

The Man of Faith

Xin Ye

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“Fear and Trembling! Fear and Trembling!! Fear and Trembling!!!” Shouting and jumping, I closed my book, and ran to my friends in the living room. They nodded their heads, smiling. “Have you cried? Have you cried?!!” They had not. “Read it again. And cry!!!”

Preface

“What our generation lacks is not reflection but passion.” (42¹)

Reading Johannes’ *Fear and Trembling* has always been a passionate experience for me since I first cast my eyes on this book. I feel an affinity for all the great passions in the book. I am moved by them and I plunge into many passions as I read along. This is something I enjoy in reading the great books of the College. So often I have not been so much affected by the reasoning as by the passions of the souls in and behind the great books that I have encountered in these four years: the earnestness of Socrates, the devotion of Augustine, the aspiration of Kant, and so on. There are, of course, authors whose passions remain backstage and are not easily detectable from their work. Euclid, for example, is the most “impersonal” figure that I’ve met in my four-year journey. He never said a word about himself in *Elements*. Nevertheless, I “feel” him! What kind of a soul must be behind a work grand like *Elements*! When we were working proposition after proposition, it was as if we were climbing a high mountain covered with thick trees. We might not know where we were, and what we were doing. Soon, however, we were beyond the tree line: the pristine beauty of the eternal glacier and the grandeur of our height awe us and energize us. Such were the passions I felt with Euclid. Likewise, in Lab and

¹ I use the Hong edition. All the citations are from this edition. Passages will be cited by page number.

Math, it very often requires a long technical preparation before we feel the cause for which our “heroes” strive and their noble passions. Indeed, with all these great souls whom I love, I “feel” them more than I understand them. And I have been transformed not by my understanding, but by my “feelings,” my passions!

Fear and Trembling is unique in my four years. It is the only book that is directly about passion. It overflows with the passions of the author and is also about the “highest” passion, faith. (121) Thus, I invite you to join me, on this eulogy of passion, in this pilgrimage of the highest passion, faith, and in the admiration of the only great man, the man of faith.

The essay consists of three parts. Part 1 is about passion and faith as the highest passion, which are also the main subjects of *Fear and Trembling*. Part 2 is about paradox and dialectics, which are the tools of progress and revelation of the book. Part 3 is about the explorations of the man of faith by comparing him with the knight of infinite resignation at different angles and in light of the discoveries from Part 1 and Part 2.

Part 1: Passion, Individuality, and Faith

Passion²

What, after all, is passion? Can we define passion? Can we understand passion? I do not know. But we can at least *describe* passion, and we can distinguish passion from other human experiences. Perhaps we still would not be able to know *what passion is*, but we can at least know *what is a passion* and *what passion is not*.

² Before we move on to the section on Faith, the passions discussed would be limited to all passions except faith. Faith has such a special status as a passion that it deserves a different section. It is so difficult to grasp that it has to come after a lengthy discussion about passion in general and its peculiarity.

Johannes says, “The essentially human is passion, in which each generation perfectly understands another and understands itself.” (121) Why? Well, “That which unites all human life is passion.” (67) For example, love is a passion. (73) So long as beauty exists, and so long as eyes can see, love will be. A king or a servant, a queen or a maiden, all are equally entitled to the passion of love. Would a king falling in love be different from a pauper falling in love? Externally, of course, they might express this passion very differently. We would have all the pomp and glory on the one side and all the simplicity and poverty on the other. But the passion itself, the love itself, is the same.³ Both the king and the pauper would suffer from the insecurities of love, would rejoice from the sight of the beloved, and participate in deep connection with another being, or, perhaps, even with existence. Despite the different manifestations of their love, both the king and the pauper are humble servants in the temple of Love. They are equated in Love, and they are united in Love. Passion is what takes away our masks and makes us all identity-less human beings again.

This does not necessarily mean that “the essentially human is passion.” What does Johannes mean when he says “the essentially human”? Of course, if there is something that we all share, and in which we are all equal, it is inviting to think that this is also something fundamental and essential. We share, however, many other things. We share languages (not that we all speak the same language but that we all speak languages and we all have this desire and capacity for communication), we share reasoning, we share basically the same bodily structure. What makes passion special? Why is the essentially human *only* passion? It could be that we identify ourselves with our passions more than with anything else. If passion is where our idea of our self, our substance, comes from, it would indeed be reasonable to say that passion is our

³ Lessing: “...for the passions make all men equal again.” (67)

essence. Do we identify ourselves with our passions more than anything else, then? Yes! My passions are what I trust and what I depend on in my conception of myself. Johannes agrees with me in that he says: “The conclusions of passion are the only dependable ones—that is, the only convincing ones.” Are we, however, betraying reason and science? Are we dumb brutes who know no higher expression of our essence assigned to us, the only beings that have an upright posture? Yes. I hear the reproaches from science and reason, and my confidence in passion is shaken. I am not sure again what the essentially human is. Johannes says: “He easily envisions his fate in an age that has crossed out passion in order to serve science....” (7) I belong to the *same age* and share the same inclination.

Passion and Science

Why does Johannes describe his age with passion and science? Why does he juxtapose passion and science in this way? I am sure it is not only because in Danish “passion” (*Lidenskab*) rhymes with “science” (*Videnskab*), but also because both passion and science are fundamental in us.⁴ Though Johannes himself does not talk much about science directly, it always is backstage as the opposing element of passion and his project. When he describes an ideal Faust, he says: “... my Faust is so ideal that he is not one of those scientific doubters who doubt one hour every semester on the podium but otherwise are able to do everything else....” (110) These doubters do not doubt passionately; instead, they doubt mechanically and perfunctorily. Johannes calls these doubters “scientific” and therefore not “ideal.” By science he does not refer to the narrow category of Physics, Chemistry, and Biology because his description of the doubters is not limited. Any subject that is epistemic, where reason but not passion is required, is a science.

⁴This dichotomy of passion and science is significant in human existence. It is reflected by the common idea that man is both a rational animal and an emotional animal. It is also manifested in our perceptions of the world in many ways: the man and the woman, the city and the mountain, Mathematics and Poetics, and Sciences and Arts.

Johannes has also said in the beginning quote that his generation lacks passion but not reflection. The similarity of this statement with his statement about his age also tells us that we should take science in the broad sense. Johannes repeats in the Preface: “The present author is by no means a philosopher.” (7) He makes the disclaimer that he neither “writes the system nor gives promises of the system.” (7) Why? If science is to be understood as such, a philosopher would be a scientist and any system would be scientific as well. Johannes sees the ubiquitousness of science and stands firmly against it.

Though he does not say much, at least not directly, about the reason why he does not want to participate in the trend of the age and why only passion is the essentially human, that he believes this is important to many of his claims. Let us fill this gap ourselves and try to understand the difference between science and passion, the cause of that, and the essentiality of passion. We will understand passion better by knowing *what passion is not*. We will have more confidence with Johannes once we are convinced of the essentiality of passion.

Science is epistemic. Science can be taught and learned. Science can be passed from one generation to another. In science, we start with the point where the last generation ends and go “further.”⁵ The apex reached by the last generation is the base of the present generation. Individuality does not matter that much in science. Each generation dissolves itself into this ongoing river, this flow of science and knowledge. It does not matter how many years it takes for Euclid to write his first book of *Elements*: if I spend some days to follow, to understand, to remember, and to demonstrate all the propositions of Book I, it becomes my knowledge.

⁵ This could be the source of the urge of going further than Abraham and Socrates. (5-8) Unsurprisingly, Johannes is negative about this age and always praises “not going further.” The examples of Socrates and Abraham are the two most evident ones. But he also praises the same quality in Lessing: “...Lessing also had a most uncommon gift of explaining what he has understood. With that he stopped; in our day people go further and explain more than they themselves have understood.” (88)

Passion is not epistemic. Passion cannot be taught, at least not in the sense that by understanding a passion through someone else, I can learn the passion.⁶ Passion-wise, we are at no advantage to the generations before us. Johannes made an analogy to swimming (37,38) that has its place here with slight revisions and expansions. One can read about swimming for ten years, knowing everything needing to be known, but if he does not ever try to go to the water and swim, he would never swim. He would belong to the waders, unlike Johannes, who can at least swim as he has the passion at least to make the movement of infinite resignation. Swimming could at least be passed on and taught in the sense that there are still techniques and perhaps good training systems to be taught. To swim in passion, however, there are no such things as techniques or systems.⁷ Every human being is presented with the same ocean of existence: Only the “swimming” cultivates passions, nothing else. One cannot take advantage of the passion of Euclid. One can, perhaps, be inspired by it, but to have the passion of Euclid, one has to work in the same way that Euclid does: one has to swim. Johannes says: “education is the course an individual goes through to catch up with himself.” (46) Yes, education, in the perspective of passion, is not to learn anything from another human being, and not to catch up with past generations, but to develop what is potential in us, in all human beings. Education is learning to swim.

Language and history are essential for science to be passed on and for knowledge to accumulate. By language and history, one can by no means pass a passion on to another or learn a passion from another. What happens in the past, what the past generations have done, can

⁶ “No generation learns the essentially human from a previous one...For example, no generation has learned to love from another.” (121)

⁷ cf. “The present author is by no means a philosopher. He is in a poetic and refined way a supplementary clerk who neither writes the system nor gives promises of the system.” (7)

provoke some passions, as language can also do, but what provokes a passion is different from the passion itself. A pauper might provoke love in another pauper, and a queen in a king, but the love is the same for the pauper and for the king. The passion itself should be distinguished from the cause of the passion, the object of the passion, and the external manifestations of the passion. Once it has been distinguished, we see that the passion itself is only related to the individual in it, it is the particular in time, independent from the past and the future. For that very reason, there can be parties and groups in science, but there are only individuals in passion.

The reason for all the aforementioned differences is that, in science, the idea of objectivity is emphasized, which leads to the externalization of scientific knowledge. In this emphasis a dichotomy is bound to appear — the dichotomy of the subject, us, and the object of our science. This is also what is entailed when something is epistemic. Even if it is a science about us, say psychology or epistemology, we are treating ourselves, say, our psychology, abstractly as if it is a stone, or an electron. Once this dichotomy comes into being and once we reduce the subjectivity to pursue objectivity and “knowledge,” we are also *alienating ourselves*, that is, we surrender the inward feelings of our individualities to the objective knowledge of our object. The more we participate in science in this way, the more we are externalizing ourselves! Science is like a possession gained by intellectual labor! Possession — we shall not be misled by this name, which is one of the deepest secrets and deceptions of finitude — cannot really be possessed by another. It flows from one person to another and acquires no identity from anyone, except a temporary identity from its temporary possessor. This also explains that no matter who writes *Elements*, as long as I master it, it is my knowledge.

