the true God, knowing the true conception of God, and now prays but prays untruly, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol – where then is there more truth? The one prays truly to God though he worships an idol; the other prays untruly to the true God and therefore truly worships an idol.¹²²

I believe this passage adequately captures the subjective foundations of the Kierkegaardian system of religiousness. Accordingly, it supports every claim I have made in this thesis. Climacus mentions two cases of people praying to God. In the first case, one knows the true conception of the true God, however he prays falsely and untruly. In the other case, one prays truly and faithfully with the right intentions, but worships an idol or an idolatrous image of God. He argues that the second individual, who prays truly and with the right intentions to a false God, is more truthful than the other. This is precisely why, according to Kierkegaard, "truth is subjectivity."¹²³

One could correctly state that this example still compares two different fundamentally religious individuals, rather than a religious and a secular one. Both of them appropriated a religious truth and are thus considered to be, to a certain extent, religious. In light of my argument, it would be more significant if it compared a religious individual with a secular one, in order to find out whose existence is more truthful. Nonetheless, I believe that this example is archetypical for the nature of Kierkegaard's system of truth as subjectivity. It stresses the adverbial character of what being religious precisely means. In this example, the individual who prays with existential, transformative pathos and faith to a false or perhaps even non-existing God, is still more in truth than the individual who has the true understanding of God yet prays with the wrong intentions and lacks the transformative characteristics that are required of him. At the core of this example, lies Kierkegaard's argument that what matters mostly, is a pathos-filled transformation of one's existence in light of uncertainties, such as the uncertainty that God exists. In this way, it does not only do justice to the nature of

¹²² Ibid., 169.

¹²³ Ibid., 159.

Kierkegaard's religious system, but also – if read more fundamentally – accommodates an immense secular validity. This secular validity, is what I will be highlighting in the final chapter. I attempt to find out whether someone who does not hold any convictions in religious categories like God, the absolute, or, more critically, the notion of eternal happiness, can still find consolation in the analysis carried out in this thesis and more generally, in Kierkegaardian philosophy.

Chapter 3: The Secular Relevance of Religiousness

In this final chapter, I aim to do two things. First of all, I will address two readings of Kierkegaard who belong to a scholarly tradition that is convinced that his philosophy is strictly religious in nature. These interpretations stand in perpendicular opposition to my own reading. In the first place, I address Michael Burns' claim that Kierkegaard offers to oppose religious existence against more secular versions. Moreover, Burns' argues that he wanted there to be an infinite contrast between these two.¹²⁴ If this were true, it would undermine all my previous efforts, since I have aimed to offer a reading of the category of religiousness that emphasizes its secular value or validity. Therefore, I will first address Burns' claim and argue why I believe it to be incorrect.

A second reading which belongs to the same series of scholarly interpretations, is that of Andrew Torrance. In his book, *The Freedom to Become a Christian: A Kierkegaardian Account of Human Transformation in a Relationship with God*, he claims that the transformative journey, encompassed in becoming religious, is grounded in an active relationship with the God whom we encounter through the person of Jesus Christ¹²⁵. This, however, I do not believe to be wholly true. Torrance is convinced that the transformative journey of becoming religious can only be executed when one encounters God, through his Son, Jesus Christ. I have argued instead, that this transformation of our entire existence is already actualized in religiousness A, who turned out to be an immanent form of religiousness – thus not drawing upon a historical revelation of God. Rather, the transformation of one's existence that religiousness A initiates, is grounded in an unavoidable unknowability of the truths of Christianity, including the existence of God. It is precisely this unknowability which, by means of a passionate interest and a faithful commitment, engages this transformation in the existing individual, rather than the revelation of God in time, as is the case in religiousness B. This, I have shown earlier in this thesis but will touch upon again in light of Torrance's claim. By handling these two readings, I aim to show that Kierkegaard's system, despite its religious nature, more secularly oriented interpretations are equally possible. The key to this, I will argue, lies not in the use of its fundamentally religious concepts, but rather in the rhetorical power of its more deeply hidden message.

Secondly, this chapter aims to elaborate more on my own, secularly-oriented reading of Kierkegaard's system. In this way, I wish to add to the debate on the nature of his philosophy and offer a convincing argument for the secular validity of his work. I will more distinctively draw out why precisely the category of religiousness – despite the fact that it draws upon very

¹²⁴ Burns, "The Self and Society," 630.

