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# Faith, reason and the human mind – love triangle or ménage à trois?

*A study and comparison of the philosophical approaches of Søren Kierkegaard and Richard Swinburne towards religious faith*

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## Summary

This paper is about religious faith, and how philosophy should approach the topic. As a starting point, I will assume that religious faith is a good thing, and that philosophy can help enlighten how religious faith ought to be practiced, and more important, what kind of action faith is. I shall be working with two main philosophers, though I will frequently quote other thinkers and works, where I judge that beneficial. The two philosophers and main characters in this text is Søren Kierkegaard and Richard Swinburne. The two of them share a strong Christian faith, which validity or invalidity is not the subject of this paper. Rather, it is the question of how philosophy ought to approach religious faith, they fundamentally disagree. Swinburne insist that religion, in his case primarily Christianity, can and should be subjected to rigorous scrutiny and critical analysis, the same way one would approach any other philosophical problem or even scientific discovery. In doing so, you will come to see that Christianity is objectively true. Swinburne aims to prove that Christianity as a religion is probably true. Kierkegaard firmly dismiss all talk about any objective standards in faith. Faith is, according to him, inherently a subjective undertaking of the most intimate and personal sort. Faith is not a scientific or logical compulsion, rather it is an ethical choice, made when freeing oneself from despair and in the face of terrible anxiety. I have gone through each of their defences for religious faith, tried to sum up the most crucial aspects and given a description of their reasoning.

In the end, I have endeavoured to discuss and contemplate Swinburne and Kierkegaard alike, praising what I find praiseworthy, and criticising where I disagree, and of course, explain how I myself think. I have primarily criticised Swinburne for neglecting the importance of subjective devotion and passion in his apologetics. Kierkegaard I criticise for his refusal to seek God outside of the human psyche and I discuss how I think a changing context in time and environment creates further difficulties for his religious approach. In the end I have concluded that both Swinburne and Kierkegaard have important and valid points, though in the end it is my subjective opinion do think that Kierkegaard is the one that has best understood what religious faith is, or at least ought to be.



## Table of contents

1	Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	7
1.1	Topic.....	7
1.2	Question.....	8
1.3	Thesis statement.....	9
1.4	Methodology.....	9
1.5	Fideism and epistemic heroism .....	12
2	Chapter 2 – Presenting thinkers and types of thinking.....	14
2.1	Kierkegaard's poetry and the sick soul .....	14
	Why faith?.....	15
	Faith as a stage in life.....	17
2.2	Swinburne's divine hypothesis .....	21
2.3	Working towards God through reason .....	24
	A coherent faith .....	25
	A reasonable faith .....	26
	Was Jesus God?.....	31
2.4	Natural theology and apologetics.....	33
2.5	Intelligent faith.....	35
3	Chapter 3 – True faith .....	39
3.1	Objective and subjective truth.....	39
	The Thomist view of faith .....	43
	The Lutheran view of faith .....	45
	The Pragmatist view of faith .....	47
3.2	A revised pragmatism .....	51
3.3	Faith through or beyond reason? .....	53
3.4	Apologetics = Approximations .....	54
4	Chapter 4 – Positive and negative apologetics.....	57
4.1	Positive apologetics .....	58
4.2	Negative, or cultural, apologetics .....	58
4.3	Faith as your best bet.....	60
5	Chapter 5 – Moral implications.....	62
5.1	God reveals himself to us through what is moral.....	62
5.2	When the religious trumps the ethical .....	63
6	Chapter 6 – Problematic aspects .....	68
6.1	Two different approaches, from two different backgrounds.....	68
6.2	God as an unassailable construction .....	71

6.3	In defence of approximations .....	74
6.4	The problem of conditional love .....	78
6.5	When the natural and the revealed comes into conflict .....	82
6.6	Just how necessary is having the correct faith? .....	83
6.7	Swinburne's motivation .....	86
6.8	Is God external or internal? .....	87
7	Chapter 7 – Looking for a synthesis, of some sort.....	92
7.1	A (somewhere in the) middle ground? .....	99
8	Chapter 8 – Conclusions.....	102
9	– Bibliography .....	108

*Well-justified conclusions about religious faith can only be reached through a thorough understanding of what constitutes rational belief and rational action. The road may be dry and secular, but we shall reach our destination in the end.*<sup>1</sup>

- Richard Swinburne

*Thi Troen resulterer ikke af en ligefrem videnskabelig Overveielse, og heller ikke ligefrem, tvertimod taber man i denne Objektivitet den uendelige personlige i Lidenskab Interesserehed, hvilken er Troens Betingelse, det ubique et nusquam, hvori Troen kan blive til. Har Den, somn havde Troen, vundet Noget i Henseende til Troens Kraft og Styrke? Nei, ikke det Allermindste, snarere er han i denne vidtløftige Viden, i denne Vished, der ligger ved Troens Dør og begjerer efter den, saa farefuldt stillet, at den vil behøve megen Anstrængelse, megen Frygt og Bæven for ikke at falde i Anfægtelsen, og forvexle Viden med Tro.*<sup>2</sup>

- Søren Kierkegaard

## 1 Chapter 1 – Introduction

### 1.1 Topic

What is religious philosophy, and how should it be thought of? While there are some debate about which discipline first entered the human psyche, philosophy or theology, both are at any rate extremely old, and concerns questions humans have had about their own existence, and the existence of the world around them, for as long as there have been humans. Questions that have given birth to both religion and philosophy, and oftentimes a mixture of the two. What kind of relationship there exist between religious faith, and philosophy, is then an important and pressing question, almost no matter how you feel about the former or the latter. Naturally, I can have no hope of dealing with the subject in its entirety, but I can study two prominent philosophers within theistic philosophy, and that is what I have done. These two would Søren Kierkegaard and Richard Swinburne, two famous and prominent philosophers that both have had substantial influence on how philosophers and philosophy has approached religion in the modern era. In my master thesis, I wish to focus on the topic of religious philosophy. To be more precise, it is my wish to explore the concept of “faith” and its relationship to reason/rationality. With faith in this

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<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3

<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S, 1994), 43

regard I think specifically on religious faith, and how this may coexist with the reason-based approach that should guide philosophy. Is it possible for religious faith to exist alongside a rational approach, and can this co-existence be somewhat mutually beneficial? Or do their conflicting natures necessitate an intellectual and emotional separation? Is there a possibility that the two attitudes can strengthen and enhance each other? Or will their different natures and meanings inevitably lead into conflict, or else necessitate some form of mental separation? Most atheist or irreligious would probably support the former; according to those views, faith is a contrast, perhaps even an enemy, of reason. However, it is not those that I wish to focus on the limited space and page numbers I have available. I will instead focus on philosophers whose starting position is arguing that faith is somehow beneficial for us. Within religious philosophy, the relationship between faith and reason is not a clear one, nor does there exist any unanimous position on the subject within religious philosophy/religious philosophers. In this paper it is therefore my intention to present two conflicting viewpoints, namely Swinburne's and Kierkegaard's, on the question of how to best obtain good religious faith through philosophy, I will then argue their strengths and merits, as well as their flaws and weaknesses, so far as this is possible, and in the end try to create a sort of synthesis.

## 1.2 Question

At the centre of this paper, I will work with, and discuss, the workings of two philosophers with considerable contributions within the field of religious philosophy. These are Søren Kierkegaard and Richard Swinburne. Their works will not be my *only* sources, nor will the two of them be the only thinkers I will be referring to, but I shall endeavour to make them my focus points.

I do not think it is necessary to defend the claim that to have religious faith, at least in the Western world of the past century or so, has become an increasingly controversial topic. But it is not my goal or interest here to explore this development, at least nor primarily. I do think contexts affects the writings of the two philosophers that are my primary focus, and I will discuss that, to some extent. Nor do I wish to debate the existence of God/gods/divinity, or their possible nature. Instead, I will try to see how belief in these may correlate with philosophical endeavours. How can we balance philosophy with religious faith? **Is there a contradiction between reason, that ultimately seeks to explain everything, and faith, that**



**tells us to accept some things and phenomena that we cannot fully understand or prove?**

**Or can reason indeed give us ground to support (religious) faith?** While it is not my intention to debate God's nature, I have, for the sake of brevity and simplicity, selected a specific approach and type of faith that I will work with, or at least use as my primary source of references when referring to "God": the Abrahamic model of a singular, omnipotent, omnipresent, omnibenevolent, omniscient and personalised being. This is the Christian, but also Jewish and Islamic, view of God. Said being also interacts on a personal level with at least some humans, in the form of revelations. I believe that this should be sufficient to cover the question I wish to explore. And of course, since both Kierkegaard and Swinburne are Christians, that is the theistic concept they work with and within as well.

### 1.3 Thesis statement

In this paper it is my intention to make the case for the idea that philosophy as a discipline need not and should not separate itself from and disregard the concept of religious faith. It is my belief, and subsequently the claim of this thesis, that religious faith does and can significantly contribute to the understanding of various philosophical topics, not only those exclusively concerning themselves with specific religious endeavours, but also regarding ethics, metaphysics and epistemology in general. It is however the epistemological aspect I wish to focus on in this paper, especially how philosophers of religion have tried to confront and justify religious faith. In this paper, I wish to present to opposing viewpoints in this matter, made by two Christian philosophers, whom may have shared religion, though certainly not their philosophical outlook on it. These are the eighteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and the present age British philosopher Richard Swinburne. These two will be my main focus, though I do also wish to bring up several other names, where I find that convenient for explaining, clarify and nuance the opposing views on faith's relationship to rationality.

### 1.4 Methodology

It seems natural to start by clarifying what is commonly meant by "faith" and "reason" since the two terms are so important themes in my thesis. At the very least, I must clarify what I here mean by these words. Both words are after all common and rather vague and ambiguous in meaning.

With “faith” I shall refer to the state and/or action of having great trust and confidence in something or someone, without sufficient evidence to talk about knowledge. In a religious setting, this naturally refers to having strong belief in something divine, like God. Yet I shall endeavour to keep God as much as possible out of this project, though I certainly cannot escape frequently mentioning the concept. However, it is those who believe in Him, while also in one way or another believing in the value of philosophy, that first and foremost interests me. Closely related, but less specific, than the concept of “faith” is the word “belief”. Simply put, belief means to deem it plausible that something exists or is true, without having iron-clad evidence that it is true. There is nothing specifically religious about belief, naturally, but there can be no religious faith or religion without a group of beliefs, that are supposed to be inherently coherent. In the case of (orthodox) Christianity, one is required to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, died for our sins, was resurrected and descended up into heaven, and that the rest of mankind may be saved by believing in him. Each and one of these beliefs alone are quite a slim foundation for a faith, but together, they make it possible to establish a system of beliefs that together, when accepted as true, make it possible to form a religion, which is the basic requirement for having religious faith. Since faith is built upon beliefs, not certainties, it follows that any faith also makes itself vulnerable to external scepticism and internal doubt. In the end, how to overcome these challenges is what this paper is about.

As for “reason”, we can define this as the cause of an event or situation or something which provides an explanation; though it is also the ability of a healthy mind to think and make judgements, especially based on testable facts. Closely connected to reason is the term “rational”, that is, the ability to, and/or action of, showing clear thought and reason. For both terms, complete objectivity is the ideal when making decisions, we are to draw our conclusions from what logic and facts tells us, whether we like the eventual outcome or not. Naturally, there is always a subjective agent that makes these supposedly objective decisions, but the ideal is to suppress this as much as possible. However, we can also think it perfectly acceptable, perhaps even necessary, to make subjective rational choices to a subjective goal. Reason then becomes a means to an end, and this end may perfectly well be highly personal and idiosyncratic, or subjective. Any machine would do to illustrate this, putting them together is hopefully a rational endeavour, the goal of the construction is the

highest possible level of efficiency, the purpose of the machine to create some sort of subjective pleasure for someone or something.

When planning this thesis, exploring Kierkegaard's religious beliefs was one of my first starting points. Kierkegaard was the father, or at least an extremely important precursor, of the philosophical theory/movement of *existentialism*, and his writings on the human psyche, free will, despair and the finite versus infinity have ensured him a place amongst human history's greatest and most prominent philosophers. I have for a long time been fascinated with Kierkegaard's unique interpretation of the Christian faith, and his approach towards religious faith in particular. Kierkegaard is notable for dismissing and attacking the idea that true faith needs to be, should be, or even could be, defended by rational argumentation. Faith is, in some sense at least, inherently different or separated from reason and objective criteria.

In order to best explore and explain Kierkegaard's religious stance, I decided, in accordance with my mentor, to contrast Kierkegaard's view of faith with another Christian philosopher, whose view and approach are distinctly different from Kierkegaard's.

The choice of Swinburne as Kierkegaard's opponent in my projects is somewhat coincidental, as I do believe that there is a considerable number of present-day theistic/Christian philosophers, like C.S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig and John Lennox, that could also be used to argue for the same overall viewpoint: reason can and should play a role when we commit ourselves to faith. That is not to say that there are no philosophical and theological differences between these thinkers, there are and they are sometimes substantial. But I still feel confident in saying that they all heavily apply reason when defending and promulgating their versions of Christian faith. Nonetheless, I am confident that Richard Swinburne has also earned his place among them. And admittedly, his rather rigorous adherence to evidentialism and objective criteria makes him a clear-cut foil to Kierkegaard.

While Swinburne is a proud analytic philosopher, Kierkegaard is a philosopher of the more continental mould. It is notable that analytical philosophy seems popular with the famous Christian apologists of today, with some of the most prominent men in the field like William Lane Craig, John Lennox and Alvin Plantinga all being identified as a part of the discipline. Analytic philosophy relies heavily on logic, and treats philosophical projects and themes as a

collective undertaking, with a direct or indirect cooperation between philosophers that rely on each other's reasoning and ideas, sometimes agreeing with each other, sometimes modifying and adapting ideas, and again sometimes rejecting ideas as logically unsound. By contrast, it is undoubtedly so that Kierkegaard follows the continental, perhaps the more traditional, approach in treating philosophy as an individual project, worked out and done by men in solitude. And indeed, the ultimate isolation of the individual is an important element of Kierkegaard's thinking.