Passion is not external like science so that we can get a passion from someone else. Passion, in contrast, is something that is internal. It is *in us*. Of course, there might be an object

and subject of a passion. I can be a subject of the love and my girlfriend the object of it. In a deeper sense, however, I am both the subject and the object of love: I initiate the passion, love, and I am subjected to all the experiences of this love: joy, jealousy, insecurities and so on. Science is all about the object of its pursuit, something distinct from us. Passion might be directed to someone, but, again, the passion itself is in us, comes into being only because of us, and is experienced only by us.

It might be confusing why passion comes into being only because of us, as we very often feel many things involuntarily. This is because we conflate feelings with passions: they ought to be distinguished, though I myself have conflated them on some occasions for simplicity's sake.⁸ Feelings and passion are both distinct from reason and science and belong to the same category of human experience in the sense that both are emotional and non-rational. But passion deserves a different status, because, just like science, it is something that is active. (One still needs to make the effort to learn a knowledge and one has to be receptive to let knowledge to be passed on to him.) Emotions or feelings, however, are something we only feel but cannot generate. We receive emotions, but we need to do something for passion to come into being. Something might provoke us to have a passion, but we are the final "censors" who will decide if we want to express the passion or not. Just because passion is active and feelings are passive, *courage* is necessary for the generation of passions. This is also what I meant by "passion comes into being only because of us."

Johannes says that the one who cannot make the movement of infinite resignation does not feel "the significance of the high dignity assigned to every human being, to be his own censor,

⁸ "This puts faith in the rather commonplace company of feelings, moods, idiosyncrasies, vagaries, etc."(69) Note that Johannes does not put passion in this list. Whenever he talks about passions, however, he is positive about them. The distinction is important.

which is far more exalted than to be the censor general of the whole Roman republic.” (48) This is an empowering and humanizing sentence. It shines with the light of humanity, and has a lyrical validity for me. I have always had difficulty, however, understanding it. Given what we’ve discovered about passion here, I can finally find a way to make sense of this beautiful but difficult sentence. Johannes says that proper movements require passion. “*Each movement of infinity is carried out through passion, and no reflection can produce a movement.*” (42) If the movement of infinity is carried out through passion, then it means the one who cannot make the movement of infinite resignation does not have enough passion to make it. Thus, we can restate our first sentence as, the one who does not have enough passion to make the movement does not feel the significance of the high dignity assigned to him, to be his own censor. Why? Well, as we have just established, we are the censors of our passions: we have the capacity to choose, to reject, and to develop any passion that is our potential, including the passion for this wonderful and admirable movement of infinite resignation. Those who cannot make the movement must lack the courage for this passion and not realize that he is entitled to this passion despite its greatness and difficulty because he is his own censor! Thus, I repeat, passion is active, and we are the censors of our passions. We are responsible for our passions completely, and, to have passions, we need to be courageous to be the agent of our passions.

Going back to science and passion, what would an age be if it has crossed out passion to serve science? As established before, epistemic knowledge, which science boasts, does not belong to anyone. We should not be deceived by the ideas of authorship and patent rights, which suggest that an idea belongs to someone who first discovers it. They are social inventions, and they are invented precisely for the reason that they are not self-evident and precisely for the reason that one’s idea can be so easily “stolen” by another. These ideas, the epitome of which is the idea of

property, are natural products of the development of “the external world.” (27) But in the world of spirit, in the world of passion, nothing can be stolen. “Only one who works gets bread.” (27) Our passions, therefore, are inseparable from us. They are ourselves and they always shine with the light of individuality. An age which has crossed out passion to serve science has also sold its soul. It has become enslaved to “the system,” which seeks only universals as the highest realm for human beings. If we, heaven forbid, are members of this age, and if we are one of those who surrender the expressions of ourselves to lifeless science, we essentially turn ourselves into an insignificant accessory of an ever-being-updated and developing machine. Who owns the machine? No one! Perhaps the machine should be named human ignorance. We would spend all our life to become a useful but tiny brick in a tower “under construction.” This tower promises the greatest glory of all, but would it really become a tower, or simply a monstrous protrusion with the omniscience of science in every point? Even if it does become a tower, who will enjoy the grandeur of it? What is the use of such a promissory note in heaven and in next lives, when we are on earth and only have this life? I would use all my strength not to join this crazy omnibus of scientists, who can hardly build a tower!⁹

Now, I suppose, there is no doubt left concerning this battle between passion and science, we should know who enjoys the victory. Note that the battle started because there was a question: what is more essential in *us*, science or passion? Passion might not have won the battle if the question was: what is more important in the external world? Passion only needs victory in one thing, that it is the source of our self-identification and that it is who we are. It is *in us* more than science is. I am by no means derogating the use and power of science. Science does not have to

⁹ “I invoke everything good for the system and for the Danish shareholders in this omnibus, for it will hardly become a tower.” (8) Yes, we’ve understood Johannes’ feeling concerning science. He describes his age the way he does to warn us against this terrible inclination of crossing out passion to serve science.

fight with passion either. Passion and science are perfectly compatible. Many great writers that we read are scientists. As I said in the Preface, I feel the passions of these great scientists even though I am reading their scientific works. It is true that their science becomes like common sense for me after I understand it and read the science after them: sometimes I even find some former amazing thoughts of theirs to be lacking in maturity and rigor because I know the new thoughts of the authors after them. The individuality and peculiarity of their wonderful passions, however, leave a strong mark on my soul and keep on amazing me. Science itself is not problematic. It is, perhaps, among all the “external” activities that we do, the most intrinsic and dignified. What is problematic is to cross out passion to serve science. It should be the opposite: for those who are talented with science, science should be a means to express their elevated passion after they have cultivated the passion. Indeed, we should first be human beings before we become scientists.

Passions

This journey of passion will clarify many important claims in *Fear and Trembling*. First, the sentence I cited before: “*Each movement of infinity is carried out through passion, and no reflection can produce a movement.*” (42) Why is each movement of infinity carried out only through passion? Because the movement of infinity is a spiritual movement, and it is an internal movement. “It is essential that it (the movement of infinite resignation) not be a unilateral result of a cruel constraint of necessity, and the more this is present, the more doubtful it always is that the movement is normal.” (46) A proper, and normative movement of infinity should not be forced by external necessity. We should be the free initiator of the passion to make the movement. Whether in infinite resignation I give up one dollar or ten billions does not matter. What matters is the passion, the internal act of infinite resignation.

The next movement is the Socratic movement. “Just to make the celebrated Socratic distinction between what one understands and what one does not requires passion; and even more, of course, passion is necessary in order to make the authentic Socratic movement, the movement of ignorance.” (42) One might think that to distinguish what one understands and what one does not requires reason, not passion: it should be an epistemic distinction. To understand the cited sentence and to dissipate this doubt, we need to go back to our earlier discoveries about the dichotomy of subject and object in epistemic activities. Even when we try to understand our psychology epistemically, we are distancing our psychology from us as an object of research. But to know what *I* understand and what *I* do not, *I* am both the subject and the object. To know the answer to this question, *I* need to ask *myself*, and not myself as a distant and abstract object, but myself as I am! This is certainly not an epistemic activity but a passionate one because the dichotomy of subject and object bound with reason, science and reflections evaporates by the heat of the immediacy of *I*. The movement of ignorance, of course, requires even greater passion. We are not playing around with words and saying mindlessly: “I am ignorant. The only thing I know is that I know nothing.” If we do so, it is not a movement of ignorance, but a movement of hypocrisy. How much passion do we need, to defy this indefatigable ego that claims to know and wants to know, to admit that it is us, really *us*, that knows *nothing*, and to plunge into this dark abyss of *aporia*? Both the celebrated distinction and authentic Socratic movement require passion as they are about us. The latter needs more passion

because we are fighting against the passion of ego, and perhaps even the passion for society and language.¹⁰

We've explored passion and movements. But there are also particular passions waiting to be explored! For example, the passions of irony and humor are interesting and confusing. (51) Why are irony and humor passions? Again, they seem to be intellectual and to belong to the sphere of language and science. I don't have a firm grasp on this. I do know, however, that irony or humor means that what is said is not what is meant. The true message of irony and humor is not conveyed in words, but in a strange way: it is not verbal, but still meaningful. Where does that message come from, then, if not from language? The only option we left is passion. This way of arriving at passion is intellectual. I am using logic to convince myself that irony and humor are passions, but I do not really feel the passions of irony and humor. We could, however, at least have a deeper understanding of passion through irony and humor: passion is not verbal, but it is meaningful.

So far we have been exploring the passions of human beings. But passions could also belong to nature. "...a wild, fermenting power that writhing in dark passions produced everything...." (15) "And look! The sea no longer roars, its wild voice is stilled; nature's passion, which is merman's strength, forsakes him." (94) How are we to understand the passions in these cases? Can nature have passions as well? It seems to me that there are three senses that nature has

¹⁰ "...He (Socrates) who had maintained the equilibrium of doubt throughout all the specious arguments, who had intrepidly denied the certainty of the senses and the certainty of thought, who, uncompromising, had defied the anxiety of self-love and the insinuations of fellow feeling..." (7) What a passion do we need to defy the anxiety of self-love? And what are the insinuations of fellow feeling? It could mean simply that our friends try to convince us that we know something. In a deeper sense it could also refer to the very idea of society, and how ridiculous and useless society is when one wants to make the movement of ignorance. As said earlier, passion does not need party and cannot have party. Each person has to be responsible for his own passion. Society would not help at all. Community would only be a seductive illusion. Insinuations of fellow feeling can also represent the very idea of language, for isn't the basic assumption of language that we know something and we share our knowledge in it? If these suggestions are sound, what a passion we need to defy insinuations of fellow feeling!

passions. First, passion itself has nothing to do with thoughts, language, articulation. It is an expression that is beyond reasoning and reflections. In that sense, all the “expressions” of nature are passionate in that nature does them “thoughtlessly.” Nature’s force has a mysterious source that is beyond our reflections. Second, as said earlier, passion is something active and requires courage. Once passion has been expressed, it is also powerful and strong. This idea of power also fits nature very well. What does nature do but grand things? No wonder it can be the merman’s strength. Third, we’ve said before that passion is initiated by the self and has an effect on the self. It is something internal. It is an expression of the self, of individuality, and does not bother with the external world. Nature’s passion is also similarly self-contained. It does not aim for anything outside of nature. It is fulfilled in nature and in every particular moment. This exploration of the passions of nature not only deepens our understanding of passion, but it also leads to a new insight. Passion could unite us and nature. It could be the means by which we have a “communication” with nature. Passion, then, allows us to be connected with nature and have a harmony with it. This could be the reason that he who has faith can move mountains. (49)

Individuality and Universality

In our exploration of passion as the essentially human, the idea of individuality has been mentioned a couple of times. This is an important idea and is closely related to the idea of faith. Passion is, however, also universal in that we all have passion and we all have equal entitlement to passion. How are we to understand the individuality and universality of passion? Before, we invited science on stage, and by distinguishing it from passion, we also understood the peculiarity of passion better. Similarly, to understand the individuality and universality of passion, we need to invite another good friend of human existence, Ethics, and probably say a few things about reason as it is related to the idea of universality.