¹²⁵ Andrew B Torrance, *The Freedom to become a Christian: A Kierkegaardian account of Human Transformation in Relationship with God* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.), 2.

religious notions such as that of an eternal happiness – can bear validity for non-religious individuals too. We can see that the different functions of religiousness do not induce the same things for the religious as they do for the secular individual, if we focus on the strict definitions of the concepts upon which it draws. Therefore, Kierkegaard's system does not hold equal validity for the religious person as it does for the secular. The religious individual and the secular person both value these notions differently. However, I do believe that, despite the religious nature of Kierkegaard's system, a secular reading can still be argued for, if we are willing to look, not at its substantive concepts, but rather at its broader mobilizing aptness. I will not just elaborate on Westphal's interpretation, but will also explore a similar reading, namely that of Mariana Alessandri. Both she and Westphal belong to a series of interpreters who argue for the broader philosophical and existential relevance of Kierkegaard's oeuvre. They oppose themselves to the school of thought to which Burns and Torrance pertain.

3.1 Kierkegaard As a Strictly Religious Thinker: Burns' and Torrance's view

Although previously in this thesis I have drawn upon, and referred to, his work regularly, I disagree with Burns' claim that it was one of Kierkegaard's goals to set religious existence against more secular forms. Moreover, he argues that Kierkegaard wants there to be an infinite contrast between the two, in such a way that the properly religiously-existing individual would be nothing but an offence to the secularity of the established order.¹²⁶ If this were to be true, then the whole aim of this thesis, namely to argue for a secular re-reading of the category of religiousness would be undermined. Therefore, I take some time to address this point. By all means, it is undoubtful that it was indeed one of Kierkegaard's goals to redefine what it meant to be religious, or how to be a true Christian. However, from the *Postscript*, I drew that Kierkegaard in the first place disagreed mostly with the untrue and presumptuous attitude of his contemporary fellow Danes, rather than wanting to out his concern about the rise of secularism in his days. Recall the earlier example, about two individuals praying to God, one truly and the other untruly. If Kierkegaard's true concern lay with attacking secularism in order to tackle its rise in 19th century Denmark, would he not have introduced a secular individual and a truly religious one and opposed them to each other, in order to argue why the religious individual is more in truth than the secular one? Would he not have build his inquiry around the opposition between religious existence and secular existence, in order to convince his reader that the former is higher and more enticing than the latter?

Instead, he erected his philosophy around redefining Christianity and religiousness. The *Postscript's* aim was to formulate an answer to the question, how could one become truly Christian or truly religious. It never focused on defining why one would have to become

¹²⁶ Burns, "The Self and Society," 630.

religious over secular. He attempted to define the true form of religiousness and did so by identifying more presumptuous forms, the kinds of religious attitudes of people assuming they were Christian. However, these individuals did not possess the virtues and characteristics which he deemed to be crucial for true religiousness. This reading of Kierkegaard's project seems more likely than the one Burns is offering.

Climacus asked himself at the beginning of the book, "How can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness Christianity promises?"¹²⁷ It was his main focus: to figure out how precisely he could participate in Christianity, and what was required of him if he wanted to do so. If he wanted to oppose secular existence against religious existence, as Burns claims, would he not have formulated an argument in which he tried to prove the existence of god objectively? In this way, he could have figured out once and for all why religiousness is of a higher order than secularity. If he truly wanted to enter the debate between religiousness and secularism, an objective debate for that sake, it seems most likely that he would have formulated arguments to disprove secularism. Instead, he did not aim to do so and, it can be argued for, that he did not want to enter this debate, precisely because of his conviction that these kinds of objective matters are always shrouded in absolute uncertainty. This was one of the central assumptions of the *Postscript*. Kierkegaard was aware that the existential matters upon which Christianity touches, are highly subjective affairs, precisely because they cannot be objectively grasped. The same thing goes up for the discussion of secularism versus religiousness. I believe that, given Kierkegaard's system and all its premises, there is ground to state that he was not interested in entering the objective debate between religiousness and secularism, one which would require of him an argument or ontological proof of God's existence. Only in this way the debate could be resolved. However, because of the uncertainty that comes with these matters, he opted to redefine what it meant to be truly religious and oppose it against the assumed and presumptuous religiousness he diagnosed in his contemporaries. In this way, the backdrop to which Kierkegaard formulates his message is not strictly secularism, but rather aesthetic forms of religious existence.¹²⁸

What points even more to this reading is the fact that the terms 'secular' and 'secularism' only appear very few times in the *Postscript*. The first time it is mentioned, is at page 337 of the 583 pages-long book (in the Hannay translation I have been referring to). Climacus writes that

In his innermost being the religious one is anything but a humorist; on the contrary, he is absolutely occupied with his God -relationship. Nor does he interpose the comic between himself and others in order to make them ridiculous, or to laugh at them (such an outward direction is away from religiousness). But since he dares not, by virtue of

¹²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 18.