While Kierkegaard and Swinburne are my main focus, I have during this work also used/consulted other philosophers and their works where I have deemed that useful in understanding and expanding on relevant philosophical topics and terms. While Swinburne and Kierkegaard are my main focus, it is also true that they are representatives for larger discourses, in that the question of how to approach and treat religious faith in a philosophical context is an old question, and one that is still fiercely debated. That is not to say that there is not a fundamental difference between them or their thinking, however. Kierkegaard's Christianity is an explicit rejection of objective truths as a guiding light towards God, Swinburne sees objective truth as the essential tool we have in attempting to comprehend God. This means that their starting points are rather different, and we can categorize it as *fideism*, where we can find Kierkegaard, and *epistemic heroism*, where Richard Swinburne may be placed. We shall briefly consider the meaning and implications of said terms.

### 1.5 Fideism and epistemic heroism

"What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian's question, asked in the third century, questions what, reason (Athens) and Jerusalem (the Christian faith), may and ought to have with one another.<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard's position, probably much like Tertullian, is that they are two separate realms, and that the rules that apply to the one cannot be assumed to apply to the other. This makes Kierkegaard a *fideist*. Tertullian is usually credited with being the first of the important Christian fideists, later great names in Christian fideism are Blaise Pascal, William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and of course Søren Kierkegaard himself.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Fideism", Richard Amesbury, 19.04.2020  
URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/fideism/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Fideism", Richard Amesbury, 19.04.2020  
URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/fideism/>>.

Those that tries to understand or approach faith by reason has misunderstood the nature of faith, and probably the nature of reason too. It is important to remember that this does not entail that Kierkegaard dismiss reason altogether, far from it. Also Athens has much too teach us, and one of Kierkegaard's greatest heroes is Socrates. But Christianity, or at least true Christianity, is not science, it is not philosophy and it is not a political ideology. It is fundamentally otherworldly, in that its purpose is to help humans bridge the gap between our own limited reasoning, and God, whose knowledge and wisdoms transcends all human understanding. For humans to try to comprehend God as they would a mathematical problem or an ethical dilemma is not only an insult towards God, but also inherently ridiculous. Why should we have any right to expect Christianity to make sense to us rationally?

Epistemic heroism insists that not only are there no genuine tension between true faith and human rationality, but that they in fact corroborate one another. Religious beliefs can be proven, by epistemic means, to be perfectly rational and objectively compelling: so that anyone objectively assessing the epistemic evidence will also accept the conclusion that a certain religious faith is true or false. In its most radical form, epistemic heroism claims that there are a priori evidence(s) for the existence of God, that is, evidence that can be accepted without experience, or at least that there are a priori considerations that makes it likely that God exists. Swinburne believes it to be possible to at least make it logically probable that Christianity is true, based on a priori argumentation alone.<sup>5</sup> That may be part of why he puts relatively little emphasis upon what might be described more as a posteriori argumentation: for example that God must exist because objective morals do exist, or because historical evidence makes it probable that Jesus was the Son of God. Swinburne disbelieves the former, as we will consider more in depth later on. As for the historical dimension, Swinburne do consider the gospels to be overall at least quite historically reliable, though he shows relatively little interest in the subject.<sup>6</sup> (Something he shares with Kierkegaard, who more or less dismiss all historical research of Christ and Christianity.) There are however many apologists who puts great importance on the historicity of the

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<sup>5</sup> Swinburne, "Why Believe That There Is a God?", p. 5-6

<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that he altogether dismisses it. In *Was Jesus God?*, for example, Swinburne frequently discuss the historicity of Jesus, particularly in chapter 7 and 8. It is however safe to say that this is not where Swinburne has devoted the majority of his philosophical thinking, neither explicitly Christian or otherwise.

earliest Christianity, like William Lane Craig and N.T. Wright. Likewise, many apologists considers the (purported) existence of objective morals a compelling evidence for the existence of God. As such, Swinburne's position is somewhat radical, also in the Christian apologetic tradition. He is however in accordance with the central point of classical apologetics: The point of the discipline of apologists is that there is as such no truly inherent conflict between objective rationality and subjective faith, because true faith is not subjective at all, but objectively true. Apologetics, or so it may seem, is really not that different, if different at all, from the standard natural sciences. It is all a question of evidentialism, the more evidence, the stronger the claim. The less evidence, the weaker the claim.

## 2 Chapter 2 – Presenting thinkers and types of thinking

### 2.1 Kierkegaard's poetry and the sick soul

It is often somewhat difficult to ascertain Kierkegaard's exact philosophical position, due to his complicated habit of frequently writing under various pseudonyms, which again seems to have been an intentional scheme on his part to create distance between his own person and his works.<sup>7</sup> These various pseudonyms again occasionally attacked each other and the viewpoints they presented. It is thus exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to say with certainty which of them Kierkegaard himself supported, if any. And yet, it is through the pseudonyms that some of Kierkegaard's most famous thoughts, ideas and expressions are presented. The pseudonyms are therefore important, though as Kierkegaard himself stated, they should not *necessarily* be viewed as his own opinions. In fact, one of the advantages of this heavy use of pseudonyms is that it becomes more difficult to ascertain what the author actually thinks himself. The reader must think him/herself.<sup>8</sup> I will therefore note when I do quote or refer to one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, and from which one. But apart from that, I will not spend time and space debating how much Kierkegaard agrees or disagrees with the particular pseudonym, unless I deem this absolutely necessary, that is to say if two viewpoints made by different pseudonyms seem to disagree with each other. It then follows that Kierkegaard must disagree with at least one of them and perhaps both. Nonetheless,

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<sup>7</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> McKinnon, "Kierkegaard's pseudonyms", p. 116-117

they are after all ultimately all authored by him; and are therefore he is responsible for them. Of Kierkegaard's extensive authorship, I shall in this paper contend myself with the following books: *Filosofiske smuler*, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelige efterskrift* and *Frygt og Bæven*. I have also read the short essay *Lilien paa marken og Fuglen under Himlen*. Of course, Kierkegaard often wrote under his own name as well, and that he made a distinction between explicitly religious (though of course still of a quite philosophical nature) writings, which he signed with his own name, and the more philosophical (though by no means irreligious) texts, which he tended to sign with various pseudonyms. Kierkegaard himself distinguished by texts written by "his right hand and his left hand", where the more religious texts typically were by written by his "right hand" and without pseudonyms, the more philosophical texts by his "left hand" and under pseudonyms.<sup>9</sup> This also underscores which of the two he considered the most important. It is unlikely that he would appreciate the fact that his "left hand" made a far wider impact on the world than his "right one" did, but then again, no one has the right to determine his or her own legacy.

Finally, when referring to Kierkegaard and quoting his works, I have elected to stand by his original language, and written them in Danish. When reading him, I have overwhelmingly read the original source material, and it is of course always best to use the original source, when this is possible. Kierkegaardian quotes will therefore all be in Danish. Apart from this, the text in its entirety is in English; including, of course, my reflections and opinions on what Kierkegaard thinks.

#### Why faith?

As both Kierkegaard and Swinburne are Christians, it follows that they both consider religious faith to be empirically true; that is to say, that they think it originates from a true source: The existence of God, which it is possible for human beings to have a degree of interaction with. As Christian writers, they must also necessarily regard the experience of religious faith as something fundamentally positive: By faith in Jesus Christ, humanity may obtain a form of salvation. It is the reason for faith as such that interests me here though; because the two thinkers' different approaches towards *how* also leads to a different

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<sup>9</sup> Mjåland, introduction in Kierkegaard, *Liljen på marken og fuglen under himmelen* (Verbum. Print Best Printing Company, Estland), p. 8

approach towards *why* we should have religious faith. What problem is religious faith supposed to solve, and/or what gap is it supposed to fill?

For Kierkegaard the answer for what faith ultimately is and means, is release from despair and anxiety, which normally haunts all humans, when faced as they are with the infiniteness of the world versus their own finite existences. The absence of God leaves the universe, and human existence, in such a terrible, excruciating maelstrom of meaninglessness that it becomes untenably bleak and meaningless for anyone that genuinely thinks about it for any meaningful length of time. It is worth mentioning that while Kierkegaard very much strives towards being as devout a Christian as he possibly can, his philosophy and writings do not concern themselves with the afterlife, and any mentioning of heaven or hell is next to non-existent. Kierkegaard's Christianity is very much a faith that looks toward this life and this world.<sup>10</sup> In the Kierkegaardian bibliography, there is a running theme that humanity has the freedom to themselves make their earthly existence a heaven or a hell, by turning towards or away from God. As would become more or less typical in later existentialism, both of the Christian and the atheist kind, the self is in Kierkegaard always free to define itself at any moment. This is however not only positive, because it also highlights the limitations of unbound freedom. You, the self, can never be still and can never stop choosing. A moment of perfect bliss and satisfaction can never last for more than a moment. This, combined with the mercilessness of time, means that anything we create, be it ourselves or in the world around us, is bound to change, any traces we leave behind will fade as time goes by. This knowledge is hard, perhaps unbearable for humans, and we suffer under it. Our only hope for lasting salvation, something beyond temporary reprieve, is in absolute obedience towards, and trust in, God. God represents what is truly infinite, yet never changing. He is the first and final source of everything, and therefore everything is contained within Him. Human well-being therefore ultimately is preconditioned to depend upon Him. This person is The Religious Man (Det Religiøse Menneske), who live in a state of something akin to unity with God, and who has distanced himself from everything else, for nothing may be equal to God. That is not to say that Kierkegaard encourages us to separate ourselves from

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<sup>10</sup> It may very well be that as a so-called knight of faith, Kierkegaard's ultimately hope and believes that he will in some way be reunited with his great love Regine Olsen, if not on earth so at least in heaven. But I do not think that this is ultimately important for his views of God and heaven, the reason which I hope to make clear further on in this paper.



the mundane world, like some Christians have chosen, e.g. monasticism. Devotion towards God is something we always can have and always do, everywhere. We always, at least after having discovered Christianity, have the possibility and opportunity to become fully and truly religious, the choice is always there, for us to make. As I hope I have made clear by now, for Kierkegaard true religious faith is not an act of reason, but of passion. It is not science or logical calculations, but the ultimate form of love, from which true faith comes. God is so all-encompassing and completely demanding that it does seem as if for Kierkegaard, there can be room for nothing, or no one, else.

To be sure, the idea of illustrating the relationship between God and humans as that of lovers, is not something Kierkegaard has invented, but is an old Christian tradition hailing at least from the purported medieval notion of courtly love; the chaste yet passionate love between a knight and his beloved lady, where the lover becomes a substitute for God.<sup>11</sup> It is also central to bridal mystique, where Christ is made into the groom, and the believer into the bride, and in the churchly tradition of referring to the church as the bride of Christ.<sup>12</sup> It is also implicit in the superiority of the theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity, above the philosophical virtues Wisdom, Temperance, Justice and Courage. It is not clear-eyed wisdom, but passionate devotion, that is the final goal and the key to salvation.

#### Faith as a stage in life

Kierkegaard in his writings famously differentiates between three ways of attempting to overcome the meaninglessness of despair. These are the aesthetical, the ethical and the religious.<sup>13</sup>

The aesthetical stage is where humans try to free themselves from gloomy thoughts by amusing, or at least entertaining, distractions. This has often been interpreted as stooping into nihilistic libertinism and hedonism, but that is not necessarily the case. The aesthetical concerns itself with beauty, joy and self-fulfilment, and this may or may not be immoral; artists, musicians and writers, as well as lovers, diners and gamers may be said to operate within the aesthetical. The main characteristic they share is that they are engaged in something that is supposed to give them pleasure to do. It is also self-centred; the pleasure is hedonistic and selfish. They are enjoying themselves, or at least they are supposed to.

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<sup>11</sup> Bonneuil, "Arrival of Courtly Love", p. 265

<sup>12</sup> Kenda, *Practicing passion* (USA: Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2004), p. 124-126

<sup>13</sup> This is an old division, which amongst others can be found in Plato's *Republic*: The life of desire, the life of duty and the life of wisdom.

However, as all pleasures are temporal, and no activity is really that amusing for a long time, certainly not for eternity. The esthetical approach is doomed to fail. Soon enough boredom will set in, and through boredom despair, because the self will realize that the aesthetical cannot offer any meaningful and permanent distraction. From there, life and the universe will feel meaningless and dull, and despair will return, with a vengeance.<sup>14</sup>

Moving on from the aesthetical stage, there is the *ethical* stage, where humans submit and repress their personal urges and desires for something more worthwhile, a greater good. This can be your family, your country, your career, your people, an ideology, the environment or even mankind in general. Here, the individual devotes himself/herself to something that (they believe) is truly good and ethical. The ethical person serves others, and sacrifice on their behalf. Kierkegaard symbolises this stage with marriage. Marriage is built upon commitment, and a duty to love and care for another human being, not only yourself. This is a higher stage, in part because it is more moral, but also because the individual becomes a part of something greater; it takes responsibility for something more than simply its own happiness and pleasure. Meaning and purpose become deeper, and the ramifications of the individual's choices are grander. Kierkegaard agrees that this is more praiseworthy than the aesthetical life, but in the end the ethical life does not provide any lasting comforts either. Because also here the results and consequences of our choices are temporary, and they cannot offer us a stable and safe identity. For still the self, as the universe, is in constant motion, and it cannot sit still. In the end, no matter the amount sacrificed, or the amount built, nothing lasts forever. Everything we build will in the end come to nothing. This realization, whether subconscious or not, will cause despair also for the ethical human being.<sup>15</sup> Presumably, there is amongst the ethical that Kierkegaard would place Swinburne and his type of apologetics. Swinburne's project is heartfelt enough, and aims to benefit humanity in general and Christians in particular, but due to its reliance on approximations, doubt and intellectual reservations, it is no better than more secular ideologies. Though Swinburne may think so, there is nothing eternal or genuinely steadfast about his thinking, and it will continue to evolve and change until it is forgotten or else changed into something unrecognisable.

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<sup>14</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 69

<sup>15</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 69-70

Finally, we have the religious stage, though Kierkegaard does divide this into two parts: Religiosity A and Religiosity B. The first group's religiosity is misguided, or at least insufficient, the other's the path towards genuine faith and salvation.

Religiosity A is concerned with genuine devotion. It leads to a state where one genuinely wishes to follow God's will. And by personal effort and willpower, one hopes to reach God. This is however not truly possible. We, as humans, cannot rise above our temporality to eternity and God. It is not possible, no matter how intensely we long for it or how hard we try.