Johannes starts the first *Problema* with: “The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times.” (54) Every *Problema* of *Fear and Trembling* starts with this clause, “the ethical as such is the universal,” followed by another sentence that befits the perspective of each *Problema*. This repetition and parallel cannot be accidental. Johannes very often reveals deep things through these “hidden” parallels. The parallels should motivate us as understanding the universality of the ethical will have significant and foundational power. It will throw light on faith and passion and we can also understand the meanings of the repetitions of “the ethical as such is the universal” and of the different sentences following it in different *Problemata*. In what way does the universality of the ethical come from? Is there a universal law that applies at all times and to everyone, telling us that we should not kill? If there is such a law, it cannot be social conventions, as they change all the time. It cannot simply be written somewhere in a law book or on a stone by a saint, for that would make it a particular in time and not applicable in all times. Similarly, it cannot come from a god announcing the ethical, like God did with the commandments through Moses, which has to happen in time. Where does the ethical come from, if not from anything external, if not from society, and if not even from God?

It has to come from us. Yes, from our very selves does the knowledge of the ethical come. It is the law given to humanity by nature. Though each one of us is different, the law does not have particular expression in each individual: we share the same law. If laws come from us and we share the same laws, we must share something in us. They are reason and conscience. Conscience could be reduced to another form of reason, the reason of heart. Let our research be limited to reason, which is easier to understand and suffices for the purpose of universality. The reason is where the categorical imperative comes from. We share reason, which has the capacity

to universalize a particular situation and to evaporate the external circumstances and internal feelings. Therefore, what is wrong for me to do would also be wrong for another person. What would be the significance of such a universality?

This universality is universal in the sense of uniformity. It does not care about the passions we experience, our social status, and our external appearances. In other words, it does not care about our individuality and peculiarity. Tolstoy says: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” (*Anna Karenina*) Perhaps similar sentence can be said about ethical men: all ethical men are alike as the ethical is the universal and identical. For that very reason, language and disclosure are Ethics’ dear friends.⁽⁸²⁾ Language also presupposes a common knowledge and a uniformity. In a superficial sense, each language has dictionaries, professors, customs, and grammatical rules as its guardians to maintain its uniformity and to preserve the common knowledge, in order that speakers of the same language can understand each other. In a deeper sense, the common knowledge that language presupposes is universal ideas. For that reason, speakers of different languages could understand each other with the help of translation: translation presupposes commonality. Our universal reason certainly has a strong affinity to all universal ideas, so the ethical is also connected with language. (To speak out, accordingly, almost gains a divine status in Hegelian Philosophy.)

Passion is in many ways the opposite of the ethical. It is an expression of the self, not self as universal reason, but self as the particular and individual. When one uses language to talk about passion, it is usually about the causes of the passion, the effects (external manifestation) of the passion but not about passion itself. When one talks about passion itself, if that is possible, one uses poetry. Johannes says: “Only passion against passion provides a poetic collision....” (92) From this example we can see how essential is passion for poetry. Poetry, despite being composed

in language, has always tried to transcend language, and, even in poetry, can one really talk about passion? For example, one can say he loves his lover more than the kingly glory.¹¹ He does not say anything about the love directly, instead he compares it with a common desire, or a passion for kingly glory. He is only making his love relatable, but he is not talking about his love. Moreover, how can we understand his love if we ourselves never feel anything like the passion for kingly glory and the passionate love that he feels? We talk about passions not as *a priori* concepts that we understand, but as we feel them. For that very reason, we cannot understand passion, nor can we define it.

Faith

“But the highest passion in a person is faith.”(121)

We shall now start to tackle faith, especially the relationship between faith and passion. Given what we’ve understood about passion, in what way is faith both a passion and the highest passion? We will pursue this question by examining faith with four prominent peculiarities established about passion: first, that passion cannot be defined, second, that passion is not

¹¹ Check out the favorite poem of Alceste in *Misanthrope* (390-410) to see a more “poetic” production of this idea.

“Si le roi m’avait donné,
Paris, sa grand’ ville,
Et qu’il me fallut quitter
L’amour de ma mie !
Je dirais au roi Henri,
Reprenez Votre Paris,
J’aime mieux ma mie, ô gué !
J’aime mieux ma mie.”
“If the king had given me,
Paris, his town so grand,
But to have it I must leave
loving of my dear, O!
I would say, ‘King Henry,
Take back your Paris,
I’d rather have my dearie, O!
I’d rather have my dear.”

Alceste calls this “passion speaks its native tongue.” “la passion parle là toute pure.”(404) Even such a pure expression of passion, however, is subjected to the following criticism that it is not directly about passion.

epistemic, third, that passion is individualistic, fourth, that passion has an autonomy that distinguishes it from its cause and effects.

First, faith cannot be defined. Johannes says, “it is great to lay hold of the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up.” (18) He says similar things about faith, Abraham, and the knight of faith.¹² All these descriptions of faith invite us to propose a definition. I did find a definition of faith in light of this central idea of holding on to something after having given it up. Faith is the passion *in* which one expects something with all his life and energy while recognizing the impossibility of the fulfillment of it. Of course, I cheated when I put passion in the definition as we failed to give a definition for even passion. Suppose, however, that we can indeed define passion, would the definition of faith be satisfactory? No! Absurdity lies at the root of this “definition.”¹³ If I define a geometrical figure “faith” as a curvilinear figure made of three straight lines, would the definition be satisfactory? No. Though one has freedom to define whatever one likes, one cannot violate the fundamental law of being and thought: a thing cannot be and not be at the same time in the same aspect. Indeed, though I cannot define passion, it is *conceivable* that someone might be able to define it. With faith, however, the definition is *inconceivable*. The best definition we can come up with strikes us with an impenetrable absurdity and impossibility! How can one hold on to something after he already has given it up? How can one expect the impossible? Is it not nonsensical? This is faith. It is absurd, but also great. “He

¹² I will give one citation for each of them as an example. Faith: “...for the movement of faith must continually be made by virtue of the absurd, but yet in such a way, please note, that one does not lose the finite but gains it whole and intact.” (37) Resignation, however, is antecedent to faith. (47) Therefore in faith one have given up everything, but one still gets the finite out of it. Abraham: “What was the easiest for Abraham would have been difficult for me —once again be happy in Isaac!...” (35) This shows that Abraham loved and held fast to Isaac. He was, however, willing to sacrifice Isaac. He “held fast” to Isaac after having given him up. Knight of faith: “He enjoys everything he sees, the swarms of people, the new omnibuses, the Sound.” (39) This shows that he lives in finitude and enjoys it. He also holds fast to the finite in that he believes his wife will make a special hot meal for him, but his not being disappointed when his wife does not have it shows that he has made the movement of giving up. (39, 40)

¹³ We also had the same difficulty as we had with passion: we are not taking about faith itself in this definition, but only the consequence, the manifestation of faith. How one would act in faith is still different from what faith is.

who expects the impossible became the greatest of all.” (16) He who has faith expects the impossible, so he is greatest of all because of faith. Faith is a passion in that it cannot be defined. Faith is the greatest passion in that it brings the “indefinability” of passion to a new dimension. It makes the definition of faith an absurdity and *a priori* impossibility.¹⁴

Second, faith is not epistemic. It is beyond epistemology. To understand this fully, we need to start with the Preface. (5-8) There, Johannes parallels his descriptions of the philosopher (Socrates) who stops with doubting and goes no further than that and of the man of faith (Abraham) who goes no further than faith. Parallels of Johannes are always powerful and meaningful. What is the power and meaning of this parallel? When the knight of infinite resignation is described, the image of Socrates is alluded to. (42) The allusion continues. The knight of infinite resignation “*recollects*” everything. (43) The movement of infinite resignation is said to be a “purely philosophical movement.” (48) Is Johannes turning the parallel of the best “human” man¹⁵ (the philosopher) and the “divine” man into a parallel of the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith (in this particular case, Abraham)? Yes. Johannes says: “In an intellectual sense, he [Socrates] did make the movement of infinity.” (69) The highest stage of a human being, or of a philosopher, mirrors the final preparatory step of the man of faith before he makes the movement of faith.¹⁶ The movement of ignorance, which we have admired tremendously, is incorporated into the category of the movement of infinity and therefore a part

¹⁴ Yes. Is not that law discovered by Aristotle an analytic *a priori*? Is that not something we have to believe in order to exist and we believe as we exist? Faith defies that. Therefore, in faith, we must cease to exist. But Abraham can exist. Whether he has existed or not in history is irrelevant: what is significant is the possibility and what is essential the idea. Actuality and historical facts are contingent, but the idea is not. If Abraham *can* exist, that is, if Abraham is possible, then he must exist in a new form while ceasing to exist. What is that? Rebirth. Yes. One has to be reborn spiritually in faith.

¹⁵ “Thus Socrates was the most interesting man who ever lived, his life the most interesting life ever led....” (83)

¹⁶ “The last stage to pass from his (Abraham’s) view the stage of infinite resignation. He actually goes further and comes to faith. (37)

of the double movements of faith. In order to arrive at faith, one must first surrender knowledge completely to the degree that one can say, as Socrates did, “the only thing I know is that I know nothing.” For this reason alone, faith cannot be epistemic.

Faith is, however, often confused with belief or even knowledge. The “Articles of Faith,” for example, give what must be believed. This is because we neglect the remarkable movement of ignorance, and only see the movement of faith, which is indeed about holding on to something but only by virtue of the absurd. This neglect, however, does not lead us to faith but ridicule. “Indeed, one hears what is even more curious: a person laments that he has lost his faith, and when a check is made to see where he is on the scale, curiously enough, he has only reached the point where he is about to make the infinite movement of resignation.” (48) How can one lose something when one has already given up everything?¹⁷ One will face the same comic situation if he confuses the wondrous and absurd faith, which comes only after one surrenders everything epistemic and all beliefs (if beliefs are not epistemic), with the simple and naïve belief that should be surrendered even in the preparatory movement of faith. He will lament that he has lost his beliefs when he is about to make the movement of ignorance. After the movement of ignorance, one cannot lose any belief: one already has nothing intellectually, just as Socrates also has nothing. One can lose beliefs while making the movement of ignorance, but one cannot lose faith in that movement, for faith has not commenced yet. Thus, faith and beliefs cannot be identical.