¹²⁸ Alessandri, "The Strenuous and Sufficient Task," page unknown.

true religiousness being hidden inwardness, express his religiousness outwardly, *for that would secularize it*, he must be constantly discovering the contradiction.¹²⁹

He repeats here that true religiousness is, as we have seen, a matter of hidden inwardness, of maintaining an inner relationship with God. True religiousness is not outwardly expressible. Expressing this relation in an outward sense, in fact, secularizes it. The secularization Kierkegaard mentions, does not mean doing away with the relation, as we would commonly understand secularization. Rather, in the Climacus writings, it signifies an outward expression of one's relationship with God. In this way, his understanding of secularization – expressing one's relation with God outwardly – is a form of aestheticizing. This kind of religiousness, he considered to be a form of aesthetic existence, one that is diametrically opposed to true religious existence, precisely because of its lack of inwardness.

At its heart, Kierkegaard's theory does not do away with forms of secular existence, as long as they still meet the subjective requirements of an inner relation to some inconceivable truth and occur by virtue of faith and existential pathos. I will distinguish further in this chapter why the Kierkegaardian account of subjectivity carries existential value for secular individuals, despite its religious foundations and its obsessive use of theological concepts. To come back to Burns' claim, Kierkegaard does mention the secular or secularism – although only a very few times – but his understanding of secularism comes closer to aesthetic kinds of religious existence, in which the subject attempts to express his inner relation to God in an outward way. This only confirms that Kierkegaard's main concern lay with eliminating false, aesthetic forms of religiousness, in order to develop his own theory of what religiousness should be. Rather than wanting to enter the debate between secularism – as we traditionally understand it – and religiousness, Kierkegaard aimed to oppose aestheticized ways of religious existence, from true and genuine – so passionate, faithful, transformative – religious existence. As such, Burns' claim is not wholly valid. Accordingly, a secular re-reading of Kierkegaard's thought and his understanding of religiousness as subjectivity, is still worth pursuing.

Secondly, there is Torrance, who proposes a strictly religious reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy. According to him, the transformative journey upon which one embarks when he takes up the task of becoming religious, is grounded in an active relationship with the God who at all times is present with us, and, whom we get to encounter in and through the person of Jesus Christ¹³⁰. If this were true, the transformative journey of religiousness can only be realized by God's becoming historical. This was indeed the case in religiousness B, the transcendental type of religiousness which has the paradoxical (God) in first place. What then with religiousness A, upon which Kierkegaard has elaborated so much? We have seen that

¹²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 426. [my italics]

¹³⁰ Torrance, *The Freedom to Become a Christian*, 2.

religiousness A, is an immanent form of religiousness. It does not draw upon God's revelation in his son Jesus Christ, but rather, is the kind of religiousness in which the religious individual must commit himself to his relationship with God who is not known by him, by an act of faithful and passionate life-transformation. Becoming religious, in the case of religiousness A, is first of all characterized by the objective uncertainty, namely that God exists and that eternal happiness is promised to us. The truths of Christianity are, in the first place, a possibility, rather than a certainty. This type of religiousness, as we saw, required of us the existential, pathos-filled, commitment, which entails the transformation of one's existence. In this way, Torrance's claim is not wholly valid. The transformative journey upon which one embarks when taking up the task of becoming religious, is already executed in religiousness A and does not necessarily draw upon God's historical revelation.

In fact, with Westphal, we saw that religiousness A is characterized by a task and a threefold pathos.¹³¹ The task consisted of relating absolutely to one's absolute *τέλος* and relatively to all other ends. More precisely, this meant absolutely transforming one's existence and resigning from all relative ends when necessary. However, Climacus also described religiousness A, as an immanent kind of religiousness. As Gouwens wrote, it is immanent because it does not depend upon a transcendent or historical revelation but instead draws upon a universally available experience, namely the attempt of staking one's eternal happiness on God.¹³² This involved not knowing whether God truly exists. Someone who seeks to become religious, who seeks to relate to God despairs over an objective proof that God exists and so must grasp him in faith and by virtue of an infinite inward passion.¹³³