This brings us to religiosity B. God, unlike humans and their choices, is eternal and unchanging. Any union between ourselves and Him is therefore impossible. And yet, God can make the impossible, and in Christianity, He has. This is the Paradox, manifest in Jesus, who proves that a humans may be fully reconciled with God. And those that manage to come into direct contact with him, will find God. Their choices will be God's choices, and therefore will always be the best possible choice to make. The (truly) religious human being will always make the right choice, and know that the choice is meaningful, and will know that through God also he or she will be eternal.<sup>16</sup> This life will not be free of suffering, far from it, yet even so, those that walk with God will know that everything will in the end turn out for the best.

The Religious Man and faith in God as simply put a reduction of choices. This then becomes Kierkegaard's life project – recognizing the individual human being's gift of endless choices, endless possibilities, and then freeing us from them by reducing an infinite number of choices to two: Choosing or not choosing God. If, as it follows from Christian doctrine, God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omnitemporal and omniscient, God becomes the ultimate source of everything good. Electing to submit oneself to Him then means that one pledge one's freedom to what is good, just, wise and eternal; to not choose God then ultimately becomes rejecting all of these, ensuring damnation in the form of eternal despair. God is the salvation, indeed, *the only possible salvation*, from despair.

*Dersom det ingen evig Bevisthed var i et Menneske, dersom det til Grund for Alt kun laae en vildt gjærende Magt, der vridende sig i dunkle Lidenskaber frembragte Alt hvad der var stort og hvad var der ubetydeligt, dersom en bunløs Tomhed, aldrig mættet, skjulte sig under Alt,*

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<sup>16</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 232-234

*hvad var da Livet Andet en Fortvivlelse? Dersom det forholdt sig saaledes, dersom det intet helligt Baand var, der sammenknyttede Menneskeheden [...] dersom en evig Gemsel altid hungrigd lurede paa sit Bytte, og der var ingen Magt stærk nok til at frarive den det – hvor var da Livet tomt og trøsteløst!*<sup>17</sup>

That does not mean that the choice is easy to make however, for not choosing God is both easier and more rewarding, as in more fun, at first. This is the aesthetic path, where humans are content (or rather, try to be) with making pleasurable choices, trying their best to forget the underlying knowledge that the self, their own as well as anyone else's, is fleeting and constantly changing.

Considering that, we may see how and why Kierkegaard, both in his theology and philosophy, puts such importance on the need of acting, not merely stating or saying. It is not sufficient to merely proclaim oneself a Christian, for such a statement on its own means next to nothing, as that is someone any human, or for that matter some machines and animals, can do. A parrot may say: "I am a Christian. Jesus Christ, to come into my heart." It will of course not have any idea what that actually means, but neither will necessarily the human saying the same words do. They are after all in and of themselves just words. The statement, in and of itself is nothing more than hot air and does certainly not in and of itself require any further thoughts or actions. A close relationship with God cannot be established with the use of magic spells.

Neither is it sufficient to perform a certain set of learned rituals for salvation to take place. That means that you do not become a true Christian by regularly attending church and knowing a particular set of prayers. The true connection to God is not a mathematical conundrum or trade-off, where such and such amount of time and energy set off to devotion, equals salvation and a connection to God. In such a situation we are still trapped in despair, for the religion is treated as a role we do assume at Sunday pre-noon, before we go on with our normal life, forgetting all about God until next Sunday or until we want something specific from Him, e.g. a promotion, good weather or recovery from sickness. This could hardly be further away from the all-encompassing and total devotion that is the only appropriate approach towards our almighty, everlasting and benevolent creator. If we are to have a meaningful relationship with Him, and a possibility to be freed from despair,

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<sup>17</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 112

we must submit totally and unconditionally to His will. This is to be done, or at least as its starting point, by living a Christian life. This is not only to be done on Sunday, but every day, every hour, every waking moment. Internal doubts may still torment the individual, but they are to be combated by being ignored, not by engaging with them. This ultimately means that we must strive to merge our own will with His, so that every breath we take, every thought and movement, is Christian. Having gained true faith, there cannot be really be room for anything else, your very life becomes subservient to Him, and thus all your sorrows and worries are God's to deal with. By this submission, you shall gain the ultimate and only genuine freedom, for you are no longer haunted by despair or threatened by anxiety. God is infinite and eternal, and you reside in Him.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2 Swinburne's divine hypothesis

Compared to Kierkegaard's lofty and impassioned exultations, what can rationality and Richard Swinburne even hope to counter with?

Soundness of argument is an obvious answer. Since the renaissance we have seen a tendency towards a universe that is better and better understood through science. While this process is far from complete, it likewise cannot be disputed that our quantity and quality of knowledge of universe itself and everything in it has increased tremendously since the end of the medieval era. If we presuppose that the universe is a creation, is it not then likely that we by gaining more knowledge about the universe have gained at least slightly more knowledge about its creator too? That this knowledge also has been beneficial to us, in the form of medicine, production, communication, transportation, democratisation, etc., seems undisputed. How much more do we not know even today than we did back in Søren Kierkegaard's time? As Kierkegaard would no doubt reply, while this is true, it is also irrelevant in a theological context, because knowledge of God, if such a term can even be used, is not the same as knowledge of how measles is prevented, or how electric light is operated. God is above and beyond reason. But is this explanation satisfying?

According to the Christian faith, God, in his unfathomable fullness, is beyond human understanding or descriptions, existing on another plane than us. And yet, God is not just the creator of us and our selves, but the creator of the universe and everything in it. Likewise, everything operates according to God, either by his intervention, or at least by his

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<sup>18</sup> "Kierkegaard, Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen", in *Søren Kierkegaard Samlede Værker*, s. 164-166

express permission. Therefore, can we really treat the two, universe and God, as separate matters? Does not knowledge of the one influence how we perceive the other? If we assume that knowledge about the universe is a good thing, as both Swinburne and the vast majority of modern theistic philosophers does (Kierkegaard seems more neutral to me about this subject), is it not then both plausible and enlightening to try to learn about God, to gain a deeper understanding of who He is and why he operates the way that He does? How is Christianity to respond when confronted with a universe, that apparently may work perfectly fine without an omnipresent, omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent creator? Is faith to be relegated to only the most personal and intimate sphere, our own minds? If not, it seems to be necessary to explain why the universe, not only the human self, may still find room for God, or even better, make the case for why arguing for his objective existence and power is a rational endeavour, who can present rational and objective arguments to justify itself. Swinburne's philosophy, as in his important books *The Coherence of Theism* and *Was Jesus God?* must be read with this challenge in mind. To Swinburne then, the notion that faith and reason should be mutually exclusive is absurd, for one of the most basic components of well-founded faith must be that it can withstand sceptical scrutiny and criticism. If God cannot do so, he most obviously cannot be omnipotent, omniscient or omnibenevolent either. Second, this is necessary to defend faith from being what is disparagingly called a matter of "God between the gaps", or faith that is being used to temporarily supplant reason and scientific explanation, and meanwhile, God and religious faith is driven from stronghold to stronghold, slowly but steadily losing ground, as science explains more and more of the naturalistic causes of what was previously attributed to God. As such, Swinburne can be said to be more ambitious than Kierkegaard, who refuses to discuss whether God exist or not (though he does admit that being in doubt is a perfectly natural starting point, and that we, while striving to overcome it, should not try to deny its presence), Swinburne's endeavour is to make faith philosophically sound. By certain and objective knowledge, what is uncertain and subjective may be legitimised by being proven to be reasonable and objective.

Swinburne is a personal Christian, proclaiming himself a believer in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and omnibenevolent God. He also believes that Jesus

was both man and God<sup>19</sup>, that the Trinitarian doctrine is true<sup>20</sup>, and that Jesus was resurrected from the dead<sup>21</sup>, and he espouses and defends all of said doctrines in his philosophical works. Furthermore, he also considers himself to be a rational man, and that all of the above may be explained by the use of reason and logic. That is not to say that they are not miraculous occurrences. They are, but meticulous study of all the available facts, and rational considerations, may yet make them the most logical assumptions to make. We do here encounter a philosopher that approaches faith with the attitude that rational use of argumentation and logic may indicate that the assumption that God exists is the most plausible explanation for why the universe exist as it does, and that it is not implausible, and certainly not irrational, to believe that this God is the Christian one.<sup>22</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy that Swinburne argues the case for belief in God also by referring to epistemological logic, natural sciences, natural philosophy and metaphysics<sup>23</sup>, fields of little interest in Kierkegaard's religious philosophy.

Kierkegaard's argument, if it can even be called that, for choosing to believe (and it is a choice, and not something reason or anything/anyone else can compel us to do) seems to rest exclusively on a psychological attitude: We should believe in God because that is the only genuine chance of escape from despair. Swinburne and other modern apologists on the other hand, do for example frequently discuss theories concerning the "fine-tuned" universe, that is, the idea that the complexity of the universe, and the myriad of necessary conditions required to create life exists, strongly indicates a theistic, or at least deistic, creation.<sup>24</sup>

This line of argumentation, proclaiming religious faith while insisting that it is perfectly compatible with reasoning and rationality, is the hallmark of the tradition of *Christian apologetics*, hereby only referred to as apologetics. These are Christian philosophers that seeks to defend Christianity against objections based on reason-based scepticism and objections. While there is certainly a long tradition for this Christian discipline, beginning with Justin Martyr and Augustine of Hippo and even say Paul the apostle, there would be no exaggeration to say that the field has experienced something of a revival in the latter half of

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<sup>19</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 26-7

<sup>20</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28-34

<sup>21</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 114-116

<sup>22</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 5-6

<sup>23</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.11-12

<sup>24</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 172-173

the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>. The main reason for this seems obvious: Christianity, as religions in general, is on the defensive. Its teachings and dogmas are under an intellectual scrutiny and level of attacks unprecedented in the religion's history. This is a notable difference from the lifetime of Søren Kierkegaard, who lived in a society that considered itself to be deeply pious and close to uniformly Christian. While it certainly can be argued that this fact is not relevant from a purely philosophical point of view, it cannot be denied that the alliance between philosophy and theology that Swinburne attempts to create is influenced by this development.

### 2.3 Working towards God through reason

*Many religious traditions extol the virtue of faith, and in the Christian tradition faith in God who has revealed himself in Christ is seen as a major virtue. You need it in order to travel the Christian road to Heaven. But what is it to have faith in God?*<sup>25</sup>

While Swinburne is a philosopher of religion foremost, he is also a renowned philosopher of science, and his wish to take a scientific approach towards the defence of religious faith is evident in his approach towards apologetics.<sup>26</sup> It should then not come as a surprise that his overall religious philosophy is marked by a strict adherence to analytic and methodical reasoning, where various books are being organized to cover various key concepts and specific subjects within theism in general and Christianity in particular. Swinburne's most famous works are his trilogy of books regarding the soundness of theism in general, and his teratology of the soundness of Christianity in particular. The trilogy on theism consists of *The Coherence of Theism* (1977), *The Existence of God* (1979) and *Faith of Reason* (1981). The teratology of Christianity consists of *Responsibility and Atonement* (1989), *Revelation* (1991), *The Christian God* (1994) and *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998). In this paper, three books in particular will be used as sources, these three books are *The Coherence of Theism* (originally published in 1977), *Was Jesus God?* (published in 2008) and *Faith and Reason* (originally published in 1981). These seven books are by no means the full extent of Swinburne's philosophical writings of course, nor even the full extent of his Christian writings, but they are considered his most important works<sup>27</sup>, and do describe Swinburne's preferred philosophical method, inspired by Thomas Aquinas: To start with the

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<sup>25</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4

<sup>26</sup> Swinburne, "Why Believe That There Is a God?", p. 5-11

<sup>27</sup> Hasker, "Is Christianity Probable?", p. 253



most basic foundation of Christianity, vague theism. In order for Christianity to be true, theism must also be true. And if we are to justifiably believe theism to be true, it must be the most plausible proposition.

Therefore, in these seven books, Swinburne systematically considers and argues for, in the following order: the overwhelming probability of the validity of theism, that this theism is probably Christian, and that Christianity is practiced by beings (humans) that are in their essence eternal souls, and not simply material bodies. Of course, most importantly for this paper, that it is possible and good to understand this through the use of human reasoning. The meticulousness and well-organized categorisation of the books, containing each their own specific topic, is typical of Swinburne's rigorous adherence to structured analytics, and a contrast to Kierkegaard's more free-flowing and, it must be said, chaotic authorship. Swinburne argues like a scientist turned philosopher, while Kierkegaard is primarily a creative writer, who addresses his audience through language clad in poetry, myths and pathos. This is a conscious decision, a part of Kierkegaard's repudiation of the idea of "objective" knowledge and standpoint.<sup>28</sup>

A coherent faith

*By "theism" I understand the doctrine that there is a God in the sense of a being with most of the following properties: being a person without a body (that is, a spirit), present everywhere (that is, omnipresent), the creator of the universe, perfectly free, able to do anything (that is, omnipotent), knowing all things (that is, omniscient), perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, eternal, a necessary being, holy, and worthy of worship.*<sup>29</sup>

Swinburne begins his philosophical undertaking by being as basic as possible: Arguing that theism is coherent. *The Coherence of Theism* is not a work of Christian apologetics. Nonetheless it should be noted that its stated definition of theism is not universal or neutral, but rather the one adhered to by (the overwhelming majorities of) Jews, Christians and Muslims. The goal of the book then is to argue for the legitimacy of said theism, why it is coherent. Interestingly, Swinburne in this book does not try to defend the truthfulness of his theism as such, but to show that it is the most coherent, and as such, if theism is true, the most plausible version of it. This is done in three parts, the first third of the book, called

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<sup>28</sup> Mackey, "Philosophy and Poetry in Kierkegaard", p. 325-328

<sup>29</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 1

“Religious Language”, is a discussion of what it really means when one talks of “logical possibility” and “metaphysical possibility”, and how this is to be applied when talking about theology. It is first in the second part where Swinburne, having clarified what he is actually talking about, starts to discuss what he set out to do in the introduction, explaining why his, and Christianity’s, version of theism is the best, why God must be omnipresent and why it probably is no more than one god, why he must be free, omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, as well as eternal and immutable. Swinburne is careful in specifying what is meant by each of these concepts, his goal is all the time to be as accurate and logical as possible. In the last quarter of the book, Swinburne argues for why the theistic model he advocates indicates, or even insist, that God’s existence must be necessary, not merely “a lucky break”. Remember that God is the creator of everything, including the universe, but more than this, Swinburne argues that the existence of God itself is necessary. In the last chapter of the book, Swinburne argues that God is “Holy and Worthy of Worship”, which is to say that worshipping him is something we ought to do, both because it is good in itself and because it will do us good and that it is possible to establish some form of personal relationship with the deity. “All of this, if it happened, would deserve enormous gratitude. But, while the worship of God (as depicted in theistic religions) involves great gratitude, there is more to worship than the expression of gratitude.”<sup>30</sup>

A reasonable faith

*Many religious traditions extol the virtue of faith, and in the Christian tradition faith in God who has revealed himself in Christ is seen as a major virtue. You need it in order to travel the Christian road to Heaven. But what is it to have faith in God?*<sup>31</sup>

In *Faith and Reason* Swinburne discuss and analyses how theistic faith is to coexist with reason, and how reason can be shown to lead to theism. Swinburne discuss what religious belief and faith is, and what role reason can and ought to play in them. It is notable that he distinguishes between belief and faith, as I myself have tried to do in this paper. Simply put, faith is a sum of a set or system of beliefs, that together forms coherent doctrine, where none of the individual beliefs gives us the whole system, but when put together still remains logically coherent. There can be beliefs without having faith, but there can be no faith

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<sup>30</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 285

<sup>31</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4

without beliefs. "Belief" as a concept is a considerably more general and vaguer term. Unlike "faith" however, it may be distinctively and fairly uncontroversially based upon reason and reason alone. Our beliefs may be mistaken of course, but they are founded upon empirical experiences and logical propositions that may be proven or disproven. Faith is then not the same as belief, though there is certainly a large amount of belief within faith. Faith is perhaps best described as a set of beliefs, a system of beliefs that together encompass a distinctive world-view. It then becomes necessary to establish which beliefs are true, or at the very least the ones that are the most plausible. The only way to discover true beliefs, save divine revelations, are to judge them by their rationality. How plausible is it that our beliefs are true?<sup>32</sup> It is not necessary to believe that some specific belief is *probable* in order to act according to it. It may exist among various alternative possible or even just plausible options. It then suffices that a specific belief may be deemed plausible, as in not very improbable, in order for it to be accepted as the most likely correct assumption. Sometimes the specific belief, in and of itself, may even seem less plausible than the alternatives, but is accepted because it is part of a larger belief system.