One may *receive* beliefs. The man of faith does have beliefs: Abraham believes that God will fulfill his promise. How does he have or receive this belief? We do not know. We *cannot* know

¹⁷ “Venerable Father, Abraham! When you went home from Mount Moriah, you did not need a eulogy to comfort you for what was lost, for you gained everything and kept Isaac—was it not so?” (22) Indeed, how can Abraham lose anything when he has given up everything? How would a man of faith need any eulogy to comfort him for what was lost? Nothing is lost. Only we are lost! That’s why if we want to weep for the knight of faith, he would respond: “do not weep for me, but weep for *yourself*.” (66)

—it is absurd! Abraham has already made and is always making the movement of ignorance, the movement of infinite resignation: how can he believe in anything again, and how can he hold on to anything?¹⁸ How can one have anything when one has given up and is always giving up everything except by *receiving* it? This reception, however, is still outside of our grasp—it is absurd! We can understand the movement of ignorance in faith, but we cannot understand the movement of belief in faith. Yet people disregard the movement of ignorance and superficially hold on to “beliefs,” thinking they are faith. Humanly speaking, it would be more appropriate to relate faith to ignorance than to belief, because the latter is incomprehensible—it is absurd!

The infinite doubt of Socrates should not be the opposite of faith. Instead, it should be a prerequisite of faith.¹⁹ Thus, saying faith is epistemic is as absurd as, if not more absurd than, saying that Socrates is a scientist or that he knows something. One could love someone but still do science and learn knowledge: passion and science are distinct and opposite in many ways, but they are compatible. One cannot, however, have faith and do science except by virtue of the absurd. One has already surrendered *all beliefs* and everything epistemic before one arrives at faith. Faith is an exclusive passion, exclusive of epistemology because of the concentration involved in the movement of ignorance.

Third, faith is the absolutely individual. “The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself; he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others, but he has no vain desire to instruct others.” (80) The knight of faith is walking a lonesome trial: “in the loneliness of the universe,” he “never hears another human voice” and only has God and himself in his

¹⁸ “All life is an ordeal.” (52) One has to make the movement of infinite resignation and movement of faith all the time, not just when God demands something. God is always testing us. “He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects anything else.” (40,41) Note the continuity emphasized in the citation.

¹⁹ “Faith is preceded by a movement of infinity; only then does faith commence, unexpected, by virtue of the absurd.” (69)

world.²⁰ (80) He does everything only “for his own sake” and “for God’s sake”: the two are related not accidentally but necessarily. (71) How can it be otherwise? This is the “highest egoism,” that is, individualism, but also “absolute devotion.” (71) Universality does not have its place here. Human calculation is out of the question. There is only “you” and “me” for the knight of faith: therefore only he can address God in heaven by “you.” (77) We are all lost in the external world and “beliefs” and God is “a phantom” of our reason and imagination whom we can never address directly but only as an indirect third person.²¹ (68) Faith is the absolutely individual because there cannot be anything else in this passion except God and oneself; it is the highest passion because only in this passion can we see God: it is the expression of the highest self, of our divine origin.

A note on faith and language has its place here. Why is the knight of faith unable to make himself understood? “He (Abraham) *cannot* speak.” (113) Why can’t he? One could express love. Abraham himself “can describe his love for Isaac in the most beautiful words to be found in any language.” (113) Why can he talk about a passion like love, but not faith? Of course, as established before, even love cannot really be talked about but it can be made relatable in language, in the stock of our “common ideas” and “feelings.” Does Abraham have something in his faith that is relatable, then? He only has two movements. First, he has a movement of infinite resignation. How can that be relatable? Usually one gives up something to fulfill something else. Agamemnon gives up his fatherly duty, which is his “one and only wish,” to fulfill his kingly duty.

²⁰ Of course, he can be walking on the Fifth Avenue of New York among thousands of people. One can “express the sublime in the pedestrian.” (41) What matters is not where he is physically but spiritually. Even in the most crowded street of the world, God’s voice will not be blocked by the noise. God, however, is not using a powerful loudspeaker; strangely enough, only Abraham can hear God and God does not *whisper* either. It’s all about this internal passion, faith, which defies all distractions of the external world and which cannot be shared to anyone else.

²¹ We might want to go back to the “externalization” of science. In science there is no you and me. There is only “it,” the third person, the objective reality.

(78) It is admirable that he gives up his one and only wish, but he still has a strong support in universality and he has another duty to fulfill. He is relatable and understandable. How can giving up everything be relatable? Suppose by some means we do make this relatable. It is not possible that the second movement, the movement by virtue of the absurd, is relatable. How can the absurd be relatable? Yet the movement of faith is the movement of absurdity. The individuality of the knight of faith is manifested in that he *cannot* talk about his faith: there is nothing relatable in his faith. The ineffability and individuality of passion, therefore, is brought to another dimension by faith.²²

Fourth, faith is the purest passion. Why? Let us first understand how a passion can be impure. We've said before that passion itself should be distinguished from its cause and its external manifestations. Passion itself is totally internal: only we can initiate a passion and we are the first object of our passion before the passion is directed to something else. In the external world, however, it is very easy to forget about the passion itself and to bind the passion with its external cause or effect. Passion loses its purity and autonomy and is corrupted by the "law of imperfection" of the external world. (27) For example, I love someone. Love itself has nothing to do with this person. If I, however, forget this deep truth about passion and identify my love with this person, I have signed a contract for a life of disturbance and uncertainty. This person belongs to the external world. How can I determine what she feels and does? What if she hates me? What if she dies? Once passion has lost its autonomy, it has lost its purity and therefore beauty; it would then make sense to go beyond passion and do science, to cross out passion to

²² Faith is also particular and individual historically. This is remarkable. Johannes says if faith has always existed, then it has never existed. (81) How can we understand this individuality? Would not this mean that not everyone has an equal entitlement to faith, but only those born after faith starts to exist in time? This implication is very shocking to me, especially if passion is the essentially human. Would the people born before faith exists be brutes instead of human beings because they are deprived of the chance to have what is essentially human? We do not have faith, but we at least have entitlement to it. Those people do not even have the entitlement.

serve science, and to surrender individuality, the source of limitation, uncertainty, and suffering, to the ethical and universality, the source of certainty and stability. All mundane passions do have this danger of falling into this trap and losing their purity.²³

Already in infinite resignation, however, one frees one's passion and oneself from this trap of the external world. "He keeps this love young...But he (knight of infinite resignation) needs no finite occasion for its growth. From the moment he has made the movement, the princess is lost....He has grasped the deep secret that even in loving another person one ought to be sufficient to oneself." Indeed, after infinite resignation, the autonomy of passion, or the self-sufficiency in the citation, strikes us with its eternal validity and beauty. (If the love of the knight can always be young, would it not also preserve an eternal youth?) Once the finitude is ignored, once the loved one is lost, and once the autonomy of the passion is established by the movement of infinite resignation, the passion appears in its purity and we are presented with the passion itself. We become our own censors, and we start to have control over our lives. With whom are we in love, then, if the princess is already lost? With love itself? With Socratic beauty itself? Johannes says in infinite resignation, we gain our love for God. (48) Therefore, the knight of infinite resignation turns the love for the princess into the love for God. Our guesses about love and Socratic beauty are not far-off either, because "God is love." (34) Johannes cannot "talk to God," so he could as well envision God as Socratic beauty: God will not correct him. (35)

Faith is a passion even purer than the passion of infinite resignation. Why? We first need to understand the following sentence: "...he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself;

²³ "What the princess does cannot disturb him, it is only the lower natures who have the law for their actions in someone else, the premises for their actions outside themselves." (45) The mundane passions should be called the passions of the lower natures in Johannes' terms. We are, however, talking about the same thing: that passion should be free from the external constraints and dependency. Passion should be pure. (The pure passion would be the passion of the higher natures in his terms.)

he who loves God in faith reflects upon God.” (37) The love for God in the knight of infinite resignation mentioned earlier, despite being pure and independent from the external world, still reflects upon oneself and has the limitation of “self.” This is because the movement of infinite resignation is a movement that we can discipline ourselves to make.²⁴ This idea of self-sufficiency, without God, decreases the purity of passion for two reasons. First, there is again a cause of the passion that is distractive, the self: not an external one, for sure, but an understandable one. If understanding is possible, discursive reasoning is possible, and universality is possible. If one reasons oneself into infinite resignation, this passion would be thinkable and therefore not pure.²⁵ It is great that a passion can be an expression of the self, but what is even greater is when self becomes an expression of a passion, that is, when the passion is prior. Then, one indeed has a “pure” passion. The knight of infinite resignation does not have this pure passion, because he causes himself to have the passion of infinite resignation, self is still prior. Second, if one can *discipline* oneself to have the passion of infinite resignation, this also means that this passion belongs to the realm of becoming and to time. Passion itself, however, should not bother with time, a product of the external world and finitude. It should be complete every moment.

Faith is the purest passion, even purer than the passion of infinite resignation. The self is not the cause of faith. “...I can resign everything by my own strength....By my own strength I cannot get the least thing that belongs to finitude, for I continually use my strength in resigning everything.” (49) We use all our strength to give up finitude, but the passion of faith is to hold on

²⁴ “In infinite resignation there is peace and rest; every person who wills it, who has not debased himself by self-disdain—which is still more dreadful than being too proud—can discipline himself to make this movement, which in its pain reconciles one to existence.” (45)

²⁵ Strangely enough, once something is thinkable, we also lose our certainty in it. For example, the love of the knight of infinite resignation could be directed to God, to love, and to Socratic beauty. One can not be certain which one it is. As Johannes says in one of our early citations, the conclusions of passions are the only dependable ones. Once there is an element of thinking and once we can make intellectual processes like substitutions and connections, it is not a passion making a conclusion alone but passion making conclusion with intellect. This could be the reason that we lose the certainty.

to finitude at the same time: this cannot come to being because of us. More than that, it cannot even be understood—it is absurd. This is the marvel and wonder. A miracle is a miracle. It cannot be trained or disciplined. We have it or we do not. “The true knight is a witness, never the teacher, and therein lies the profound humanity....” (80) Yes, the knight of faith makes the movement of infinite resignation and has courage for the absurd, but the movement and the courage are not faith yet. Faith *happens* without the self, without any cause, beyond our thought and the becoming. The knight of faith can only witness this wonder, of which he cannot share any agency or credit. Faith is not a passion that the knight of faith generates, as he already has no strength and power left because of his infinite resignation; instead, the passion generates the knight of faith: the passion is prior. The knight of faith, accordingly, reflects not upon himself but upon God. The self surrenders its agency and becomes an expression of faith, the absurd and the divine. This is the highest passion of all. There is not a trace of externality and not even a trace of self in faith. There is neither a trace of cause and effect, nor of becoming, in faith. Faith, then, is like *the moment*: it is not caused by the past, it is not extended to the future, it is beyond all thoughts, it is a self-contained whole, and it is eternity. Yes, faith is the purest and highest passion!