Climacus wrote, with regards to religiousness A, that "it is the relation to an eternal happiness that *is not conditioned by something*, but is the dialectic taking to heart of the relation itself conditioned alone, that is, by the taking to heart"¹³⁴ That it is not conditioned by something, points to the fact that it is an immanent type of religiousness, rather than a transcendental one. This type of religiousness, to which Kierkegaard has dedicated most of the *Postscript*, draws upon a possibility, rather than on God's historical revelation, as Torrance has claimed. In religiousness B, or actual Christianity, it certainly holds that the religious individual offers a faithful response to God which is revealed in history.¹³⁵ However, the transformative journey of religiousness, is first of all grounded in the possibility of staking one's eternal happiness on something uncertain. In this case: the possibility of God's existence. In this way, Torrance's claim is not wholly valid. The transformative journey can become anteriorly effectuated, long

¹³¹ Westphal, "Climacus on Subjectivity," 145.

¹³² Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker*, 110.

¹³³ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 104.

¹³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 465.

¹³⁵ Sousa, "Kierkegaard's Anthropology of the Self," 41.

before God has become historical. Moreover, Climacus claimed that religiousness A is, in fact, “so strenuous for a human being as always to be task enough.”¹³⁶ This disproves Torrance’s point even more. Climacus’ system of religiousness as subjectivity, requires of us a pathos-filled transformation of our lives and is, in the first place, grounded in an absolute uncertainty and possibility, rather than an objectively graspable truth. Like this, it is a lifelong task, one that is strenuous and sufficient enough for the existing individual. This will contribute to a secular reading of this category, upon which I will come back later in this chapter.

I touched upon these scholars, mainly because they both belong to a series of Kierkegaard scholars who read his work in a strict religious fashion. Both of their claims stand diametrically opposed to my own reading of Kierkegaard’s philosophy. In the first place, if it were to be correct, Burns’ claim would undermine everything I am arguing for in this thesis. I disagreed with his assertion that it was one of Kierkegaard’s goals to oppose religious existence from a secular one. Kierkegaard’s understanding of secularizing the relation we have with God, is not what we commonly regard as secularity. Instead, he considers it an act of making this inward relation into something outwardly expressible. Something he deemed impossible, since true religiousness requires of us a hidden inwardness. This externalizing is, in fact, a matter of aestheticizing. In this way, it seems more likely, given his project and his refutation of aesthetic forms of existence, that he was concerned with opposing true religiousness from more aestheticized forms of religiousness. In this way, the backdrop of the *Postscript* is aesthetic existence, rather than secular existence. Many aspects of the *Postscript* pointed in the direction of such a reading.

Likewise, Torrance’s reading belonged to that same series of interpreters. Likewise, his claim did not turn out to be wholly valid. The transformative journey offered in the *Postscript*, is already executed in religiousness A, an immanent form of religiousness in which the individual attempts to stake his eternal happiness on God without having the confirmation or guarantee that God truly exists. It was with the introduction of religiousness B, that Kierkegaard mentioned the type of religiousness, namely true Christianity, in which God reveals himself historically by means of Jesus Christ. However, he also noted that religiousness A, is already strenuous and sufficient of a life task enough for the existing individual. In this way, Torrance’s claim does not hold.

I touched upon these scholars, in order to fortify a reading of Kierkegaard’s system that does not treat it purely in a religious fashion. However, I must substantiate this reading even further. Therefore, I reintroduce the central aim of this thesis. To what extent does this religious system which Kierkegaard proposes, hold value for secular individuals? It is accurate to state that it

¹³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 466.

seems as if Kierkegaard's system, precisely because of the strict theological foundations upon which it draws, does not herald the same message for secular individuals, who do not hold any religious convictions, as it does for strictly religious individuals. However, I am convinced that Kierkegaard's emphasis on the necessity of subjectivity for religious matters, has an equal force for secular individuals and the way all humans deal with existential matters. I find ground for this not just in Westphal's but also in Alessandri's reading, upon whom I will continue to build my argument.