The question that then follows is this: How do we best assess which beliefs are the most plausible? There is only one way to do so, Swinburne thinks, and that is by rationality, which again is derived by logic. Swinburne establishes six stages of rationality, where the three first are basic and the latter three are based on them.<sup>33</sup> These are as follows:

Rational act<sub>0</sub> = The agent believes this to be the best action.

Rational act<sub>1</sub> = The agent believes this to be the best action among the available alternatives, given the probabilities based on the agent's own criteria and on her evidence of different actions attaining different goals, is it by the agent's own criteria the best or equally best action to do in the circumstances.

Rational act<sub>2</sub> = The subject believes the action, given her evidence about what her circumstances are and the correct (logical) probabilities based on the subjects' evidence of the different actions attaining different goals, is in fact the best action to do.

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<sup>32</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 231

<sup>33</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.79-82

Rational act<sub>3</sub> = The action is rational<sub>0</sub> and the subject's beliefs are based on what she regards as an sufficient amount of investigation. The agent may fail to do action<sub>3</sub> either because he fails to do action<sub>0</sub> or because in her view, her investigation has been insufficient.

Rational act<sub>4</sub> = The action is rational if it is based on rational act<sub>1</sub> and the agent's beliefs are based on what is by the subject's own criteria a sufficient amount of investigation.

Rational act<sub>5</sub> = The action is rational act<sub>2</sub> and the agent's beliefs are based on what is by correct criteria a sufficient amount of investigation (into the probability of different actions attaining different goals and the relative goodness of alternative actions given her evidence about her circumstances.) Rational<sub>5</sub> actions are the ideal actions, where we have the strongest and most reasonable beliefs.

Having set out the criteria for how he considers something plausible, Swinburne proceeds to establish which religion he deems the most rational<sub>5</sub>. According to Swinburne "... to my knowledge neither the Catholic Church, nor the Orthodox Church, nor - I suspect any large Protestant Church has ever made any dogmatic pronouncements about the kind of belief which is involved in faith."<sup>34</sup> In the last chapter of *Faith and Reason, The Comparison of Creeds* (p 231-263, 2005 edition) Swinburne sets out to establish some criteria by how to best deem which faith doctrine, Creed, is the most plausible. These are:

1) Assessing the probability of theism<sup>35</sup>

This is of course the beginning of any quest of religious nature, to determine if theism is more probable than non-theistic religions or atheism. If theism is a simple theory, its probability depends upon the evidence available; and of whether or not there are counter-evidence that are more compelling.

2) Comparing theistic religions<sup>36</sup>

If during first stage we find evidence that make theism at least somewhat probable, we must determine which *theistic* religion is the most probable. Swinburne contends himself with discussing the three "Abrahamic" religions<sup>37</sup>, who all agree that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. They do however disagree on some of

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<sup>34</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 156-157

<sup>35</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 232-233

<sup>36</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 233-243

<sup>37</sup> While these are by far not the only theistic religions that exist, it seems safe to assess that they are at present the most important theistic religions in a global perspective.

the other aspects of His nature, and by how, why and for what He revealed Himself (though they all agree that He has revealed himself). The classical Christian must believe that Jesus was resurrected, something that Jews and Muslims deny.

3) Miracles<sup>38</sup>

If God does intervene in human history, actively changing its course, we must investigate the validity of miracles, for miracles, by their definition, defy natural laws. If it then is possible to argue that some event or phenomena probably was a miracle, the most likely explanation would be some kind of divine intervention. Therefore, the theistic religion that best can defend the historical validity of its own central miracles, is the one with the strongest claim of divine intervention.

4) Evidence of the occurrence of miracles<sup>39</sup>

Swinburne address David Hume's famous criticism of belief in miracles. Miracles may or may not take place, but they are always the least probable explanation, simply because they do take place in violation of natural laws, which in itself is supposed to be impossible. Therefore, any alternative and natural explanation that can be thought of, is more plausible than that of the miracle. Swinburne rejects this as a secretly naturalistic description of what is meant by "natural". Any evidence for the existence of God, is also an argument for the possibility of something (God) interfering and disturbing the course of nature. Without no god, the resurrection of Jesus is widely implausible. If on the other hand there exists a god with the power and the will to do such a thing, the resurrection, and miracles in general, at once becomes considerably more plausible.

5) Comparison of theistic and non-theistic religions<sup>40</sup>

It is also necessary to distinguish between theistic and non-theistic religions, for of course atheism is not the only alternative to theism. Swinburne argues that non-theistic religions have fewer and inferior answers to natural theology than does theistic ones. Buddhism, for example, does not offer any explanation for why there is a universe to begin with, for like atheists they deny that the universe has any creator, but unlike atheists they insist that there exists a moral law engrained into

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<sup>38</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 243-248

<sup>39</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 248-253

<sup>40</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 254-255

the universe, called karma. And Buddhism, along with most eastern religions, does not claim to be rooted in revelations. They are not based on divine interference, but rather cosmic truths that anyone, with the sufficient wisdom, can discover for themselves. This is harder to defend than theistic religions, like Christianity, who readily admits that their doctrines could not have been conceived without divine interference. Theistic religions thus have two supporting pillars; revelations and natural theology, non-theistic just natural theology.

#### 6) Philosophical religions<sup>41</sup>

Philosophical religions claim to be derived out of philosophical reasoning. As such they are similar to eastern religions, but philosophical religions usually reject mysticism and insists on being strictly reason-based. They are typically constructed as a rebuke to the perceived superstition, intolerance and dogmatism of traditional religions. Yet at the same time, they wish to retain the positive aspects of the traditional religions, and attempts to merge what is considered good from various religions, dismissing the less appealing doctrines. They are typically hostile to organized religion, because that is perceived to remove people from genuine religious experiences, and into unthinking dogmatism. As such, they share similarities with Kierkegaard, who also insists that the only true religion is the personal and deeply felt one. And like with Kierkegaard, Swinburne dismiss philosophical religions for disregarding crucial aspects about theism in order to prove a point, ending up with neither a coherent philosophy or a useful religion.

#### 7) Conclusions<sup>42</sup>

If adherence to a religious creed is to be deemed rational, adequate research and investigation is required. The amount and type of investigation is required depends on what means and alternatives are available to the religious seeker. Historically, many, perhaps most, of humanity lived in communities where there was only one creed present. In such cases, there is little to no room for further religious exploration or considerations. In the developed world of today however, we are aware of a vast multitude of potential creeds, and in order to make a rational choice between them, some investigation and comparison is required. Which creeds are

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<sup>41</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 255-260

<sup>42</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 260-263

more probable, and which are more improbable? In the present age, the problem is not a lack of information, rather the opposite. There are so many alternative creeds that exist that the investigator may devote her entire life to the pursuit, without being able to conclude. Swinburne suggests a few preliminary rules to lessen the enormity of the task. If she has access to them and their teachings, she should start by investigating the great world religions. Their great number of followers, of which many have been or are very serious and/or highly intelligent people, strengthens the chance that there is at least some truth to them. In addition to this, we should listen to what people around us, friends and family, believe. We do have some duty to believe what people are telling us, especially when told by someone we trust. Likewise, if someone believes in a creed so strongly that they devote their life, or at least large chunks of it, to spread it, we have more of a duty to give it some serious consideration.

Creeds that have little following, even if they have existed for some time, and/or are dismissed by the people we trust, and/or have few mentally resourceful adherents, and/or where the adherents show little genuine commitment to them, are less worthy of investigation, and may be more safely dismissed.

Together, these seven points presents Swinburne's rational starting point towards faith. Following it, or so the claim is, we can reach a point where we are well suited to pick out a faith. Swinburne, being a Christian, naturally has concluded that the Christian faith is the best alternative.

*Was Jesus God?*

*But why should we support that God (if there is a God) is the Christian God? I plan to answer that question in this book and to show that, if there is a God, then the main doctrines which the Christian Church teaches about God, the doctrines which are special to Christianity, and distinguish it from other religions which also claim that there is a God, are very probably true.*<sup>43</sup>

Having established what he means when talking about “theism”, and why he thinks said definition is the best, Swinburne, proceeds towards a more specifically Christian standpoint, in *Was Jesus God?* where Swinburne argues for why this question is to be answered in the

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<sup>43</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 1

affirmative. Christianity of course necessitates that Jesus was divine, and that God worked through him. This book is divided into two main parts, “God Loves Us”, and “God Shows Us That He Loves Us”. While both of these claims are accepted in Judaism and Islam as well, *Was Jesus God?* is clearly and unambiguously a work of Christian philosophy, it also differs from *The Coherence of Theism* in that while Swinburne continues to follow the path of analytical, logical philosophy, he also refers to historical sources (first and foremost, the gospels) and revelatory religion – religious experiences that appear as revelations to chosen people. This last point presents a challenge to analytical philosophy, for it is not logically possible to discuss the validity of divine revelations with supernatural elements. By that I mean that revelations are both so personal, and unrelatable, that it is not really possible to discuss them by objective facts and scientific reasoning. Swinburne admits “That purported revelation will, of course, include claims that we could not discover for ourselves – for the main point of a revelation is to tell us things which we could not discover for ourselves.”<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, we are entitled to require that said revelations do not stray all too far from reason and logic. A true prophet cannot proclaim revelations that are in direct conflict with what we naturally can deduce must be God’s nature. Thus, the truly religious and the truly ethical cannot, according to Swinburne, ever be in conflict. God is fundamentally good, and for that term to have any genuine meaning, we must be able to grasp what is meant by the term “good”, and have at least a vague sense of what it means that something is the ultimate good.<sup>45</sup>

*Was Jesus God?* follows from the conclusions of *The Coherence of Theism*, that God must be benevolent, perfect and personal. From this Swinburne deduces that God loves us, for being a perfectly good person includes being a loving person.<sup>46</sup> And as God is perfect, so is His love.<sup>47</sup> What is more, the best way to express this love, and therefore the one God by definition will choose, is to partake in our human nature, in order to atone for our wrongdoing, teaching us the right way to live, and to give us a promise of Heaven, or a place where all is good. According to Christian doctrine, this is of course just what Jesus was, God in human form, and the one opening up the path to the closest possible relationship to God.

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<sup>44</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 84

<sup>45</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 87-90

<sup>46</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28

<sup>47</sup> Hence, Swinburne believes that the trinity can be made plausible by a priori reasoning: The trinity is an example of perfect, unselfish love. See the chapter "God is love", in *Was Jesus God* for elaboration.



If the premises of the first part of the book, that God loves us and that the best way to love us is by atoning for our transgressions by becoming one of us and take the punishment on our behalf. Swinburne then concludes that Jesus is an ideal candidate. In fact, he is the only plausible candidate.<sup>48</sup> Swinburne then discusses the life and death of Jesus and defends the gospels as overall accurate and trustworthy historical sources. Special attention is given to arguing for the resurrection of Jesus, which of course is a key claim in Christianity, and Swinburne argues (in that sequence) that it is logically possible, plausible and probable that Jesus was resurrected. At last, he defends the validity of the Church, as a fellowship of Christian believers, and the legitimacy of the Bible as a holy book, and that it is rational to accept both of them in lieu of the supposition that the Church was founded by Jesus. In fact, Swinburne makes this not only a question of historical accuracy, but states that a divine and benevolent Jesus would by logical necessity found a church.<sup>49</sup> If we accept this, it is also at least plausible that the Bible, or at the very least parts of it, was written under divine inspiration.

#### 2.4 Natural theology and apologetics

We do need to explore the concept of natural theology and in particular that of apologetics, and it does present an intellectual and fairly clear-cut line between the approaches of Richard Swinburne and Søren Kierkegaard. To be specific: It is a cornerstone in Swinburne's theistic philosophy, and totally, indeed intentionally, absent in Kierkegaard's.

It is worth noting that the existence of God seems to presuppose a considerable number of specific traits of the deity in question, both among laypeople, and among philosophers and other thinkers. But God, in his/her/its/their most basic definition, is a pandeistic entity, the first, original and necessary cause in the universe, but quite possibly nothing more. This is the Aristotelian, as well as the Spinozean, idea of an *immovable mover*, the ultimate first cause of everything that happens in universe.