Part 2: Dialectic and Paradox

Lyrical Dialectic

What is *Fear and Trembling*? We only know it is not a system. Who is Johannes? We only know that he is not a philosopher. So far we have only been exploring the content of the book, but not its form. How does everything come into being?

When I read the part where Johannes introduces the hero and the poet, I thought he was the poet and Abraham the hero: otherwise what is the relevance of the poet and the hero? “The poet or orator can do nothing that the hero does; he can only admire, love, and delight in him... but when he has found the object of his search, he roams about to every man’s door with his song and speech so that all may admire the hero as he does....” (15) Johannes does not have faith as Abraham does and he cannot act like Abraham. He has, however, the capacity to give eulogy to Abraham and to be amazed at Abraham. (37) He let Abraham be understood in his greatness. (31) The entire book never leaves Abraham and his greatness. Though he cannot understand Abraham, he admires him. (112) If he had known a knight of faith in real life, he would have spent all his life “admiring him.” (38) All this evidence suggests that Johannes is the poet.

Johannes himself, however, disclaims that. “But here I stop, I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically.” (90) He claims to be doing dialectic instead. Abraham is never addressed as the hero either in the book.²⁶ Instead, the tragic hero is mentioned many times, whose greatness cannot be compared to that of Abraham. Indeed, it would be strange if Abraham is the hero and Johannes the poet: hero is relatable but Abraham is not, and Johannes cannot “delight in” Abraham, a life of absurdity. If Abraham is higher than the hero, it would make sense that Johannes is also higher than the poet to befit his “hero.” Johannes says: “Only passion against passion provides a poetic collision....” (92) Does his dialectic provide a better occasion for the poetic collision? His dialectic can stir the readers “to an awareness of the dialectical struggles of faith and its gigantic passion.” (32) The poet might not be able to write about this poetic collision of faith and its gigantic passion.

²⁶ “She (Mary) needs worldly admiration as little as Abraham needs tears, for she was no heroine and he was no hero, but both of them became greater than these....” (65)

What Johannes offers, then, is a passionate dialectic that befits Abraham. It is different from the “scientific” dialectics that a philosopher or Hegel would use: where different or contrary intellectual ideas meet, struggle, reconcile, and give birth to greater ideas. The passionate dialectic “sets in motion” passions and witnesses the struggles of passions. (102) Would the passionate dialectic also have reconciliation and give birth to greater ideas? Would there be progress in this passionate dialectic? How? Johannes says: “...everyone was great in proportion to the magnitude of that with which he *struggled*.”(16) This suggests to me that the dialectic could be advanced by making the *struggles* greater. There are three ways that Johannes achieves that: 1. Focusing on passions instead of the result. 2. Resolving a struggle by allowing the higher passion to prevail. 3. Torturing the hero.

First, he focuses on the struggles of the passions instead of the result. The dialectic moves from finitude to passion. “Moreover, in its dialectic the result (in so far as it is finitude’s response to the infinite question) is altogether incongruous with the hero’s existence.” (63) The result is contingent on the external circumstances, on finitude, but pure passion is not. One becomes a hero not by the result, but by making the beginning: by initiating the passion. Johannes extends this idea of prioritizing the passions over the result in his revision of some stories in *Problema III*. His revision of the merman story is a great example: “I have taken the liberty of changing the merman somewhat, and essentially I have also changed Agnes a little, for in the legend Agnes is not entirely without guilt...” (95) In the original story, the legend, both the seducer and the seduced have guilt. Whether Agnes would be seduced or not has nothing to do with the struggles of passions. It is just a matter of chance. Agnes shares the passion of the merman.²⁷ The success

²⁷ “...Agnes of the legend is a woman who demands the interesting, and anyone like that can always be sure of having a merman close by...” (95) Her demanding the interesting suggests a desire for new “adventures.” The merman shares this passion in the “adventures” of his seduction.

of the seduction is not so much dependent on the passions on each side as on the practical skills of merman and other contingencies. With the revision of Johannes, however, Agnes becomes a pure manifestation of the passions of faith and innocence and the merman a pure manifestation of the passions of lust and deception. What a struggle of passions! The result, then, only serves as a manifestation of the resolution of this struggle, but not an arbitrary determination based on the contingencies: the focus is always on the struggle of the passions. The innocence of Agnes calms down the wild sea. Is this not miraculous? Is this not unbelievable? First, as noted before, passion unites us and nature and it is not outright absurd that a deep passion of a human being can have a deep influence on the passion of nature. Second, it does not matter! Be it a poetic imagination and production or not, what matters are the struggles of the passions but not what happens in actuality, not the result. In the presentation of the passionate dialectic, the story becomes great. With the help of passionate dialectic the merman “stands at a dialectical apex.” (98) He stands at an apex because what he faces is pure collisions of passion, not an arbitrary result.

Second, we witness struggles of the lower passion and higher passion being resolved into the higher passion. The tragic hero is a good example. “He allows an expression of the ethical to have its *télos* in a higher expression of the ethical; he scales down the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to a feeling that has its dialectic in its relation to the idea of moral conduct.” (59) It is not the purpose of the essay to explore why the duty as a king is higher than the duty as a father. It suffices to point out that in the citation there are two ethical expressions that are in conflict, but by virtue of the dialectic of the feeling, one scales down the

lower expression and expresses the higher.²⁸ This is another form of progress and resolution in the passionate dialectic.

Third, the passionate dialectic makes progress by “torturing the hero.” This usage comes from Johannes: “...I could be tempted to call myself *tortor heroum* (tormentor of heroes), for I am very inventive when it comes to torturing heroes.” (109) His torture of Faust by his revision is an excellent example of how torturing the hero makes the dialectic progress. In the original story, Faust had chosen lust before he saw Margaret: this choice of lust caused him to see Margaret and therefore also the suffering following his seeing Margaret. It was not just the greatness of his doubt that was responsible for his suffering. The struggles of passions were not pure, for the passion of doubt was contaminated by the passion of lust in its struggles with the call from the universal and the passion of love. Faust, then, was neither so great, nor so “unlucky” or miserable, because he partially deserves his suffering for his choice of lust. After the revision, however, Faust suffered only because of his greatness, his passion of the infinite doubt. He was not responsible for seeing Margaret: he was being tortured. This very torture, however, made the dialectic more intense and purer. Faust had to choose either the passion of doubt or the passion of love, both of which are great passions.²⁹ Just as we see the greatness and strength of humanity

²⁸ The usage of “feeling” here deserves some clarification, as one might expect “passion” instead due to my distinction of passion and feeling. Though passion and feeling are different, they very often cooperate. The feeling has a “cognitive” role here. It is the source of the “knowledge” of the dialectic. To really surrender the lower expression and express the higher expression, we still need passion instead of feeling. In short, feeling tells us what is higher and what is our duty. But to act, to do, and to perform the duty, we need passion. The relationship between the feeling and the passion mentioned is similar to that between knowing what is good and doing what is good.

²⁹ The universal would be on both sides: on one side he should not “throw everything into disorder” by his powerful doubt; on the other side, he should speak because he was not sure if his resolution was not prompted by “cryptic pride.” (110, 111)

in tragedy, the greatness of the struggles comes into being by torturing heroes.³⁰ Therefore, torture is another way of progress in this passionate dialectic.

This passionate dialectic is great. We might now have an answer to why Johannes wants to use dialectic instead of being a poet. The best poem describes a passionate collision between two great passions, for example that of “earthly love” and that of “heavenly love.” (92) The passionate dialectic, however, both describes and *elevates* a passionate collision. We need the progress of dialectic to witness greater and yet greater passions. We might also be ready to know why the subtitle of the book is “dialectical lyric”: the dialectic of the book shines with the passion, feeling, and emotions of lyric poems. Johannes unites two realms in one book: the dialectical and the lyrical. Is it, however, great enough to throw some light on faith? No! Johannes acknowledges towards the end of *Problema* III that he introduces and develops all the stories not to make Abraham more comprehensible, “but in order that the incomprehensibility could become more salient.” (112) The dialectical apexes of all these stories only serve to “indicate the boundary of the unknown territory.” (112) Faith belongs to this unknown territory where the passionate dialectic can only *point to* but never understand, let alone make progress from faith and go further than faith. Faith, with the *paradox* entailed in it, is an *absolute stopping point* of the passionate dialectic.

³⁰ I once fell in love with Rabindranath Tagore and had his whole anthology, “*fruit gathering*,” by heart. Years passed by and I have forgotten many lines, but, just now, one of my favorite lines came to me from his prayer to “you,” apparently God. “Grant that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone; But let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.” Yes, suffering and failure nurture us more than pleasure and success. Do not all great men suffer from “overwhelming vicissitudes” and, fearlessly, cultivate and show their greatness by virtue of them? (21) Abraham is perhaps the one tortured most by God. He has to suffer from distress, agony, and most of all, anxiety and paradox. Yet he “became greater by means of these.” (65)

Paradox

Paradox. Paradox. I finally come close to you. Paradox. Do I dare to approach you? My soul jumps up when I think about you. My hands tremble when I type your name. You with your formidable impenetrability, do I dare to approach you? You with your wonder and absurdity, do I dare to write about you? No, I don't. No.

Since I lack the courage to tackle the paradox and it is understandable that I do, it is helpful to talk about courage. We said before that passion requires courage. What is the courage of faith, then? "A paradoxical and humble courage," Johannes answers. (49) It is paradoxical because in this courage we are doing two things that are perfectly incompatible and opposite: to infinitely renounce and yet to hold fast to finitude. It is humble because we as human beings cannot be the agents of such absurdity and impossibility. We have lost all our strength in our continuous infinite resignation: only God makes it possible, not us. For God, everything is possible, including our impossibility and absurdity. This is why Johannes juxtaposes "by virtue of the absurd" and "by virtue of the fact that for God everything is possible." (46) This is a beautiful juxtaposition of faith and absurdity: precisely in this absurdity lies the "incomprehensible" power of God and embracing the absurd means believing absolutely this power of God. Faith and absurdity have to be together because only when they are together, we surrender our human understanding and power completely. We humbly let ourselves be a channel and medium of God, but we share no agency, not a little bit. Now, how does this beautiful digression to the courage of faith help me with the paradox? Well, we need precisely this paradoxical and humble courage to face the paradox. I have infinitely resigned before the paradox. By virtue of the paradoxical courage, however, I can hold fast to it. *I* cannot understand the paradox. *I* don't dare to talk about paradox. Why should I, however, worry about this *I*? With humble passion, I should

know that it is not *I* who approach the paradox. “A poet is not an apostle; he drives out devils only by the power of the devil.” (61) Similarly, to approach paradox, we need paradox: let the paradoxical and humble courage be our inspiration and support.