3.2 The Secular Relevance of Kierkegaard's Understanding of Religiousness

It is unarguably true that Kierkegaard's system is indeed fundamentally religious in nature. Not only does he make use of the terms eternal happiness, absolute relating, resignation, suffering – all strictly religious concepts that have footing in a Christian framework – he also presupposes the possibility that God exists. The whole *Postscript* is structured around the question on how one should maintain a personal relationship with God, should he happen to exist. However, in Kierkegaardian scholarship there are still two series of interpreters, two schools of thought to which one can belong. On the one hand, there is that school of thought to which both Burns and Torrance, among others, pertain, who read his work in a strictly religious fashion. Secondly, there are those scholars who find in Kierkegaard's religious philosophy an immense existential and philosophical value, one that could appeal to secular individuals too. Not just the work of Westphal belongs to this school of thought, also Alessandri offers such a reading. To this type of reading, I wish to contribute. In order to make my point clear, let us reintroduce the central question of this thesis: to what extent can Kierkegaard's religious philosophy carry meaning and hold value for non-religious individuals?

Non-religious or secular individuals are the growing group of people who do not longer hold, or perhaps never have held, a belief in the existence of God. In his book, *A Secular Age* (2007), Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor makes the distinction between political, sociological and existential secularity. This last kind, he describes as the "broad background conditions of belief and spiritual searching: something like the general assumptions implicit in one's lived experience, social and cosmic imaginary, which make a difference to what form (if any) one's religious aspirations take."¹³⁷ With regards to Kierkegaardian philosophy, his secular readers may not hold the same convictions in notions such as eternal happiness, the absolute, resignation, suffering, or guilt, as religious individuals do. However, does that unavoidably mean that Kierkegaard's system is irrelevant to them? This, I do not believe to be the case and ground for such a reading I find in the work of both Westphal and Alessandri.

¹³⁷ Arto Laitinen, "Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*: A Secular Age," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no. 3 (June 2013): 353.

Remember that Westphal describes religiousness A, the central form of religiousness described in the *Postscript*, as consisting of a task and a threefold pathos. In general terms, the task is to relate absolutely to one absolute τέλος and relatively to all other ends. The threefold pathos of this existential task is its power to evoke resignation, suffering and guilt.¹³⁸ These are all strictly religious terms and might not mean much to the secular individual. However, on a more fundamental level, Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness does teach an important lesson. The task of becoming religious is one of pathos, precisely because it "consists in expressing this in existence, in existing; it consists not in testifying to an eternal happiness but in transforming one's own existence into a testimony to it."¹³⁹ The secular effectiveness of Kierkegaard's system lies precisely herein: the crucial and vital subjective characteristics that it promotes carry a broader existential relevance, of which every human being can benefit, whether secular or religious. As seen, more aesthetic types of existence form the background to which Climacus offers his theory of religiousness. In these kinds, one is not concerned with transforming his existence, changing his habits or letting go of all that is relative. In aesthetic forms of religious existence, one would rather buy a new hymnbook instead of dedicating his whole life to God and becoming a truly passionate and faithful religious individual.

Another less religious example of the functions of Kierkegaard's system is offered by Alessandri. She mentions that when academics realize they need to do more writing, they do not perpetrate transformative habits, such as designing a regular writing schedule, reading books on how to write more efficiently, or replacing their unproductive writing habits with more productive ones. They decide that, what they need is not all of the above, but rather a new laptop, a more organized work area, or a new desk¹⁴⁰. All of these relatively effortless solutions, she continues, rarely work and they cannot replace the strenuous habits a scholarly existence demands from them.¹⁴¹ The habit of seeking a quick-fix to certain problems or obstacles in life, rather than an actual-life transformation that is truly required in order to overcome them, is a habit or a tactic that is often employed in an aesthetically dominated world, such as ours. This, was something Kierkegaard already diagnosed in the apocryphal and aesthetic kinds of assumed religiousness of his days. Buying a new hymnbook, or going to church only on Sundays, in order to remit all one's weekly sins, was more common and definitely less strenuous than transforming one's whole existence, by virtue of a passionate and faithful commitment to God. These kinds of aesthetic and simple, yet inefficient and often unhealthy solutions to problems which require a transformative and active attitude, are still very common in our days. Our world, however different from Kierkegaard's age, is still, in this sense,

¹³⁸ Westphal, "Climacus on Subjectivity," 146.

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 331.

¹⁴⁰ Alessandri, "The Strenuous and Sufficient Task," page unknown.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

aesthetically dominated. Perhaps, one could even state that human life always will be. That it is a part of human nature to seek quick and simple, effortless solutions to problems who, in fact, require an active transformation and a passionate commitment to one's limited time in this world. That human existence is, and always will be, predestined in this way.