*It is clear then that there is neither place, nor void, nor time, outside the heaven. Hence whatever is there, is of such a nature as not to occupy any place, nor does time age it; nor is there any change in any of the things which lie beyond the outermost motion; they continue through their entire duration unalterable and unmodified, living the best and most self*

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<sup>48</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 129-131

<sup>49</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 75-77

*sufficient of lives... From [the fulfilment of the whole heaven] derive the being and life which other things, some more or less articulately but other feebly, enjoy.*<sup>50</sup>

Since the universe is not self-explanatory, and because a reasonable claim requires all things to have a cause, it figures that the universe must have a cause outside of it, as it is stated in the more modern argument for a fine-tuned universe. Furthermore, it is equally mysterious as of why, if not for the will of some entity, the universe should keep on existing, following the same physical laws it has always followed, and where every physical law is essential in ensuring the survival of mankind, or indeed any life, in a precarious balance. Divine revelations, while not discarded, are not used in furthering the argument for God's existence. The question of God's existence then becomes a fundamentally *objective* one, a hypothesis that may be proven (and therefore, also disproven) by anyone that sets their mind to it. Swinburne, as an example, has calculated that the probability of the resurrection of Jesus is 97 percent.<sup>51</sup>

As a direct repudiation of the god-of-the-gaps slur, modern apologetics use the idea of a "fine-tuned universe", noting that discoveries within physics the last few decades strongly suggest that the universe is not, as was previously thought, eternal, but at some point, what we call Big Bang, created in some way. What more, the conditions for any possibility of life to occur are so manifold and complex that the chance for any life to begin to exist, and to continue existing and evolving for billions of years, are inestimably small, so small that the most plausible explanation by far must be that the existence of the universe, and even more for us, is no coincidence; it is the result of God's willed actions. The idea(s) of fine-tuning is today probably one of the most relevant scientific objections to atheism, and one which there seems to be no, as of yet at least, compelling counter-evidence. Swinburne bases this on Bayesian probability, stating that: "Natural theology claims that the most general features of the universe show that there is a God."<sup>52</sup> Here it may be appropriate to mention that Swinburne often distinguishes between "bare" and "ramified" natural theology. Bare natural theology being what all theists, like Muslims, may accept. while ramified natural

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<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, On the Heavens, I.9, 279 a17–30

<sup>51</sup> Eakin, "So God's Really in the Details?"

<sup>52</sup> Swinburne, "Bayes, God and the multiverse"

theology is explicitly Christian; or to be more precise, explicit for a certain religion.<sup>53</sup>

Kierkegaard is, of course, totally uninterested in either.

But basing faith exclusively on these natural arguments in and of itself does not get us very far. For there is nothing in such a divinity that says that there must be a purpose in worshipping it or have faith in it. The most accurate, and probably the simplest, description of such a God would be through some form of pantheism or even pandeism. And in and of itself such a God is not necessarily to be worshipped<sup>54</sup>; at least not without great difficulty and with little seeming gain. By its very nature, such an entity is not to be interacted with, it is impersonal, uncaring and perhaps not even sentient. It follows that it has no care for humanity, nor any will or perhaps even ability to communicate with us or have any other meaningful interaction. It is worth noting that the prominent atheist and anti-theist polemicist Richard Dawkins has expressed indifference regarding the existence of such an entity. It may or may not exist, he has no strong opinion on the subject, and it matters little. Pantheism is then merely “sexed up atheism”.<sup>55</sup>

For faith to be meaningful as an act of love, it therefore becomes necessary to believe in a type of god that to a certain degree at least is approachable. It must be possible to have a relationship with said entity. Worship must be a form of transaction, where the worshipper both give and receive something; though not necessarily in equal measures.

## 2.5 Intelligent faith

This attempt from faith to reach a compromise with reason and rationality is not uncontroversial, however, as it may also mean that faith; at least concerning the Abrahamic notion of a personal, benevolent deity, must yield something of its essence, its very nature: That it is *beyond* rationality. Faith is, after all, also passion, the seeking for something, and someone, that is in the emotional, not rational sphere of the mind. Passion is, after all, not ruled by reason and calculation, but something beyond it. But can this be wedded with reason? Can trust, and inherent scepticism, really co-exist? Kierkegaard thinks not, and he is not alone. The argument made is that when we subject personal piety, the personal relationship to God, to a critical, philosophical examination, we also unavoidably subject

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<sup>53</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 107

<sup>54</sup> If this type of god ought to be worshipped, further arguments or evidence would be required than what the pantheist so far has provided.

<sup>55</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007), p. 40

God to rational calculations, which again means that we diminish Him. Making the existence of God into a hypothesis, implicitly means to question His existence, it is not a given, but a temporary condition, an approximation, that can and must be dismissed whenever a more suitable option present itself.

A good example of such a development and its dire pitfalls, is presented by Alistair McGrath in *The Twilight of Atheism*, is the one of Descartes, who set out to prove the undeniable logical, scientific and philosophical necessity of God's existence, once and for all; a grave mistake in McGrath's (and, I have no doubt, Kierkegaard's) view.

Descartes established, as his first foundation, that genuine knowledge was universal and necessarily true, and could be proven to be so, either by scientific experiments, or better yet, by logical necessity. Having established this, Descartes set out to prove the existence of God as a fundamental necessity, as rational thinking could easily verify. All the time intending to prove the rationality of Christian faith in The One God.

*Convinced that the scientific discoveries of their day could be harnessed to serve the needs of the church, Descartes and his colleagues abandoned any appeal to religious experience in their defense of their faith. The secure proofs of their religion lay in philosophy and the natural sciences – in the reasoning of this world rather than the intrusion of the next. Philosophy alone could establish the necessity and plausibility of the Christian faith.*<sup>56</sup>

As history has amply shown – it could not. Or at least, not enough to convince the vast number of atheists, agnostics and non-Christian believers that appeared during the next centuries. What McGrath and Kierkegaard both claim is that the process in itself was a mistake; more than that, it was self-defeating. After all, a hypothesis is, per definition, a temporary explanation, perfectly aware of its own limitations, and which ends, preferably, with its death by counterevidence to its claims. To turn the existence of God into a hypothesis, is to more or less admit that God's existence is not certain, but merely at present the least implausible explanation, not a certainty for all eternity, but something that must constantly be argued for, and that may just as legitimately be argued against; the only possible concluding outcome being the hypothesis' eventual demise. Descartes, and those that followed him, turned God into a scientific necessity, an explanation for mysteries of the universe. And as natural sciences advanced, and alternative explanations for how the

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<sup>56</sup> McGrath, *The twilight of atheism*, (USA: Doubleday Random House, Inc.), p. 31

universe is built up presented themselves, God seemed to retreat, until we had a universe that seemed to function perfectly fine on its own, no god(s) of any type necessary. This development has given rise to the frequent misconception of seeing religion as mere outdated scientific models, filled with claims made by people that wrote from the bronze and iron age, and easily disproven by the rapidly increasing technological and scientific advancement of the post-enlightenment western civilization. To quote Richard Dawkins once again:

*I can't imagine being an atheist at any time before 1859 (when Darwin's On the Origin of Species was first published, my parenthesis). Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.<sup>57</sup>*

My point with these quotes is to show the common misconception that so often uninformed plague both atheists, agnostics and habitual Christians of today: The Bible is meant to always be taken literally, and God is nothing but what is sometimes derisively referred to as a "god of the gaps", He exists to provide explanations for the objects and phenomena that what we cannot (yet) explain through science. As science advance, God retreats. Now, it cannot be denied that God has indeed served as the explanation of all kinds of natural phenomena through human history, all from thunder and lightning, to earthquakes and sicknesses, to the change of seasons. Today, thanks to the natural sciences we do know that all of these have logical and materialistic causes, and while the possibility of God's direct and/or indirect interference may not be excluded, but it is certainly not required. But then that has never been God's main purpose in classical Christianity, or in theism for that matter. That is a misunderstanding made possible by the attempts to compel religious faith by the use of scientific necessity. The insistence of a literal and infallible interpretation of the Bible, we can attribute to Protestantism, where some (though far from all) churches and believers hold this view. The claim that God is a scientific fact, and can be proved, discovered and explained as just another natural phenomenon, we may lay at the doorstep of Descartes and his fellow devout scientists, who mistook the creator of the universe for His creation.

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<sup>57</sup> Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York, Norton, 1986), p. 6

Another risk is that the weighting of natural religion risk pushing aside the revelatory aspects of religion. Now, Swinburne admits, agreeing with Kierkegaard, that Christianity is built upon teachings we simply cannot deduce by ourselves, truths God has not shown in nature, but that we are told by prophets and the Son of God, through their unique connections with God.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, no matter how wise he was, Socrates could never have become a Christian, because he had no chance (naturally) to learn of Christianity.

Christianity consists both of a priori and a posteriori knowledge. Swinburne contrasts this with Buddhism, which does not claim that Buddha experienced divine revelations, but rather that his teachings can be encompassed and learned by all with the sufficient level of wisdom. It is possible (according to Buddhism) though tremendously difficult, to deduce oneself to the truth of Buddhist teachings, and thus Socrates could theoretically have become a Buddhist.<sup>59</sup> Buddhism is thus primarily a priori, or at least claims to be.

In the past few decades we have witnessed a rapid advancement of sophisticated Christian apologetics, spearheaded in particular by prominent apologetics like Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne and William Lane Craig. This is perhaps particularly remarkable considering the fact the development has taken place in parallel with a slow but steady and undisputable overall decline of Christianity across the Western world during the same period of time. Intellectual, reason-based Christianity has gained a stronger foothold than it has ever enjoyed in the West since the nineteenth century, when its dominance in both public and academic thinking were undisputedly hegemonic. In the face of an often fierce and always continuing onslaught from atheistic and secular intellectuals, philosophical Christianity has been able to retain (at least some) territory and proved that the religion can withstand intense philosophical scrutiny, and perhaps even retake some lost ground.<sup>60</sup> This in itself is a strong point in favour of an intellectually-based and positivistic approach towards apologetics in my view. If, as any Christian ought to believe, the prevalence of (genuine) Christianity in a society is a good thing, it seems as if apologetics is the best weapon available in a society that is liberal yet somewhat hostile to religion. It is however not the entire picture. Faith is something more than mere rationality. That is not to say that faith in and of itself is *irrational*. Neither Swinburne or Kierkegaard would say that, rather, it is

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<sup>58</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 239

<sup>59</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 254-255

<sup>60</sup> McGrath, *The twilight of atheism*, (USA: Doubleday Random House, Inc.), p. 258-264

supra-rational, rational in such a way and to such a degree that humans cannot comprehend it. This risk making the mission of apologetics self-contradictory, in that it claims to be both rational yet disparaging rationality itself, telling us to be led by reasoning, yet insisting that human reasoning is fundamentally untrustworthy.

Yet even so, it is hard to see how it could have been different. For while it is true that faith is in itself not synonymous with knowledge, it seems to be something ultimately unsatisfying with insisting that religious faith may dismiss reason altogether, for can God and religion claim to be fully independent from the rest of the world? Does not historical processes, local culture, science and politics influence the way religion is approached, and thus how God is? To deny that would be patently absurd. Even today, Christianity does not mean the same in Norway, USA or Kenya; just as the Christianity of Kierkegaard was not the same as the typical, mainstream Christianity of today's Denmark. Here it should be sufficient to refer to Kierkegaard's stressing of the human beings' fear and trembling when facing God, the almighty creator and absolute ruler of the universe. What a distinctly unmodern idea: That God should be treated with fear. In such a view, faith would always be at risk of becoming irrelevant towards the world at large, because faith would have to be approached isolated from the rest of the world. In a society that prides itself for its rationality, it is hard to argue what use, or even place, a faith that refuses to engage with reason altogether could have.

### 3 Chapter 3 – True faith

#### 3.1 Objective and subjective truth

In Kierkegaardian philosophy and thinking, faith is a matter of personal choice, a concept postmodernism can relate to and appreciate. By the word "postmodernism" I here think of the rejection of objective truth and meaning, so-called metanarratives. Nothing is universally true, and therefore whatever we think of when talking about "truth", is actually subjective, matter of personal choice and preferences. It is important to here remember that apologetics are philosophical and reason-based, or at least, that is what they aspire to be and claim to be. That is to say that they aim to prove the credentials, validity and plausibility of (Christian) faith by appealing to rationality.

You cannot be born to faith or be forced to adopt it by logical calculations. But you must make a choice, and how can one make a qualified choice of something that cannot possibly be qualified? The most susceptible answer seems to be that we must admit that all faith systems have *something* true to them, perhaps provided that they believe in something outside of ourselves. This might be a god, spirits or merely a political idea. As for more specific tenets, we must simply contend ourselves with saying that "it is true for me". But is this a satisfying answer? I cannot see how stating that there exist multiple convictions that are at the same time all true, equally valid yet contradict each other, can lead to anything but disbelief in all of them. If we say that all approaches towards faith are equally good, we also admit that what we ourselves choose is no better (or no worse) than anything else. From this follows that whatever one believes in is essentially meaningless, the only thing that really matters is that one believes, if even that. Everything is subjective. But how can unconditional devotion survive this realisation? If religion itself becomes reduced to whatever construct you make yourself, or decide suit you, Christianity, as well as all other religions, become reduced to personal narratives. Everything becomes true and therefore nothing is ultimately true. It all ends up being a matter of personal choice and preference. Kierkegaard ends up creating further difficulties for himself in this regard when he, later in his authorship, repudiated the Christian church in its entirety, more or less declaring that all forms of organised religion to inevitably lead to corruption, hypocrisy and institutionalism of what is meant to be holy, mysterious and deeply personal. Faith is subjective and personal; so personal that no institution can dictate or control it. What more, to even attempt to do so is to try to surpass God, it is blasphemy, Man trespassing on a part of our soul that should belong only to Him. The only thing that matters is your relationship to God, expressed in blind, unconditional devotion to Him. There are no absolute rules, no firm guidelines, no fellowship. Just a blind leap into the darkness.

Is that all that faith ultimately is? Is Kierkegaard then fundamentally postmodern, rejecting all objective and subjective truths alike?