Let us start with the point where the lyrical dialectic and the paradox meet because we have some acquaintance with the lyrical dialectic. The final sentence of *Preliminary Expectoration* connects the two. “In order to perceive the prodigious paradox of faith...which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops—in order to perceive this, it is now my intention to draw out in the form of *problemata* the dialectical aspects implicit in the story of Abraham.” (53) What are the dialectical aspects? The beginning sentence of each *problema* is a good candidate. As noted before, each sentence starts with the same clause, “the ethical as such is the universal,” followed by an “aspect” of this claim. The aspects are: the ethical applies at all times, the ethical is the divine, and the ethical is the disclosed, each of which corresponds to the theme of its own *Problema*. How to relate the paradox to these aspects? Johannes defines the paradox as: “Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal...” (55) Ha! The single individual being higher than the universal is the paradox and we just mentioned the different aspects of the ethical, the universal. The dialectic of faith, then, consists in showing that the man of faith transcends these aspects of the ethical and is higher than them as a single individual.

Indeed, Abraham transcends these aspects. First, “The story of Abraham contains, then, a teleological suspension of the ethical. As the single individual he became higher than the universal.” (66) He suspends his ethical duty to Isaac, not to fulfill a higher ethical duty, in which case he would have suspended it as a universal individual, not as a single individual. Instead, he

transcends the fatherly duty as a single individual.³¹ Second, He has an ethical duty, which is “divine,” but the ethical “is reduced to the relative in contradistinction to the absolute relationship to God.” (71) Normally the divine and the ethical correspond and the individual is opposed to them. (71) In Abraham, “for one’s own sake” and “for God’s sake” is synthesized and are opposed to the ethical. The single individual is higher than the universal by virtue of the absolute. Third, the ethical demands disclosure from Abraham, that is, it demands that Abraham speaks. Abraham, however, *cannot speak*. He violates this aspect of the ethical not because of “aesthetic magnanimity,” that is, to save another person. On the contrary, he violates this aspect to kill Isaac. (92) He violates it not out of any concern for the universal. He violates it as a single individual and he simply *has to* violate it as a single individual. That he cannot speak is not a personal choice, but a necessary condition of faith: faith is individual. Thus, Abraham, as a single individual, is higher than the universal and transcends an aspect of the ethical in each *Problema*.

This, however, is not the entirety of the paradox. Johannes has a prescription after the phrase that “the single individual is higher than the universal”: “...—yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal.” (55) Why is this prescription so important? What was lacking before? The problem is with the demonic paradox. What if someone is born demonic and also exists as a single individual higher than the universal? Note that it is still alright for the demonic’s individual acts to be *higher* than the universal. After all, what does “higher” mean? Johannes articulates the meaning of it: “...that the single individual is higher than the universal...that the single individual...determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute...” (70) That the single individual being higher simply means that the

³¹ “There is no higher expression for the ethical in Abraham’s life than that the father should love the son.” (59) Agamemnon suspended his fatherly duty, but the ethical is not relinquished. It is preserved in a higher duty. (54)

ethical becomes relative to the absolute and one determines the ethical by the absolute. Alright then, if one has a demonic nature, say he is a Bluebeard enjoying seeing people killed, he would determine his relationship to the universal by his relationship to the demonic, the absolute. (105) He would transcend the ethical. The ethical demands that one should not kill, but he will.³²

Even the man who after being sleepless over Abraham's story decides to sacrifice his son would be a single individual higher than the universal. (28, 29) There is no way by which we can know if God demands this from this man or not. Even if he indeed hears the voice of God and he hears that God demands his son from him, he is not justified. How can we know if it is really the voice of God or an illusion? Therefore, simply hearing the voice of God and obeying it, beautiful and amazing as it sounds, is not faith. If this is faith, then the demonic is a man of faith and the sleepless man who wants to sacrifice his son is a man of faith as well, provided that they both think that they are performing the duty from the absolute and that they hear their "voice of God." No. Faith is, to be sure, "madness." (17) Madness, however, is not necessarily faith. Only "divine madness" is faith. (23) We have so many stories in the *Problemata* and all are distinguished from the story of Abraham, though many of them have the single individual higher than the universal. This is because they have not fulfilled the prescription that the single individual should first live in the universal.

The prescription is important. Abraham has been in the universal. He loves his son. (20) He "can describe his love in the most beautiful words to be found in any language." (113) He is a devout and God-fearing man. (31) All these show that he loves to be in the universal and to translate his acts into the universal. Before he transcends, he needs to have the assurance that his

³² Johannes acknowledges that in sin one also exists as a single individual higher than the universal. (98) It is probably because of this paradox that both sin and faith are categorized as later immediacy instead of first immediacy. (99) Thus, if we do not have the prescription, faith would be the same as sin and the divine the same as the demonic. Heaven forbid!

love for his son is his one and only wish. (78) Without this concentration and assurance, he cannot be sure if the “voice of God” he hears is actually from God or an illusion. To hear the voice of God, do we not need the “voice of the ethical” as a contrast? This is also what is entailed in the prescription that one has to first live in the universal completely.³³ Again, this is incomprehensible for our human understanding. The so-called “voice of God” is not so outright absurd to most people because one could identify it as a projection of our unconscious. If Abraham, however, loves Isaac with all his soul and life and harbors no secret hatred against him, how is it possible that a “voice” comes to him telling him that he should kill Isaac? This is absurd! This voice cannot come from himself and he cannot be the agent of this voice, so it has to come from the absolute, from God.

Having articulated the prescription and the possible misunderstanding, we are at a position where we are facing the absurdity and the incomprehensibility. This reminds me of the absurdity of faith that we explored. There, the absurdity lay in the fact that one cannot receive anything, or hold fast to anything, after having resigned infinitely. Curiously enough, here we have the absurdity in the inverse form: it is absurd that one can violate the universal as a single individual, when being in the universal is his one and only wish. In both cases the man of faith is powerless and is not the agent when it comes to the movement of faith. In the first case he has to receive things from God or to hold fast to finitude based on the faith that for God everything is possible, though it is an impossibility for himself. In the second case he has to hear the voice of God, which cannot come from him. This paradox of faith, therefore, is perfectly compatible with the absurdity of faith or the definition of faith which we came up with. After all, both are not

³³ “That I was determined to make the movement could prove my courage human speaking—that I loved him with my whole soul is the presupposition without which the whole thing becomes a misdeed....” (35) This presupposition is essentially the prescription. One has to live in the universal fully and in the case of Abraham it means that he must love his son fully.

really a definition of faith for both are absurd and both only talk about the consequences of faith but not faith itself. There are different human ways to arrive at faith and to describe faith. Faith itself, however, always has its incomprehensibility, absurdity, and paradox. The passion we need to have faith is also always the same, no matter how much we intellectualize and try to understand it. It is the humble and paradoxical courage with the inspiration of which we start our journey of paradox.

Part 3: The Man of Faith

We are here. We are ready to explore the man of faith. There is, however, nothing left to be pointed out about the man of faith himself. His life is just the faith and the paradox that we have shown, and which we can never understand. They require the purest passion, and they commence where “thought stops.” (53) When we explored faith as the highest passion, we only discovered some peculiarities of faith and how faith transforms passion and brings the qualities of passion to a new dimension. When we use the passionate dialectic to arrive at the paradox, we only see how the paradox transcends different aspects of the ethical and how the paradox is still higher than the dialectical apexes of all the stories. We never know what faith, paradox, and the man of faith are but only what they are not and their peculiarities. We shall continue this method of exploration. We will “check” the man of faith from different perspectives and explore the knight of infinite resignation under the same perspectives for he is closely related to yet different from the man of faith. We will understand neither the paradox nor faith, but we can at least witness the manifestation of faith and paradox in these perspectives and the beauty, incomprehensibility and significance of them. I have chosen the three following perspectives.

The Relationship to Existence

Let us start with the knight of infinite resignation, for his existence is peculiar and great enough and can unite many great passions that we've only mentioned or partially explored. Johannes says that the knight of infinite resignation is reconciled with existence in pain. (43) What is existence? What is to be reconciled with it? Why in pain? Let's explore them. Existence seems to represent the external world that we live in, which Johannes also expresses by the names "actuality" and "finitude." It is a world full of contingencies and imperfections. (27) "...[I]f a vast, never appeased emptiness hid beneath everything, what would life be but despair?" (15) Such is the nature of the external world. One cannot cross the same river twice and identity is a chimera. All is subject to the law of change and uncertainty. If our passions are not pure and if we let the external world affect our expression of our passions, it makes sense that life would be only despair. In existence, there is nothing to depend on and this is the source of our suffering. We are not reconciled with existence. The knight of faith, however, has "pure passions" by virtue of his infinite resignation. He is assured in it. What happens in the external world cannot affect him. Note how the assurance is established. "The knight, however, makes this impossibility possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it." (44) He turns the passion inward, which makes the passion pure but which at the same time defies the chance of its fulfillment in actuality. He is free from the emptiness of existence by being an alien to it.³⁴ He does not have anything to do with existence so existence cannot hurt him or shake his peace. "In infinite resignation there is peace and rest...which in its pain reconciles one to existence." (45) Since he does not expect to get the princess in actuality, he would not be disappointed by existence and would have peace and rest. It must be wonderful, however, to get the princess in

³⁴ "...the knight of resignation is a stranger and an alien." (50)

actuality. (50) The knight of infinite resignation does not dare to hope that. Here lies the pain. Here lies also the reconciliation, for reconciliation always presupposes two opposing elements and the knight is opposed to actuality as he is an alien to actuality and constantly distances himself from it. This is a bit odd. He lives *in existence* and he is a *being*, yet his peace and rest precisely lie in his absolute detachment from existence.

Let us stay with this state of infinite resignation and see if it throws light on other infinite concepts. First, in the movement of infinite resignation, one gains his eternal consciousness, which Johannes also calls love for God.³⁵ (48) What does it mean? In what way is the consciousness “eternal”? Normally the eternal means the everlasting. If this is what is meant, it is difficult to equate that with love for God. Johannes never elaborates on the idea of everlastingness. What he does emphasize and what we have established is the purity of the passion, its detachment from finitude and actuality. What if the eternal, instead of meaning endless time, means outside of time? Then it corresponds with what is said and emphasized and can be equated with love for God. Indeed, if a consciousness is outside of time, it means that it is also outside of all the change involved in time, in actuality, and it means it is a pure consciousness. The love for God, as it is not dependent on finitude, would also be an “eternal” love. Sometimes Johannes uses the phrase “eternal validity.” (46) This makes sense as well, as one distances oneself from finitude, nothing can challenge his validity. One affirms his upright self-sufficiency. It is, of course, possible that this eternal consciousness is also everlasting as Johannes

³⁵ Yes. Unlike what the name “infinite resignation” suggests, it is not the case that one just gives up everything. It is true that one gives up everything finitely, but one does not simply give it up but turns the finite desire into a spiritual expression, for example into love for God. (44) Thus one gains the love for God, which cannot find fulfillment and actuality. This distinction is important. The knight has something in his giving up. (47) We find ourselves and affirm ourselves in infinite resignation. (35)

talks about the “immortality of the soul.” (100) This meaning, however, cannot be primary. Who cares about endless time when one is already outside of time?