It is precisely in this, that its contemporary and secular relevance is contained. Kierkegaard's system of religiousness as subjectivity, its obsessive emphasis on *how* we relate to existential matters rather than their possible objective true-ness, along with the critical realization that the phenomena of life, which often, if not always, matter most to us, imply that they cannot be guaranteed or known objectively, carries an immense existential and philosophical validity for all human beings. Resignation, for example, in being one of the three kinds of pathos that characterize a religious attitude, signifies the decision and the desire to loosen one's ties to all relative goods in order to initiate a fundamental life-transformation. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard proposes this in a very religious framework, for someone non-religious it might mean letting go of the things that drag him down or hold him back from becoming truly happy, fulfilled or self-satisfied. Seen through secular glasses, its system teaches us that a big house, a fancy car and a luxury-filled lifestyle are only aesthetic solutions to more fundamental and deeper lying existential hardships. In order to be truly happy and fulfilled, what is required of us is an unabridged transformation, an actively taking up of one's existence, instead of buying the latest iPhone, or most recent headphones.

This is the powerful subliminal secular message of the Kierkegaardian system. Alessandri has touched well upon this too. Individuals need to be transformed, not provided with new material goods,¹⁴² she writes. This is exactly what Kierkegaard himself tried to point out. Individuals do not need to buy a new hymnbook, they need to vigorously take up the possibility of entering into a relationship with God by actively transforming their whole existence. And this requires of them a series of subjective characteristics and crucial existential virtues. In this way, religiousness A as a pure inward subjectivity, teaches individuals how to develop an inner life¹⁴³, it teaches them how to absolutely transform their whole existence, in light of the fact that the things who matter to us most deeply, can most likely not be known or grasped by objective reasoning. Kierkegaard tried to make this clear by showing that religiousness, as an absolute relation with God, required a passionate commitment, an infinite concern for one's eternal happiness, together with a faithful leap into the unknown. A jump into a world of possibilities, rather than of certainties. I think Alessandri has stated this most adequately:

It is challenging to agree to live for something outside of oneself that is not visible or certifiable, but living always entails taking this kind of risk: life calls us to venture and

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

to value possibility over certainty. Living in religiousness A means living for an eternal happiness without waiting for a guarantee that such a thing exists. Becoming open to something outside of oneself means giving up on self-sefficiency, it means humbly opening up to a world of possibility beyond our control.¹⁴⁴

In life's most critical moments, we never have the absolute guarantee that things will turn out a certain way, we will never be able to fully grasp the outcome of our actions before we have acted, and we will never have absolute knowability of life's most crucial phenomena. Despite this unavoidable fact, we must leap into a world of possibilities by virtue of devoted faith and a passionate life-transformation.

It is true, that what religiousness *does*, is not the same for the secular individual, as it is for the religious individual. The religious person does value eternal happiness, the absolute category of God along with the threefold pathos of resignation, suffering and guilt differently than the secular person. However, the aim of this thesis was never to compare the religious individual with the secular one, in light of what Kierkegaard had written about religiousness. Kierkegaard's system, if read in its most strict fashion, does not incite the same characteristics for the secular individual as it does for the religious one, precisely because the subjectivity of the secular individual is not grounded in the assumption that God exists, that eternal happiness is a possibility, and that we possibly could be rewarded with it. These two cannot be compared to each other if we read Kierkegaard's system in such a strict and closed manner.

However, by answering the question what religiousness does, according to Kierkegaard, I have tried to touch upon the fundamental nature of its system. It is true that he offers a strictly religious and Christian framework, and that he consistently sticks to religious terms. However, his system contains a deeper existential and philosophical relevance. One that can hold value for all human beings alike, whether religious or not. In Kierkegaard's philosophy, religion and religiousness are the archetypical frameworks that require a set of subjective characteristics of the individual. These subjective characteristics are equally critical in more general existential, and universally available, human experiences. In this way, precisely because of its strictly religious nature, Kierkegaard's system tells us a very important and elucidating message. In its own unique way and grounded in religious theory, it offers us a broader exemplary narrative from which all human beings, whether religious or not, can draw valuable life lessons. For this reason, its secular relevance is rhetorical, rather than content-oriented.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Reiteration and Concluding Remarks

The aim of this thesis was to offer a re-reading of the category of religiousness in Kierkegaard's *Postscript*. I did not suggest a close theological reading of the passages regarding religiousness, but instead wished to provide the reader with an ontological reading of this category. In this way, I did not aim to answer the question 'what does religiousness *mean*, according to Kierkegaard'. Instead, I was interested in knowing, 'what religiousness precisely does', according to our author.