This was obviously not what he set out to do. At the centre of his philosophy is the Christian claim that Jesus was both God and man, that he loves us with fully unselfish, divine love, and that we have a duty to follow him as far as we are able. The entirety of his philosophy,



or so Kierkegaard himself insisted, is built upon this core.<sup>61</sup>

Likewise, for Kierkegaard, Socrates was fundamentally wrong in his worldview and his religion, because he did not understand that greater than rationality and logic is the pure, all-consuming and unconditional love the believer feels towards God. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard forgives Socrates, because he lived centuries before Christ did. Socrates cannot be blamed, at least not fully, for his misguidance, because he lived before he could ever learn or experience *The Paradox of Christ*.<sup>62</sup> This paradox is a central core to Kierkegaard's thinking, where the individual (den Enkelte) must break free from the collective (det Almene) in order to gain freedom from despair and closeness to God (det Absolute). It is the paradox that Jesus was both God and man. Both eternal and temporal, finite and infinite. God, who cannot have a history, has become historical. What is impossible, has not only been made possible, but realized.<sup>63</sup>

*Troens paradox er da dette, at den Enkelte er høiere enn det Almene".<sup>64</sup> The individual must be member of society, while simultaneously break free from it. "Paradoxet kan ogsaa udtrykkes saaledes, at der er en absolut Pligt mod Gud; thi i dette Pligtforhold forholder den Enkelte som den Enkelte sig abolsut til det Absolute.<sup>65</sup>*

Socrates had nothing but his own intellect and irony to help him away from despair, and that is simply insufficient for the task. As someone hoping to be a true, unconditional and steadfast believer, Kierkegaard must by definition believe fully that the central message of Christianity, that Jesus died and rose from the dead, are true, and that nothing whatsoever in this world may shake his faith in this divine act. Nothing anyone can say or do may change the believer's conviction about this. And this is self-evident, because arguing in favour of your beliefs implicitly admits that there is justification for some level of doubt about them. Your faith needs to be defended, protected from assaults. And then your faith is not perfect, but conditional. Swinburne seems to suggest as much when he at the end of *Faith and Reason*, states that when regarding the question of finding the correct faith: "Indeed, an openness to the possibility that our conclusion about which, if any, is the right way to

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<sup>61</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 310-311

<sup>62</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Kierkegaard's Religion", in *Søren Kierkegaard*, by William MacDonald *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 04.05.2020  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/kierkegaard/>>.

<sup>63</sup> Garaventa, Kierkegaard and Christianity, 493-495

<sup>64</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* 2013, p. 162

<sup>65</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* 2013, p. 162

pursue may be mistaken should, I suggest, never be entirely absent from our lives, so important is the issue."<sup>66</sup> Swinburne means to say that we always should be rigorous and as objective as possible in our assessments, particularly in something so important that it may affect us for all eternity. But there is also a clear implication that we never can be absolutely sure that we have arrived at the correct destination. There is always, no matter how much we have thought and read, a small sliver of doubt, or at least there should be. The individual never commits himself completely.

Obviously, we do not know what Kierkegaard's response would be towards the modern trend of apologetics, but I do suspect that he would regard them as aspiring towards Socrates, when they should be aspiring towards Christ. Certainly, Kierkegaard makes it quite clear that he has no respect, though perhaps some pity, for his contemporary's apologists.<sup>67</sup> Apologists, Kierkegaard thought, cannot use ignorance of the Christian gospel as an excuse for their philosophical failings. Socrates is doing the best that is humanly possible, with the limited resources he has at hand. The Christian apologists has misunderstood, ignored and distorted Christ's true message. They are thus even further away from the truth and God than Socrates ever was, despite, unlike him, being intimately familiar with Christianity.

Nonetheless, I cannot see how Kierkegaard's criticism and dismissal of apologetics is sustainable when facing challenges from other religions, not merely atheism or, just as bad in some ways, lazy and shallow Christianity. How can Kierkegaard respond to a fully devout, passionately loving Muslim? The only possible reply for a Christian is that the Muslim is doing it wrong, somehow. That there is something in Christianity that is superior to all other religions, beliefs and atheism. That something about Jesus is supremely unique, and cannot be copied, imitated or compared. And is it possible to argue that without resorting to apologetics? It seems to me that the answer must be no.

Though Kierkegaard naturally never had the chance to comment upon what Swinburne thinks, what Swinburne on the other hand thinks of Kierkegaard, we can know, because Swinburne has written about him. Swinburne mentions Kierkegaard briefly (which in itself is perhaps rather tellingly of how he regards Kierkegaard's thinking about the subject) in *Faith and Reason*, where he uses him as an historical example of a prominent thinker who was critical of what Swinburne is trying to do, that is, arguing for a rationality-based Christianity.

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<sup>66</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 266

<sup>67</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelige etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 52-55

*Opposition to ramified natural theology, historical arguments for the truth of Biblical claims, was central to the work of Søren Kierkegaard. By such historical work, he wrote "one would never arrive at anything more than an approximation, and there is an essential misrelation between that and a personal, infinite interestedness in one's own eternal happiness".*<sup>68</sup>

Swinburne then hand-waves the Kierkegaardian objections away by stating that even if we do not depend on rational arguments for religious truth, the faith may still be doubtful and half-hearted. To simply not question something is not the same as to embrace it. To question it may not necessarily end in weakening of faith in it, on the contrary. "Faith in God is not the same as belief that there is a God; and faith may involve total commitment while belief is far from completely confident."<sup>69</sup>

In the same work, Swinburne categorizes and debates what he believes are the three main approaches towards Christian faith. These are:

1. The Thomist view, which he pledges himself to.
2. The Lutheran view
3. The Pragmatist view, where he puts Kierkegaard.

#### The Thomist view of faith

The first of these are of course named after Thomas Aquinas, the medieval age's most famous theologian, and a firm believer in the role of reason as a tool towards gaining faith. Aquinas is not the first Christian, much less theist, to have thought this, but he argues for it and he makes a crucial (according to Swinburne) addition. The definition is this: "The person of religious faith is the person who has the theoretical conviction that there is a God."<sup>70</sup> In order to do so rationally, and here comes Aquinas' contribution, you must hold certain other propositions, apart from the truth of God's existence, to be true as well. Simply put, this means that the existence of God can be verified by confirming certain other propositions, and that the existence of God means that some other propositions again can be verified from the fact of God's existence. "The things of faith surpass human understanding, and so many becomes aware of them only because God reveals them. To some, the prophets and apostles, for example, this revelation comes from God immediately; to others, the things of

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<sup>68</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 109

<sup>69</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 110

<sup>70</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 138

faith are announced by God's sending preachers of the faith."<sup>71</sup> This is natural theology and makes the process of faith akin to scientific discovery. Divine revelations are treated as natural observations would have been. Like Aquinas, Swinburne strongly believes in natural theology; so much so that both of his published spiritual autobiographies contain the concept in their title: *Natural Theology and Orthodoxy*<sup>72</sup> and *The Vocation of a Natural Theologian*<sup>73</sup>.

Here, some qualification must be made. For this paper, the most important one is that faith may be compared to scientific knowledge. Regarding belief systems, faith is then a somewhat weaker form of belief system than (scientific) knowledge. There is room for more doubt in faith, but overall, they operate in the same field of seeking knowledge. Accepting this logic, there is no fundamental difference between the epistemologies of scientific knowledge and religious faith. Swinburne cites Aquinas, who again cites Hugh of St Victor, who asserts that "faith (fides) is a form of mental certitude about absent realities that is greater than opinion (opinio) and less than scientific knowledge (scientia)". This is not controversial. Indeed, Swinburne is so bold as to state that "every Christian writer who has written about faith has said something similar."<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, he detects an easily and often overlooked disagreement of vital importance. According to Aquinas, the difference between faith and scientific knowledge is that scientific knowledge is not that strong belief that something that really is true is true, they both have that. But in addition, scientific knowledge can explain *why* it is true. Since faith needs God in order to be true, and we can never fully understand God, we will never be able to explain why faith must be true. Faith is knowledge of which we do not understand what makes it true, though we still believe firmly that true it is. "The act of believing is firmly attached to one alternative [that the belief is true rather than not] and in this respect the believer is in the same state of mind as one who has scientific knowledge and understanding".<sup>75</sup> One might think that the existence of God itself at least can be scientifically proven, but according to Swinburne at least, Aquinas

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<sup>71</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 2a. 2ae. 6.1.

<sup>72</sup> Swinburne, Richard, "Natural Theology and Orthodoxy", in *Turning East: Contemporary Philosophers and the Ancient Christian Faith*, Rico Vitz, ed. (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), pp. 47–78.

<sup>73</sup> Swinburne, Richard, "The Vocation of a Natural Theologian," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, Kelly James Clark, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 179–202.

<sup>74</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 139

<sup>75</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 2a. 2ae. 2.1.

seems to doubt this as well, as only God ultimately knows why there must be a God.<sup>76</sup>

Two problems arise from this. One is the fact that faith is a matter of degree, not an either/or. You can have strong faith or weak faith, much or little. What is "worse", or at least a more problematic aspect, is that the Thomist view risks being directly unchristian. That is because Christianity, like most theistic religions, considers faith to be a good thing in and of itself. Someone with strong faith merits praise for that. Having faith is a virtue. And yet, if Christian faith becomes too much akin to scientific knowledge, we may also easily risk that evil people has strong faith, in that they do not doubt the existence of God yet try their best to defy His will. That causes Aquinas to make his other, and more controversial, qualification: Faith, in and of itself, is not a virtue. Demons have true beliefs about God, and presumably few if any are as certain of God's existence as Satan. How to solve this?

Firstly, demons and humans have different types of faith. The faith of demons (and, we must suppose, angels) is forced upon them. They have no say in whether or not they believe in God. Humans on the other hand, may choose. Then, it also becomes to our credit, because the signs are not so clear to us. Our faith is a choice, and act of courage.

Secondly, the faith of demons, devils and psychopaths is built upon fear and hatred, not love. And for this love to be genuine, we are also required to at least truly want to do good works. True faith and true love are one and the same. Swinburne concludes his presentation by stating:

*So, although Thomist faith by itself is a very intellectual thing, a faith of the head and not the heart, a faith which may be held without any natural fruit in Christian living, the meritorious faith which the Thomist commends, the saving faith which puts the person of faith on the way to salvation, involves the whole person.*<sup>77</sup>

#### The Lutheran view of faith

This second view of faith is according to Swinburne a combination of the intuitive and the reasoned. That "faith involves both theoretical beliefs-that (Thomist faith) *and* a trust in the Living God. The person of faith, on this view, does not merely believe that there is a God (and believe certain propositions about him), he trusts Him and commits himself to Him."<sup>78</sup> This was, of course, the view of Martin Luther. It means that what is *the most* essential,

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<sup>76</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 139

<sup>77</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 141

<sup>78</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 142

though not the only element of faith, is trust. We could consider this view to be Thomist plus trust. Later Lutheran theologians distinguished three parts of faith: knowledge, assent and trust.<sup>79</sup> Knowledge means the strong belief that something true is true. Assent is necessary to ensure that our faith has the right foundation, and to motivate us to do what is good, as a reflection of proper faith. What is then the role of trust? As Swinburne puts it: "To trust someone is to act on the assumption that she will do for you what she knows that you want or need, when the evidence gives some reason for supposing that she may not and there will be bad consequences if the assumption is false."<sup>80</sup> Swinburne thinks here of an ordinary person, but the definition might as well fit God, who will always be somewhat unknown to the believer, and where there is some reason to suspect that He might not be altogether good and/or capable. (Hence, the problem of evil.)

The Lutheran view acknowledges that trust is not guaranteed to be well-placed, and that there will be some bad consequences for us if the trust is misplaced (denial of everlasting life, or even worse, denial of *blissful* afterlife). Some reasoning seems necessary. If one believes that God exists, and believes all the propositions of Christian creeds, one believes that God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and thus that it is always good to trust that God will do what, in the end, is best for us.<sup>81</sup> Luther wrote: "Let no one be content with believing that God is able or has power to do great things: we must also believe that he will do them and that he delights to do them. Nor indeed is it enough to think that God will do great things with other people, but not with you."<sup>82</sup>

But the Lutheran view of faith shares a problem with the Thomist one, for also here the evil man or woman may be a person of genuine faith. They may not try to purposefully defy His will, because they must, by compulsion of their faith, trust God wishes them well and wants them to do great things, but will these things be good? It would seem that the Lutheran view of faith is the view of the Caliphate of ISIS, whose faithful adherents truly believed that God is great and capable, and that he wanted them to do great things, namely conquer, enslave, rape and kill in His name. This is not a problem for Aquinas, who does not think that faith in and of itself is noble (though it is a fundamental requirement to do truly good), but it

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<sup>79</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 142

<sup>80</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 143

<sup>81</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 144-145

<sup>82</sup> Luther, *Magnificat*, (Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 199

is for Luther and his fellow protestants, who believes that faith in and of itself, regardless of works, is good. Even *the* good, since salvation comes through faith alone. We detect here of course the old schism between Protestants and Catholics, the question of whether it is faith alone, or faith and good works, that is our salvation. Swinburne argues that the conflict itself is largely a mutual misunderstanding of the word "faith", and that there need be no conflict. Indeed, the Thomist view of faith, so long as it is remembered that the right form of faith must be one built upon love, is no different from the Lutheran view. We do good works because we have faith, and our will to do good works prove that we have faith. "What is needed for salvation (in addition to beliefs) is basically good character, that is, a mind full of good purposes arising from the love of God set to bring about good results as opportunity arises, to guide the beliefs of which one acts."<sup>83, 84</sup>

#### The Pragmatist view of faith

So if for Aquinas beliefs-that is the most important matter, and for Luther both beliefs-that and trust are both necessary (though trust more so), is a third option then possible? Yes, according to Swinburne, and it is here that we find, according to him, Søren Kierkegaard, amongst others.<sup>85</sup> These believers, according to Swinburne, goes as far as to disregard the value of beliefs-that altogether. They have no interest, or feel that there is no possibility, of ever proving that God exists, or that the propositions we give Him are believable. The divide between God and mankind is simply far too large for something like that to be possible. Swinburne coins this "the Pragmatist view". Here, reason is discarded as a tool towards faith, and it is stated that faith is thoroughly beyond reason. Faith is then gained by acts, that is, acting as if you were a believer. Acting as if you believed that God exists. Acting as if you believed that His power was great and that He could do marvellous things. By doing so, it is believed and hoped that doubt eventually will fade away, and faith will come. There is a precedent for this in religious philosophy, also by philosophers that fully believed in the merits of reason-based faith. Pascal did not believe that acting-as was the key to faith, but it

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<sup>83</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 146

<sup>84</sup> However, whether or not this presents a strictly accurate view of Lutheranism is questionable. Swinburne, who is an Orthodox convert from Anglicanism, may forget the weight Lutheranism puts on "total depravity", the idea that humanity is born wicked, and only by the mercy of God may we hope to become good. Goodness of character is then a result of faith, not a supplement to it. This is however beside the point and scope of this thesis.