There are more remarkable things to come now that we are at the peak of the passion of resignation. Let the dialectic of our eternal validity expand. We’ve mentioned before that the movement of infinite resignation could be conceived as a movement of infinite doubt or, intellectually, a movement of ignorance. Strangely enough, Johannes says: “...the person who has actually made just the movement of infinity scarcely doubts.” (100) Here the movement of infinity, instead of being equated with the movement of doubt, is a movement after which one scarcely doubts. How to reconcile this? The object of doubt could be crucial. In the citation the doubt is about “the immortality of the soul.” It is the doubt about the infinite. In the movement of infinite doubt, however, we are doubting everything finite: our bodily existence, our preconceived ideas, everything material and all the specious arguments based on them. Precisely by doubting and renouncing the finitude do we gain the “eternal consciousness” and get in touch with the infinite. Naturally, our doubt for the eternal disappears the moment we made the movement of doubting everything finite. Therefore, doubting the finite makes one confident in the infinite and diminishes our doubt about the infinite.

Connected to this topic of doubt is the passion of innocence. Let me set this passion in motion. When Johannes describes the princess with whom the knight of infinite resignation is in love as another knight of infinite resignation “similarly disposed,” he makes the claim that one who understands the state of this “knight couple” can never be deceived. (45) Then he says: “No girl who does not have this pride actually understands what it means to love, but if she does have this pride, the craftiness and cunning of the whole world cannot deceive her.” (45) I take the pride to mean the eternal validity we find in ourselves after the movement of infinity. How does

this pride of infinite resignation protect us from deception? In *Problema III*, he talks about deception again and the means against it in the context of the seduction of the merman. While most people think it is “culture” that shields one from deception and seduction, Johannes disagrees with them and says: “...there is only one means, and that is innocence.” (95) In his story, the innocence of Agnes indeed overpowers the wild passion and the “craftiness and cunning” of the merman. Is this another hidden parallel of Johannes where the pride of infinite movement and innocence are both shields against deception and seduction? Could innocence be incorporated into the movement of infinity as Socratic doubt has been incorporated after we discovered the parallel of doubt and infinite resignation?

Indeed, we can synthesize innocence and the movement of infinite resignation. What is innocence but a deep trust in the humanity and goodness of other human beings? Is not lack of innocence essentially doubt about the motives of others? Once one makes the movement of infinite resignation, however, the motives of others do not concern us finitely anymore. It is true that the merman is the epitome of the demonic and the wild passion of nature. For the innocent Agnes, however, the love for the merman —yes! for a demon!— could very well be an expression of her love for God. “...in absolute faith and in absolute humility, like the lowly flower she thought herself to be, and with this look she entrusts her whole destiny to him in absolute confidence.” (94) What a faith! After the movement of infinity, the finite object of our love does not matter anymore as it is only the material cause of our love, but not the final cause. The final cause is our love for God, the final cause is the pure passion, and the final cause is the beauty within. Thus, we can love anyone as we love God and trust everyone as we trust God. Is not this innocence? How can one be deceived with this innocence? One is only deceived when one expects something but the innocent one expects nothing. How can the innocent one be seduced?

“He [the merman] can seduce Agnes, he can seduce a hundred Agnes, he can make any girl infatuated—but Agnes has won, and the merman has lost her. Only as booty can she be his, he cannot give himself faithfully to any girl....” (95) Yes, the merman might seduce Agnes, but Agnes will never think or feel that she is seduced and she can still express her “pure love” to her man. What an unshakable love! What an innocence! Yet this innocence is essentially another form of infinite resignation.

The next passions are of irony and humor. We bore a grudge against them when we were exploring them as passions: they were neither vivid nor salient. This is not surprising, as Johannes says: “Our age does not want to know anything about this; on the whole, it does not want to know more about irony than was said by Hegel, who, curiously enough, did not understand much about it and bore a grudge against it, which our age has good reason not to give up, for it has to guard itself against irony.” (111) Again, we belong to the same age so our lacking for the understanding of irony and humor is reasonable. Let us, however, not lose hope. We belong to the age of science; yet we managed to transcend science and give a eulogy to passion. Now, with the help of the passion of infinity, which has already united many great passions, we might understand irony and humor. Indeed, Johannes acknowledges that irony and humor are the “infinite passions,” which means that they can be also incorporated in infinite resignation as the movement of ignorance, eternal consciousness, and the passion of innocence have been. He says: “Irony and humor are also self-reflective and thus belong to the sphere of infinite resignation; their elasticity is owing to the individual’s incommensurability with actuality.” (51) What is the meaning of “self-reflective,” “elasticity,” and “incommensurability” and why do they belong to the sphere of infinite resignation? Let us limit the focus to irony because Johannes says more about it and because what we discover about one is applicable to the other.

There are two examples that will throw some light on our questions. First, the example in New Testament given by Johannes: “When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men.” (111) Johannes says: “This passage shows clearly that subjectivity is incommensurable with actuality, indeed, that it has the right to deceive.” (112) Ethics demands disclosure but in this example one hides their fasting, a way of spiritual development. If one discloses it, others will have reactions to this behavior, for example, admiration for the stigma and devotion of the fasting one. These reactions could make our fasting impure. One might fast for the sake of the praise and the honor from the external world. This expression of irony, however, keeps one from these impurities and ensures the purity of the spiritual expression of fasting. Wait, where are we now? Are we not back to infinite resignation? Doesn’t the movement of infinite resignation serve the same purpose, that is, to distance us from the external world and to establish internal stability by making the passion pure? Is not the “actuality” in the citation another way of saying the external world and existence? Is not the expression of irony an expression of infinite resignation? We left irony (and humor) with the conclusion that, in irony, what is said is not what is meant and what is meaningful is not verbal. We were not so far off then. We just need to add one more thought to connect what we established to what we discover now. If what is meant spiritually is not the same as what is expressed verbally and actually, this also means that the spirit distances itself from actuality and existence, which is the purpose of the fasting one’s irony: hiding his spirituality from actuality and showing his independence from finitude.

The last example is subjected to the objection that the fasting is not necessarily an expression of spirituality and that it could be just a blind ritual or even a healthy diet. Our second example, however, has an unambiguous beauty and spirituality: the last words of Socrates.

Johannes identifies his last words as his response “that he is surprised to have been condemned by a majority of three votes.”³⁶ (117) Then Johannes commented: “He could not have bantered more ironically with the idle talk in the marketplace or with the foolish comment of an idiot than with the death sentence that condemns him to death.” (117) What does this irony mean? It means that Socrates is beyond the struggle with death and “affirms himself.” (117) Similarly, his irony with the foolish talks shows his indifference to these specious arguments. It means he maintains the “equilibrium of doubt.” (6) Irony is an expression of his infinite resignation from all the arguments of existence and even from his very life. With the amazing example of Socrates, we should not have doubt concerning the infinite passion of irony. Instead of holding a grudge against it as we did before, now we are able to appreciate its beauty and admire it as a form of the movement of infinity!

We can also now answer the questions concerning “self-reflective,” “elasticity,” and “incommensurability.” Our self has the capacity to separate itself from finitude and to express itself purely. While language and ethics call for disclosure, irony entails “hiddenness” and affirms the individuality and “interiority” of self. (82; 69) Irony defies actuality and universality but affirms the self. Hiddenness makes one great. (88) It shows the strength of the self, of our “eternal consciousness.” Thus, irony is self-reflective.³⁷ I take the “elasticity” to mean the freedom of expression as opposed to the “rigidity” and “uniformity” of ethical expressions. (88) The walk of the knight of infinite resignation is “light and bold.” (38) This lightness also shows one’s elasticity. One is not limited by existence but transcends it. Thus, irony is elastic. The

³⁶ Johannes is aware that Socrates has said a lot after these “last words.” These are, however, his last *public* words and his immediate verbal reactions to his death sentence. According to Johannes’ interpretation, Socrates makes the movement of death when his death sentence is announced to him. These words are therefore expressions of his triumph over death and for that reason have the special status of the “last words.”

³⁷ In Part 1 we said that the knight of infinite resignation loves God without faith, and for that reason, his love reflects upon himself. (37) Now if irony is also an expression of infinity, it makes sense that it reflects on the self.

“incommensurability” should be that between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, pure passion and contingent actuality. That is, when one affirms his inner infinity by irony, he exists as an “alien” to the finitude because of his infinite resignation. His eternal consciousness despises the temporal realm, and his pure passion disregards the contingencies of the external world.

The oddity and alienness never leaves the knight of infinite resignation. It is an element that keeps on manifesting itself in our exploration. Would it not be better if the knight of infinite resignation also lived with the princess *actually*? It is odd that he loves the princess yet distances himself from her spiritually. Would it not be better that, having eternal consciousness, we also rejoice in temporality? It is odd that, having flesh and mind, we always retreat into the eternal consciousness. Would it not be better if, faithfully surrendering herself to her man, Agnes were in love with a saint, not a merman? It is odd that her heavenly love, absolute faith, and pure innocence are directed to a demonic being. Would it not be better that Socrates and the fasting one can express what they mean directly? It is odd that irony is always indirect and that it has to distance itself from actuality. Why is the knight of infinite resignation so distinct from existence? Why such incommensurability? Why such contrast?

In faith, this oddity in existence disappears. Johannes describes the existence of the man of faith as: “To exist in such a way that my contrast to existence constantly expresses itself as the most beautiful and secure harmony with it....” (50) Yes, because of the movement of infinite resignation, the man of faith is contrasted with existence and is incommensurable with it. He, however, makes the movement of the absurd and holds fast to existence and finitude. Not a trace of the “heterogeneity” of the infinite with the finite can be detected in him. (39) Existence is indeed his dear friend. Our existence has an underlying emptiness which causes our suffering and

insecurity. His existence has an absurd fullness and fulfills his every wish! Yes, he dares to hold fast to existence even though he has resigned infinitely and has recognized the impossibility of the fulfillment of his wishes. How absurd it is. Yet how unshakable the faith is because infinite resignation is antecedent. How wonderful! Johannes says: “And yet it must be wonderful to get the princess, and the knight of faith is the only happy man, the heir of the finite....” (50) Yes, the knight of faith dares to embrace finitude as it is after having given it up, so he is happy: for isn’t everything he encounters a wonderment and a blessing from God as he gives up *everything* and expects *nothing*? Does he not enjoy every moment of his life as we enjoy a miraculous blessing? Every moment, every single moment of his life, is a miracle by virtue of the absurd. He lets his eternal consciousness have its expression in day-to-day pleasures. Johannes cites a poet who, “after beautifully and simply expressing his desire for the good things of life in five or six lines, ends thus: a blessed leap into eternity.” (42) Yes, eternity is not in the next world. It is not in the next life. It is not even in the eternal consciousness which only dares to stay in the “self.” It is right here in front of us! It is right here in finitude! The sublime is in the pedestrian. The kingdom of heaven is on earth! What a beautiful union of the eternal and the temporal. What a wonderful and secure harmony with existence!