In Kierkegaard's understanding, becoming subjective is crucial for, and primordial to, becoming religious. Subjectivity is the realm that deals with how we ought to relate to certain truths, and religiousness, for Kierkegaard, is a matter of our relation to the truths of Christianity. Objective truth the kind which handles the nature of specific objects and asks about whether they are true or false. As shown, objective questions ask about the true-ness or false-ness of the objects at stake. Subjectivity, on the other hand, asks about the nature of one's relationship to these truths. It is not about objects as pure objects, but rather, about the relation of the questioning subject to the possible truth of these objects. Albeit initially, Climacus considers both types, he promptly expresses his preference for the latter, precisely because what matters most to us existentially, is not the objective truth of things, but the subjectivity of our relation to these truths. In this way, religiousness, in the Climacus writings, builds upon the realm of subjectivity. I argued that subjectivity is a prelude to religious existence, in such a way that the latter requires the former. One who desires to become religious, must first and foremost become subjective. Subjectivity is also a matter of inwardness, and, accordingly, "inwardness at its highest in an existing subject is passion."¹⁴⁵ With this notion, Kierkegaard introduced the main characteristic of relating to truth subjectively. Passion, he claims, is the virtue by which we ought to relate to the absolute $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ of our lives. Only by relating to passionately to an unknowable truth – this means, absolutely transforming our existence – do we become subjective, according to Kierkegaard.

Besides passion, an auxiliary core notion of subjectivity, is that of faith. For Climacus, faith is precisely this: the contradiction that exists between the individual's infinite concern for his eternal happiness and the objective uncertainty that stems from speculative thought about existential matters. I have shown that there exists a tension between our infinite concern for ourselves and our inability to grasp truths^{iv} – at least the existential truths that matter to us mostly – objectively. A religious example of this is the unknowability of God's existence. However, this principle can coordinately apply to broader existential truths. Because of this tension, in becoming subjective, the individual must commute to faith. These two aspects, passion and faith, combined, made up the foundations of the Kierkegaardian understanding of

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 163.

subjectivity. In this way, the set of virtues or characteristics that subjectivity has to offer are 1) a passionate commitment to and concern for our lives and our own being and 2) relating to ourselves, our existence and our happiness, whether eternal or not, in *faith* given the tension between the passionate concern for ourselves and the uncertainty of objective speculation on existentially relevant questions. Exactly these virtues are critical if one wants to become religious. Passion is not merely the verbal expression of one's self-concernedness. It is the evocation of a groundbreaking life-transformation. Faith, in its turn, is not just the mere belief that something will turn out for the better. Instead, it is the willful leap or act into the unknown, into a world of possibilities.

Subsequently, I scrutinized the central theme of this thesis: the category of religiousness. Kierkegaard's account of religiousness is one that he ultimately names 'religiousness A'. It was my goal to make clear that this account can only be grasped in light of his commitments to subjectivity. Christianity, in being the problem of relating to an eternal happiness, is an existence-problem, and, in this way, is a subjective affair. In order to overcome it, the existing individual requires a set of pathetic-dialectic skills. I argued with Westphal that religiousness A consists of a task and a threefold pathos. The threefold pathos of this existential task lies in the notions of resignation, suffering and guilt. These combined make up the pathetic element of religiousness. The dialectic element, on the other hand, stems from the fact that this task, by virtue of becoming subjective, requires of the individual an absolute existence-transformation. This dialectic transformation is rooted in our being and, in the Kierkegaardian framework, can only be overcome or mediated by a movement of *kinesis*. It is initiated by actively taking up the task of becoming subjective, rather than by means of pure reflection or thought. This is why the pathos that is characteristic for a truly religious individual, consisted not in testifying to an eternal happiness, but rather in transforming one's whole existence into a testimony to it.¹⁴⁶

Later on, Kierkegaard distinguished between religiousness A, the type of religiousness described above, and religiousness B, or Christianity. The former is an immanent religion, since it does not draw upon the transcendent revelation of God, while the latter, being a transcendent type of religiousness, does. Climacus himself admitted that religiousness A, in its current form, "is so strenuous for a human being as always to be task enough."¹⁴⁷

This descriptive and explanatory analysis of Kierkegaard's understanding of religiousness enabled us to argue for a secularly relevant reading of it. Regardless of the fact that Kierkegaard's philosophy locates itself in a very religious and typically Christian framework, I argued that it carries profound existential relevance and that, in this way, it can likewise appeal

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 331.