<sup>85</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 148-149

could be an important steppingstone for this doubting believer. Acting as if you were a Christian will help you towards becoming one.<sup>86</sup> According to Swinburne, this is what Kierkegaard calls "the leap of faith"<sup>87</sup>. You do not truly know, when you make the leap, that God will be there at the bottom of the cold, black sea, but you must make the leap nonetheless. Ridding oneself of doubt is not the preamble of faith, it is its early walking companion.

*...the Pragmatist view is also that of Kierkegaard; and Kierkegaard bears much of the responsibility for the many traces of this view in modern theology. "The leap of faith which Kierkegaard commends is a matter of acting-as-if with "the passion of the infinite". He commends Socrates for having the right sort of faith in immortality because "he stakes his whole life" on this. "When Socrates believed that God is, he held fast the objective uncertainty with the entire passion of inwardness, and faith is precisely in this contradiction, in this risk. Without risk, no faith. Faith is the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and the objective uncertainty."<sup>88</sup>*

The person of Pragmatist Christian faith does then not have to believe that there is a God, in that he or she can think it more probable than not that God does not exist. Yet at the same time, paradoxically, he or she must believe that by doing certain actions they will reach their goal, in this case, to believe in God.

*He will need, therefore, to have such beliefs as that he is more likely to honour God by participating in Christian worship than by doing nothing; and more likely to get to Heaven by feeding the starving than by taking heroin. He may believe that there is more than one way which he can pursue equally likely to attain his goal, but he will need to believe that some ways are less likely to attain these goals.<sup>89</sup>*

Swinburne then brings up what I consider to be a crucial flaw in the Pragmatist/Kierkegaardian approach: That it is not specific enough. Its approach towards faith may or may not lead to faith, but we have no way of telling what type of faith is the right one. To *have* faith is essential, as salvation from despair, but exactly *what type* of faith

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<sup>86</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 148-149

<sup>87</sup> Though Kierkegaard himself never used exactly this phrase. He wrote about "et kvalitativt spring", a qualitative leap. Nonetheless, it was a leap *into* faith he had in mind.

<sup>88</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 149

<sup>89</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 149-150



that is the right one, and how to know, Kierkegaard largely ignores, apart from stressing that reason is not the way. And it is not enough to answer "love", for both the Christian and Islamic religions stress the importance of loving and obeying God, and both of them *cannot* be true. Christianity is based on the belief that Jesus Christ died on the cross, Islam, through the Quran, purported to be the very word of God, insists that he did not. Both of these claims cannot be true, and without reasoning we have no way to determine which one is the most plausible. Therefore, we do need at least a few pre-existing beliefs before we can take the leap into faith. This is acknowledged by some Christians of the Pragmatist mould, but Swinburne is "not aware that Kierkegaard recognized the need for such beliefs."<sup>90</sup> Kierkegaard took it more or less for granted that his readers would be Christians, or at the very least have grown up in a Christian culture and context. To some degree, we can forgive this overlap, for how could Kierkegaard ever know that the Christian culture he so loathed would fade away? But this is not good enough, for as Swinburne points out, all Kierkegaard would have to do was to go back into early Christianity.

*Those, like Augustine, who agonized over religious allegiance in the first centuries AD, were concerned with a choice between Christianity, Judaism, Mithraism, Manichaeism, Epicureanism, Stoicism etc. Their concern in making a choice was with which was most likely to be true; and so, among religions which offered salvation, was most likely to provide it.*<sup>91</sup>

In such a context, what alternative is there than to assess each of the offered paths to salvation, and then proceed with whichever is deemed the most plausible? Augustine, just like modern Westerners, was offered a multitude of different worldviews and religions, each of them offering a variant of salvation, each of them demanding, either explicitly or implicitly, to be more or less exclusive. It is not possible to be both a Christian and a Manichaeist, for example, and even less to be both a Jew and a Mithraist. Stressing the leap of faith alone becomes a cruel joke, if the seeker of faith has no idea of which direction to leap into. There is a problem here, as Swinburne points out. But what exactly is his suggested solution? How are we to know which faith, amongst the crowd, is the correct one?

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<sup>90</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 150

<sup>91</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 155

*I am also inclined to think that, in earlier days, all that was (implicitly) required of the candidate for baptism was a belief that the Christian system was marginally more probable than each of its alternatives, not very much more probable than them - so long, of course, as the belief was joined to a total commitment to action. The ever-present inveighing against Christians who are hesitant is to be read more often as inveighing against lack of commitment rather than lack of conviction.*<sup>92</sup>

If this is true, the Christian, or for that matter any believer, seems to unavoidably being caught in a rather difficult and unpleasant dilemma. For it seems that the faithful-wannabe is forced to make a most important choice, *the* most important choice perhaps, based on very scant evidence. If you are compelled to make a bet where the wage is your immortal soul, it seems rather unsatisfying to be content with a choice that is merely "marginally more probable" than any of the other choices at hand.<sup>93</sup> What more, despite the weakness of available evidence, a total and unquestioning commitment is demanded. But the severity of the demands made are somewhat softened by the implicit acceptance of doubt in the believer. Doubt, at least in the starting phase, is seen as both natural and understandable, and you should not wait until doubt has been overcome before you are prepared to commit yourself, because then you will wait your entire life. It is noteworthy that the last sentence of the quote above is entirely in accordance with Kierkegaard's thinking. The point of Christianity is commitment, not conviction. Swinburne theorizes that the yearning for a stronger form of foundation of faith is what led to the Pragmatist approach to be developed. There is a longing to believe, on a stronger and more solid foundation than what the available evidence can provide. The Pragmatist view of faith can be seen as an admission of this difficulty, and seeks out a path where the relative lack of well-founded available beliefs are not a hindrance for having faith.<sup>94</sup> Kierkegaard would presumably equate Swinburne's notion of "beliefs" with approximations, the pre-established facts of the universe and God from which it is hoped an unassailable and perfect faith may be built.

Swinburne concludes his presentation of different view of faith by writing:

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<sup>92</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 155

<sup>93</sup> It also makes the pagan hostility towards Christianity's insistence on exclusivity in worship more understandable.

<sup>94</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 156

*So it looks at this stage as if the Thomist and Lutheran views of the faith which conduces to salvation (that is, Thomist "formed faith" and Lutheran "faith" are essentially the same, while the Pragmatist view differs from these in that it does not require belief that there is a God and the He has certain properties and has done certain things, only a weaker belief. On all these views, the person who has the virtue of faith (that is, "formed faith" in the Thomist sense) seeks to do those actions which the love of God would lead him to do.*<sup>95</sup>

### 3.2 A revised pragmatism

There are however several problematic aspects regarding Swinburne's descriptions and classifications of the three forms of faith he sketches. Whether he has properly understood the Lutheran approach to faith is one, which again begs the question of its relationship to Thomist faith. That however, is not important for this paper. The differences between Swinburne's and Kierkegaard's assessment of faith are. And is Swinburne's description and criticism of Kierkegaard Kierkegaardian thinking accurate?

No, it is not. In fact, there are several factors that, when put together, seems to lead towards the conclusion that Swinburne's description and refutation of Kierkegaard's faith-approach is deeply flawed, and even fundamentally misunderstood. There are three points that must be raised here considering that.

First, as I hope I have made clear, Kierkegaard was perfectly aware that simply unquestioningly believing that there is a God, even the Christian God, is not the same as having faith in him. This was after all the main part of his accusation of faithlessness towards his fellow eighteenth-century Danes, many of whom dutifully attended church-services at Sundays and could recite their fair share of various prayers. But this is not what either Kierkegaard or Swinburne thinks of as acting-as-if. To Kierkegaard at least, a certain level of risk and of sacrifice is necessary if you are to get any closer to God. You cannot force yourself to believe, but you must still choose to trust in God, and by choosing to perform the leap and trust in God, Man will have faith, no matter if he started out with much or little belief. As Luther makes clear<sup>96</sup>, trust means that there is a certain level of doubt, perhaps little, perhaps a lot. The more doubt there would be legitimate to have, it would seem, the more heroic and admirable is the risk taken, provided of course that what is sought after is good. And as both Kierkegaard and Swinburne agree, finding God is the ultimate good. As

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<sup>95</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 150

<sup>96</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 142-144

such, perhaps experiences of doubt may even be a blessing. Rather than unquestioning and passive, never-tested compliance, doubt forces us to question our choices, making us conscious that a choice must be made, that the risks are genuine, and that it is something the individual him- or herself must make, by their own volition.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard's faith is not only based on acting-as-if. It does not even use it as the starting point. On the contrary, Kierkegaard makes it clear that before there can be any talk of acting as if you are a Christian, another feat must be undertaken. Before any acts can take place, the aspiring Christian must learn to be *silent*. Silence, not acting-as-if, is the first steppingstone towards seeking the kingdom of God. Passivity is the starting point, not any activity. The first step is not any action, but the opposite, to do nothing. In his short essay *Liljen på Marken og Fuglen under Himmelen*, Kierkegaard discusses this, and asks what the basic starting point of faith ought to be.

*Men hvad vil det sige, hvad har jeg at gjøre, eller hvilken Stræben er den, om hvilken kan siges, at den søger, at den tragter efter Guds Rige? Skal jeg see at faae et Embede, svarende til mine Evner og Kræfter, for at virke deri? Nei, Du skal **først** søge Guds Rige. Skal jeg da give al min formue til de Fattige? Nei, **først** skal Du søge Guds Rige. Skal jeg da gaae ud og forkynde denne Lære i Verden? Nei, Du skal **først** søge Guds Rige. Men saa er det jo i en vis Forstand Intet, jeg skal gjøre? Ja, ganske vist, det er i en vis Forstand Intet; Du skal i dybeste Forstand gjøre dig selv til Intet, blive til Intet for Gud, lære at tie; i denne Taushed er Begyndelsen, som er, **først** at søge Guds Rige.*

Kierkegaard does not seem to think that simply having unquestioning belief creates faith. Nor, in a clear repudiation of the thinking Swinburne ascribes to him, does he think that faith starts by acting as if faith is already gotten. Acting as-if is important, to be sure, and shows that you actually have performed the leap of faith, but the leap itself, the decision to seek the Kingdom of God, does come first. After that, it seems as if acting as a Christian will come naturally. What Swinburne somewhat derisively refers to as "acting as-if" is then more accurately described as "acting because"; you act in a Christian way because you have chosen to become a Christian, and you choose by acting. If you do not act in a Christian way, you have not really made the choice to be a Christian. Faith and good works are closely linked together, but faith comes first.

Rather, Kierkegaard's criticism of Thomist faith rests on his belief that approximations

and/or probabilities are a distraction, because they are an aversion to the vulnerability that follows when we decide to unquestioningly trust God. And as Swinburne's lifework amply testifies, it seems that no amount of philosophical speculation or reasoning can ever fully establish whether God exists or not. Swinburne does express hope that sometime in the future, this question might be more or less settled, but this seems unlikely to be anytime soon. It is possible to prove it plausible or even probable, but by objectivity alone it seems that we will never get further than agnosticism, though perhaps tilting somewhat towards atheism or theism. Nonetheless, while probability is no guarantee towards seeking a close and personal relationship to God, it seems intuitively to strengthen the chance. If we believe that God probably exists and are fairly certain of theism and Christianity, we are more likely to think it worth it to have faith. Is this not how all relationships work? Love may not be preconditioned by trust, but certainly we tend to think it both sensible and good to establish an amount of trust before we begin to love?

It is true, as Swinburne himself acknowledges, that questioning may not always be a good thing, even if it does not cause us to abandon faith *per se*. "There are many people of strong religious faith who come to have doubts about the truth of their religious beliefs and then investigate them at length. After investigation their theoretical conviction remains but the process of investigation has led to such self-questioning that action has become difficult."<sup>97</sup> They have become aware of how conditional their faith is, it is in constant danger of being challenged, and no one knows which challenge, which argument, may not ultimately defeat it. Faith in God is being subsumed by faith in (at best) philosophy and/or science.

### 3.3 Faith through or beyond reason?

The question of doubt, and how to deal with this, then becomes paramount. If a faith is wanted, how to overcome doubt? And how to move beyond doubt to explore faith on a deeper level, without fully discarding reason? If Kierkegaard is to be put in any religious tradition, it would appear that fideism is the most appropriate. Faith is independent of reason.

In Kierkegaard's writings, the relationship between human beings and God is central. The goal is answering how humans may come closer to God. In doing so it is necessary to cultivate a stoic distance to the material world. Kierkegaard has made the existence of God,

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<sup>97</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 123

or to be more precise, the *Christian* God, the foundation of his philosophy. Man's task is to connect with God. Kierkegaard terms this "the leap of faith"<sup>98</sup>, the individual human must himself/herself make the choice of faith, while being fully aware that the foundation of what they choose to believe in, the existence of God, is not something you can grasp or prove by reason. You may make a convincing argument for why "God" exist, or why His existence is necessitated by the way the universe is constructed, maybe not. Kierkegaard has no interest in these speculations. Regarding his religious philosophy, his philosophical vision is not to prove or argue for the existence of God, but rather to show why we should be religious, why we should actively try to overcome our doubts and complacency. It is Kierkegaard's belief that the presence of a genuine, pure faith necessitates an overcoming of reason and rationality, which are insufficient to grasp and comprehend God, at least the Christian God, who of course is the only true God.<sup>99</sup> It is important to say that Kierkegaard is not anti-intellectual, nor dismiss reason or scholarly learning, far from it. He was himself a deeply learned man, and his works display the inner workings of a man who in no way is ashamed of his deep and solid education. Reason has its place, in the natural sciences, in politics and in law, that is indisputable.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, faith does not entail an abolishment of reason or our ability to make critical reflections. Faith exists on a higher level where the tools used in reason are simply insufficient. Faith, together with hope and love, has to do with a realm beyond reason, and where reason, as we think of it, has no place. The life in faith, the religious stage, becomes Kierkegaard's highest ideal, the only person capable of escaping the existential despair that else is doomed to torment humanity, trapped as it is between temporality and eternity.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.4 Apologetics = Approximations

Kierkegaard's overlaying goal, with all his philosophy, it could be argued, is to become a Christian. Becoming truly a person of faith, a genuine Christian, is surprisingly difficult; and one of the preconditions is to accept that no matter how well-developed your abilities for rational analysis and deductions are, they cannot truly help you in seeking out God. All attempts to reason yourself towards God, are *approximations*, they can never grasp the full

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<sup>98</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 62

<sup>99</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 40

<sup>100</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 157-158

<sup>101</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 70

mysteries of religious faith.