Youth and Old Age

“But Abraham had faith, and therefore he was young, for he who always hopes for the best grows old and is deceived by life, and he who is always prepared for the worst grows old prematurely, but he who has faith—he preserves an eternal youth.” (18)

What is to grow old? Why do both the one who hopes for the best and the one who is prepared for the worst grow old? A definition that fits both types of people is: “To grow old is to give up finitude, and to be young is to hold fast to finitude.” A child is young as he dares to hold fast to finitude. He dares to believe that Santa Claus will come every Christmas to magically fulfill

his desire. Youth and strength are in his desire.³⁸ He is, nevertheless, bound to grow old and be deceived by life. One year he will understand his dad is actually the Santa Claus. Similarly, he has to experience the disillusion of one “Santa Claus” after another until he becomes a shrewd and “mature” man who no longer believes in the “childish” expectation. He grows old; he no longer dares to hope, to hold fast to finitude. If one is always prepared for the worst, he will not be deceived by life and grow old, that is, give up or lose his expectation, because of life. He is, however, already old as he dares not to expect, as he has already given up the joy of finitude. He is old prematurely because he gives up even before he is deceived by life.

The knight of infinite resignation is similar to the latter type of person, for he has infinitely renounced finitude and is expecting the worst. (In his case the worst is the impossibility to be with the princess.) As noted earlier, however, he has not simply given up but he has also gained eternal consciousness and love for God in loving the princess. As always, he is in an odd position regarding holding on and giving up. His having is a giving up.³⁹ The knight of infinite resignation is never addressed as the one who has eternal youth or as someone who is young; instead, we see places where his love is young. For example, “He keeps this love young, and it grows along with him in years and beauty.” (44) This is perhaps the best way to describe his awkward situation. He gives up everything finite but holds fast to the eternal love. One cannot simply say he is young because he is not holding fast to anything finite. One cannot say he is old either because he still dares to hold fast to something, though not something finite. Thus the best way to describe him with respect to youth and old age is simply to avoid this ambiguity and focus on his love. He *holds fast* to the love, so he makes his love *young*.

³⁸ Johannes gives an example of a girl who, “in the face of every difficulty,” “still remains convinced that her desire will be fulfilled.” (47) He calls this girl a “*young*” girl. (47)

³⁹ “...but this having, after all, is also a giving up.” (47)

The knight of faith, however, does not have the difficulty and awkwardness of the knight of infinite resignation. He is always young enough to desire because he has faith, which means to hold fast to finitude after having given it up.⁴⁰ He preserves an eternal youth. The Kingdom of Heaven is in him and he shows it by his “childlike” faith. His childlike faith, however, is not subject to the deception that a child with his childish assurance and beliefs always suffers. His faith is unshakable in the full recognition of the impossibility. (48) It dares to “look the impossibility in the eye” and accepts it through infinite resignation. (47) How can a faith like that ever be deceived by life, lose hope, and give up?

The man of faith, however, can be surprised. When Johannes describes the story of Abraham, he says that Abraham, “contrary to expectation,” got a son a second time. (9) He also said Abraham “was surprised at this outcome.” (36) We’ve established before that Abraham expects the impossible by virtue of the absurd, that God will not demand Isaac from him. Everything happened according to his “absurd expectation,” “according to the promise and according to his faith.” (18,19) In what way, then, is what happened contrary to expectation? In what way can Abraham be surprised? We see that even in Abraham’s last words that he had not left the absurdity, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son!” (119) Though he himself was going to strike the fatal blow on his son, he still believed that God will provide the lamb by virtue of the absurd. How? He did not know himself, otherwise it would be not absurd. The man of faith is a witness, not a teacher. (80) Abraham was not there to question God or understand God. He existed to witness the wonder of God, to see how God beautifully resolved the absurdity. Humanly speaking, he *had to be surprised* at the solution provided by God,

⁴⁰ “Outwardly, the wonder of it is that it happened according to their expectancy; in the more profound sense, the wonder of faith is that Abraham and Sarah were young enough to desire and that faith had preserved their desire and thereby their youth.” (18)

not that he was not ready to receive Isaac: on the contrary he needed “no preparation and no time to rally to finitude and its joy.” (37) As a man of faith he was always in finitude and gave it up at the same time. For this reason, he did not feel *relieved, thankful, deceived, or awkward* to receive Isaac back again. He *had to be surprised* because, after all, what happened happened according to the faith, that is, according to the absurd: it was beyond his expectation or his human capacity. Abraham was alway *ready* with *what* would happen. (21) He was, however, always surprised by *how* everything happened, for it was God who designed the solution. Abraham’s job was to infinitely resign and yet hope for the impossible: that is, to kill Isaac and yet believed that Isaac would not be killed. How would that happen? He could not know. He could only be surprised by the wonder of God.

Is not the surprise also a quality of youth? The shrewd and the “grown up” are so calculative that they do not allow themselves to be surprised and cannot be surprised either. How can one be surprised when one protects oneself from the wonder of life and from the glory of God? Yet the man of faith is young enough, brave enough, open enough, and humble enough to be surprised by the wonder of God manifested in his very own life. He opens his soul, he surrenders his human calculation, he performs his duty and he witnesses how God provides everything wondrously and beautifully. A human being can only be surprised to witness the divine intelligence and incomprehensibility of God. Every moment is completely new for him as every moment before he surrenders the entirety of existence and comes back to existence every moment again. He looks at the “new world” as a newborn child would do. He is surprised by this rebirth that happens every moment, by this new world that is revealed to him by virtue of the absurd. Thus, he is the eternal newborn baby in the glory of the lord.

To give and To receive

“...[H]e has not even grasped the little mystery that it is better to give than to receive and has no intimation of the great mystery that it is far more difficult to receive than to give, that is, if one has the courage to do without and in the hour of distress did not prove a coward.” (104)

We shall consummate our journey with the exploration of this sentence, not only because of its beauty and difficulty but also because it reflects perfectly the relationship between the knight of infinite resignation and the man of faith. The knight of infinite can be conceived as one who has given up everything finite; the man of faith can be conceived as someone who has received everything finite by virtue of the absurd. What does this sentence mean, then? Is it not easier and better to receive than to give? I need to do something or have something in order to give something. To receive seems to be easy; I do not need to do anything to receive. It also seems better to receive. I would “drive with four horses” if I can always receive money from the Heaven or from a generous patron! (51)

The problem with receiving lies precisely in the “always” in my conditional clause. We have known existence well enough to recognize that all what we receive could be taken away from us again. How can we know for sure that we can *always* receive something? The tragedy of Job is always lurking in our subconsciousness. Our imagination can always draw horrible picture in which we lose *everything* and have *nothing*. Can we still act gracefully and not be a coward when vicissitudes of life overwhelm us? I take the “do without” to mean to live without what we have received and “the hour of distress” to mean the time when we have lost what we have received.⁴¹ If I am right, it is indeed better to give than to receive because all the pleasures we received are

⁴¹ Note that it means that we will lose *everything*. As noted earlier, in a deeper sense, nothing really belongs to us. Everything we have, including our body and mind, is *given* to us. The first “giver” is our parents, community and society. The second “giver” is all the contingencies of existence. The third “giver” is nature and God. Every giver is deeper and more ultimate than the giver before.

roses that have their thorns: they are potential burdens. To give means to be more in control of our happiness. It is indeed more difficult to receive than to give for it requires more spiritual development not to get attached to what we have than to what we do not have. (What we have is what we have received.) But one must not get attached, otherwise it is a source of suffering.

The knight of infinite resignation gives up everything. This state of being is better than that of people who are overwhelmed by their desires for the pleasures of finitude. The knight is the only one who is in control of his life, who is self-sufficient. It is, however, much more difficult to receive everything finite than to give up everything finite, and the man of faith manages to do that. One can give up everything by his own strength, and this movement of infinite resignation makes complete sense. It is just a natural expansion of the cited sentence that it is better to give than to receive. To receive something after one has given up everything, however, is absurd and beyond our power. The man of faith needs to give up his ego and agency and to simply surrender to absurdity with his “humble and paradoxical courage.” We believe that we can somehow control our lives and our body belongs to us. We believe we are totally responsible for our lives and our society. Then we start to judge, we start to teach, and we start to suffer. For the knight of faith, however, “the whole earthly figure he presents is a new creation by virtue of the absurd.” (40) Yes, every cell and molecule, every vibration of his vein, and every movement of his body are the creation by virtue of the absurd. He has done his work of making the movement of infinite resignation and of humbly embracing finitude in his faith in God. Then he witnesses. What does he see? The Kingdom of Heaven on earth. A divine rebirth by virtue of the absurd. His body and mind is the temple of God where wonders are revealed all the time.

“Non nobis Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.” “Not unto us, O lord, not unto us, but to thy name give the glory.” I learned to sing this simple and yet profound song in

Freshman Chorus. I kept on coming back to this song in times of distress and elation. Without this song I could have lost myself in my suffering and my joy. This song saves me because the humble courage of faith is beautifully described in it. By giving up ourselves and our credit, we also have given up everything finite, for this idea of self is the strongest attachment we have. Yet the song still believes in “glory” without this self. Glory from whom, then? From God. One must give up, and yet dare to receive. This is faith. He who has this humble courage is the man of faith. His life is the earthly manifestation of the divine glory.

Epilogue

When I was a Freshman I heard that Aristotle said that philosophy starts with wonder.⁴² This sentence is wonderful. I have loved it and remembered it all four years. So often, I think, I search, I ponder, and I end up in a state where I am filled with wonderment. Thought stops: I am totally empty and ignorant. How beautiful! Reason leads to its own downfall. Thought shows me a place where thought has to stop. I have had this wonderment so often with *Fear and Trembling*. I have cried and shouted its name out loud, but there is nothing more I can do. How can I share it with anyone? How can I say a word to articulate the wonderment? Precisely in this emptiness, precisely in this powerlessness, my wild and arrogant soul is chastened, tamed, and saved: for I cannot do anything but witness this wonderment. Abraham, is it how you have lived your entire life? Abraham. Is it how you are a guiding star that saves the anguished? Abraham, Father of faith! Abraham, thank you!

⁴² Sorry dear readers, I have been very diligent throughout the entire essay to give citations and to support my arguments with the text. Please forgive me for this exception: I have not even tried to find the source of this saying. Who cares if Aristotle says it or not? Who cares where and with what intentions he says it? If Aristotle has not said it, I say it. What matters is the passion this sentence inspired in me.