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 466.

to secular individuals. Even though one does not believe in a higher divine being or in a form of happiness promised to us in an afterlife, one can still draw valuable, secular and broader existential conclusions from what Kierkegaard has written. In its own historical, philosophical and ideological peculiarity, Kierkegaard aimed to show, that what matters in existing, is to relate with an absolute commitment to things which can often not be ascertained. That we must find some absolute category and maintain an inward and subjective relation of transformative passion and committed faith to whatever could possibly be true. In Kierkegaard's account, religiousness is archetypical for this way of existing: it requires a passionate, infinite concern for one's personal existence, in light of an eternally given or promised form of happiness. Our claim was even more clarified by his example of two people praying to God, one truly and faithfully to a false God, and the other untruly to the true God. Although this example compares two types of people with a certain religiosity, its focus on the 'how' gave away the true priority of Kierkegaard's project.

The argumentative firmness of this reading became more substantial as I touched upon the claims of both Burns and Torrance.. In contradistinction to their reading, I built upon the work of Westphal and Alessandri to offer an account which stresses that, despite its religious character, Kierkegaard's system – if looked at through secular glasses – still holds ground. It is of course indisputable that Kierkegaard's system is strictly religious in nature, and that what religiousness *does* to the religious individual, is fundamentally different from what it does for the secular person, precisely because the latter does not hold the same belief in the strict religious categories upon which his system draws. A secular worldview differs fundamentally from a religious one. For this reason, the secular relevance of his work lies not in a strict reading of its concepts, but rather in its rhetorical power. Its functioning lies in its evocation of a life-changing attitude, pushing one to become truly solicitous, in a world overshadowed by aesthetic demeanor.

Religiousness is the category which evokes a set of virtues and characteristics, affirming that one is passionately and infinitely concerned with oneself. This particular understanding of religiousness lucidly teaches us how to develop an inner life, to transform our whole existence in light of the epistemological inevitabilities involved in existential phenomena. It reminds us – yes, even secular individuals – to give up on our self-sufficiency, to step into a world of infinite possibilities, rather than one of absolute certainty. The secular relevance of Kierkegaard's theory of religiousness is not enclosed within its closed religious concepts, or its restricted categories. Rather, it is contained in its rhetorical message: it carries the power to evoke a radical life-transformation, required to take on life's most valuable, yet most unfathomable, phenomena. Especially in a world dominated by aesthetic miens to the more laborious existential tasks, this is particularly relevant.

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ⁱ I must stress here that, throughout this thesis, I use Kierkegaard and Climacus interchangeably. Extensive research has been done into the relation of Kierkegaard to his pseudonyms. The question to what extent the different perspectives and voices of pseudonyms represent his actual ideas or philosophy, remains contested. Therefore, I choose not to enter this discussion here. More on this can be found in 'Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. *Volume 17: Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*. Edited by Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate (2015).'

ⁱⁱ It seems as if ethics makes up an important aspect here of Kierkegaard's understanding of subjectivity and that, accordingly, some considerations about the place of this notion have to be made. Although I cannot fully dispute this, a thorough analysis of the role and place of ethics in Kierkegaardian subjectivity is out of scope for this thesis.

ⁱⁱⁱ This phrase contains one of the core premises of Christian thought. In its colloquial religious understanding, Christianity does not do a great job of letting each subject develop meaning for themselves. Because of this, building upon a religious framework for a non-religious reading, unavoidably assumes the same premise, that man by himself is not capable of formulating solutions to life's most demanding tasks. This, might perhaps pose a problem for a secular reader. However, in the case of this thesis, it does not hinder our analysis because the idea that many existential phenomena – such as the future outcome of our actions, the possible self-satisfaction deriving from past decisions, or, more philosophically, the possibility of conscious life after earthly death – cannot be epistemologically grasped by human reasoning, is still contemporary relevant. One could also even say that such truths are essential to human existence.

^{iv} This notion has pushed some interpreters to assume that Kierkegaard is a fideist, or that he does not believe in objective, scientific truths. I do not believe this to be wholly true. Kierkegaard did not wish to do away with all objective or scientific reasoning. His claim is that objective knowledge, in being objective, does not apply to subjective human existence. Only to a limited extent does it add substantial significance to how one should live his life. An elaboration on this is, sadly enough, again out of scope for this research. However, for more on this matter, see: Evans, C. Stephen. "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason: Can There Be a Responsible Fideism?" *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* 64, no. 2/4 (2008): 1021-035