To be sure, you may reasonably hope to prove the existence of some sort of God, the earlier mentioned concept of natural religion, the belief that the religion, and hence religious faith, that can be acquired by reason-based observances and conclusions from studying the universe. But this in itself does not get you very far, and certainly not towards Christian faith.

In fact, it is doomed to fail.

*Den Existerende, der vælger den objective Vei, gaaer nu ind i hele den approximerende Overveelse, der objektivt vil bringe Gud frem, hvilket i al Evighed ikke naaes, fordi Gud er Subjekt, og derfor kun for Subjektiviteten i Inderlighed. Den Existerende, der vælger den subjektive Vei, fatter i samme Øieblik den hele dialektiske Vanskelighed ved at han skal bruge nogen Tid, maaskee lang Tid, for at finde Gud objektivt; han fatter denne dialektiske Vanskelighed i hele dens Smerte, fordi han skal bruge Gud i samme Øieblik, fordi ethvert Øieblik er spildt, hvori han ikke har Gud. I samme Øieblik har han Gud ikke i Kraft af nogen objektiv Overveelse, men i Kraft af Inderlighedens uendelige Lidenskab.*<sup>102</sup>

God exists and works on a plane that is incomprehensible to us, and always will be. His nature cannot be explained by human words, thoughts or deeds alone, and only by accepting this can we have any hope of opening ourselves to seeing His true glory. Nor should we try, because trying to truly understand God by reason is not only senseless but is directly harmful to the believer. In trying to come closer to God, he (or she) may, indeed probably will, instead end up just moving further and further away. At best, it is a waste of time. Because what the approximations, reason, fails to grasp is that God is, when we apply human reason towards Him, inherently paradoxical. He is therefore also absurd. It is not possible to make sense of God, and every attempt to do so must end in failure.

Approximations are intellectual attempts to eschew this trap by constructing logical formulas and theories so comprehensive and intellectually water-tight that God may be reduced to a mathematical problem, a challenge for mankind, or at least the wiser and brighter among us, to solve. But this approach is a trap, lulling us into the sense that we are getting closer and closer to God, when in fact we are running around in circles. Faith, which is connection to God, is fundamentally subjective, like all relationships ultimately are.

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<sup>102</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 39

It is perhaps here worthwhile to mention the enormous reverence Kierkegaard accords Socrates, whom he considers a teacher and a role model, and he finds much kinship with the old sage.<sup>103</sup> In fact, Kierkegaard's thinking and writing may be seen as an attempt to become the Christian Socrates. Kierkegaard himself thought so at least.<sup>104</sup> Socrates is also a religious man. He never questions the existence of the god that guide all his philosophical undertakings, his faith in this entity appears unshakeable. And yet, while Socrates may be, according to Kierkegaard, an ideal human being, he is not freed from the constant curse of despair, because Socrates maintains that he may gain full understanding and salvation through reason, and reason alone. He cannot really be faulted for this though, after all, he died more than three hundred years before Jesus was born. Socrates never had the chance to become a Christian. As Kierkegaard is a Christian, and a man of his time, he cannot see any reasonable hope for salvation outside of Christianity (and Christian imagery and metaphors are frequently used in his writings). Socrates could not possibly discover the truth of Faith, because the necessary condition, Jesus Christ, was absent in the period. It seems as if Socrates, to Kierkegaard, is an example of humanity's inherent limitations: Socrates is the best Man can achieve on his own, the best to which reason can lead us. To reach further, we need the help of God. And therefore, while Socrates is a giant among men, something is still sorely lacking.<sup>105</sup> While Socrates cannot be faulted for not being a Christian, he can be faulted for insisting on seeking God through reason. This is a gross neglect of the loving and trusting aspect of devotion, where the believer, the lover, allows himself to be filled with blind, unconditional love towards the beloved. Kierkegaard compares Socrates, the wisest of all men, to a sixteen-year-old girl blindly in love, and it is clear Socrates that has understood no more, perhaps even less, about what it means to be a human being and what the meaning of life should be than the foolish girl. For Socrates it is reason, and not love, that is the greatest of all virtues.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Kierkegaard, *Filosofiske smuler* (Danmark: Søren Kierkegaard Kulturproduktion, 2014), p. 24-5. This book was written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus.

<sup>104</sup> Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 8

<sup>105</sup> Kierkegaard, *Filosofiske smuler* (Danmark: Søren Kierkegaard Kulturproduktion, 2014), p. 97

<sup>106</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 83-84. This book was written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus.



What more, the ability to feel this love is equal in all of us.<sup>107</sup> Socrates may be very wise, while most girls at sixteen are foolish, and yet being a fool is in and of itself no prevention from reaching true faith. In Christianity, everyone is equal. The offer of salvation applies to everyone, and the salvation is the same. Christianity requires no education or secret knowledge. Hence is it ridiculous to assume that heavy intellectual gifts are required, or that intricate philosophical arguments aiming to explain the nature of God and the logical coherence of Christianity is required in order to become a good Christian. Few if any of Christ's first followers were educated men and women, and Kierkegaard makes it clear that he thinks we stand in no better, or worse, position than they did. The historical dimension of Christianity is totally insignificant in Kierkegaardian Christianity.<sup>108</sup> Christ's message is open to everyone. Those that claim otherwise has misunderstood something fundamentally, and are in truth motivated more by personal vanity, and think more about what their fellow intellectuals may think of them than of what Christ wants for them.

*... naar Troen begynder at skamme sig selv, naar den som en Elskerinde, der ikke nøies med at elske, men underfundigt skammer sig ved den Elskede or altsaa maa have det godtgjort, at han er noget Udæmrket, altsaa naar Troen begynder at take Lidenskaben, altsaa naar Troen begynder at ophøre at være Tro, da gjøres Beviset fornødent for at nyde borgerlig Agtelse hos Vantroen.*<sup>109</sup>

At this stage, it becomes largely irrelevant whether the believer keeps insisting that he is still a Christian, or whether he ends up discarding the religion altogether. The faith is at any rate dead, killed by fear for what the intelligentsia and respectable bourgeoisie may think of it. Except for maybe in a sixteen-year old girl who is in love and does not care if respectable citizens or Socrates thinks her a fool. To be sure, it would be better still if her love was focused on God rather than her beau, but at least her soul has the right goal - unconditional, eternal and perfect love; even though she may be looking for it in the wrong direction.

## 4 Chapter 4 – Positive and negative apologetics

I have so far in this paper described Kierkegaard as hostile to religious apologetics, because he regards genuine religious faith to come from passion and trust, which reasoning and

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<sup>107</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 112

<sup>108</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2014), p. 209-210

<sup>109</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 44-45

scepticism can only dilute. This may not be the full picture regarding apologetics however, and it may be worthwhile to discuss Kierkegaard's approach as an unorthodox, yet not unheard of, branch of apologetics.

#### 4.1 Positive apologetics

Positive apologetics is what is conventionally meant when we simply use the term "apologetics". This is arguments made for the rationality of having religious faith, using epistemology and natural science to argue for the rationality of assuming that the Christian God does exist, for example by the ontological argument of Anselm, Bayesian probability or the Kalam cosmological argument. It aims to show that having religious faith is not only reasonable, and that Christian doctrines are probable, or at least plausible. Søren Kierkegaard has no interest in this, Richard Swinburne's religious philosophy is more or less exclusively devoted to it. Unlike Kierkegaard, Swinburne attempts to give logical and reasonable answers for why one ought to be a Christian. Unlike Kierkegaard, however, he writes next to nothing about why one ought *not* to be an atheist, or at least a non-Christian. Swinburne's religious philosophy is then fundamentally a positivist one, he argues for something, Christianity, and his philosophy is not attacking atheism, aside from declaring that he finds it implausible. There is however an alternative path to take, while still staying within apologetics. Rather than expounding upon and defending your own faith, one may criticise and attack the alternative(s).<sup>110</sup>

#### 4.2 Negative, or cultural, apologetics

Kierkegaard is clearly critical of the classical, positivistic tradition of apologetics. To argue for the validity of Christianity by scientific and/or epistemological means is at best a waste of time, at worst, and probably more likely, it is harmful. Yet is the word itself, apologetics, totally inapplicable towards Kierkegaard himself and his project? In the traditional sense, maybe so, but the case can nonetheless be made that also Kierkegaard is a Christian apologist. He is certainly using his formidable intellect to argue for why it is rational and good to be a Christian, he does just not believe that we can reason ourselves towards God. Kierkegaard's main point is that mankind is tormented and imprisoned in despair, and that the only possible remedy is faith in God. This we might call "negative apologetics", that is to

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<sup>110</sup> I am not saying that the one excludes the other, of course. An apologist may both argue for the validity of the rationality of faith, and at the same time attacking the implications of rejecting religious faith.

say a type of apologetic that rather than argue for the validity of faith, argues that the alternative, atheism, is worse. We ought to have faith not primarily because that is good in and of itself, but because not having faith is bad.

This reasoning may also be termed *cultural apologetics*<sup>111</sup>, a fairly recent tradition of apologetics, of which Kierkegaard may be said to be one of its early and most important proponents, though he is by no means the father. That honour would more appropriately be granted René Pascal.

In a segment of *Pensées*, Pascal criticises and satirises the enlightened atheist who declares that the abolition of God means the ushering into a new age of freedom, and that there will be no negative repercussions whatsoever in discarding God.<sup>112</sup> It is important to make clear that Pascal absolutely believed in the value of positive apologetics, that is, arguing for God through natural theology and for the trustworthiness of scripture, but he also firmly believed that having faith in and of itself is good. It is essential for living a good moral and fulfilling life.

Cultural apologetics as such do not attempt to defend Christianity by epistemology or metaphysics. It appeals to ethics. Strictly speaking, it does not argue for the validity of Christian, or even theistic, faith at all. Rather, it argues that when appraised with intellectual clarity and honesty, the atheistic universe, and human predicament, becomes so bleak, so meaningless and so uncaring that it is untenable for human beings to think about it for long periods of time.<sup>113</sup> This in and of itself does not compel us to become theists, of course. In fact, many, if not all, of the most prominent atheistic existentialist thinkers, like Sartre, Camus and Simone de Beauvoir, may be said to agree on the problem of the universe's indifference. As did Nietzsche, whose angst-filled atheism is frequently misunderstood. Honest atheism, atheism that thinks through all the moral, psychological, historical and physical implications of atheism is, or so cultural apologetics and atheistic existentialists think, extremely hard, perhaps unbearably so. The classical atheist existentialist response has been to fight the eternal and vast indifferent meaninglessness of the universe with human freedom. For the atheist, the best solution may be to focus on freedom and creating grand personal projects, and to avoid thinking about the (lack of) meaning with life as little

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<sup>111</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 65

<sup>112</sup> Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 130

<sup>113</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 71-72

as possible. Pretend that the universe has meaning. It may not be a very good solution, in fact it is inherently deeply flawed, but if atheism is true it may be the best one there is.<sup>114</sup> If this is the case, one would presumably have much reason to hope that theism is true, or at the very least, that people by and large strongly believes it to be true.

Kierkegaard is strongly aware of the pitfalls of a life without God. Unlike many of his existentialist successors, he *does* think that Christianity is true, and that it may save mankind. (Or at least the singular units within it.) While it is true that he has very little to say about atheism as such, this is largely because he regards passive, uncommitted Christianity as little or no better than honest atheism. As we have already established, to simply declare oneself a Christian means nothing.

#### 4.3 Faith as your best bet

It would perhaps here be useful to look closer at Pascal's famous wager. It seems to me that this wager also is accordance with Kierkegaard's faith. In this argument, belief in the existence of God is presented as the rational choice, also for the doubter. If God turns out to actually not exist, the rational agnostic will still only suffer a finite loss, due to the shortness of our earthly lifespans. If on the other hand, God does turn out to exist, the same person may receive infinite gains, including salvation of his soul and eternal life in Heaven. On a more sinister note, should the agnostic choose not to believe in God, he may risk eternal damnation and eternal suffering in hell.<sup>115</sup>

It is of course not difficult to spot the unfortunate implications in this argument, first among them that it seems to encourage a certain intellectual dishonesty and encourages agnostics, and even atheists, to betray their personal convictions out of fear. This is not the faith that Kierkegaard has in mind, but without discarding the danger of Hell altogether, his faith is more concerned with the present, earthly life, and if fear of Hell might encourage us to delve deeper into Christian faith here and now, it might still be useful. Swinburne's position is a somewhat careful embrace of Pascal: If in some doubt, you should choose to believe in God, as this will enrich your life. If you strongly doubt God's existence, you should not, for it is not reasonable to try to force yourself into believing something that you do not or cannot

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<sup>114</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p.78-79

<sup>115</sup> Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 121-125

consider true.<sup>116</sup> In *Faith and Reason*, Swinburne discuss Pascal's wager, dismissing it by concluding that:

*So if God values our making Pascalian moves, He values our exercise of reason. It would be odd in the extreme if He then valued our making the final move of acquiring the belief that He exists by our denying our reason. I conclude that it is rather unlikely that God has set up a world in which there is a very large reward for forcing oneself to acquire a belief which seems initially to the believer probably false.*<sup>117</sup>

This would however be deeply unfortunate. Swinburne, who is a Christian himself, is adamant that faith, at least in the Christian shape, has a positive impact on the believer. This is a theological necessity as Christian, and if it is good to be a Christian, it follows that it must be rationally sound and wise to be one.

Which is an important reason for why Swinburne devotes so much time and energy into arguing for the epistemological coherence of Christian faith. Swinburne's task then becomes to persuade you why you should not strongly doubt God's existence, but rather considering it both plausible and preferable to the alternative(s). And even more than that, he must also argue, in an intellectually convincing way, why this God, could, ought and perhaps even must, be the Christian one. An explanation and defence of core Christian doctrines is required, and Swinburne devotes considerable amounts of time and energy into doing just that. In *Was Jesus God?*, he spends a chapter arguing for the soundness and philosophical necessity of the trinity; God is compelled by his infinite love to create something equally perfect, to love it unconditionally, and the two of them, God and his son Jesus, together brought forth The Holy Spirit.<sup>118</sup> We see here Swinburne attempting to not only make sense of, but through by logic prove, why one of Christianity's most difficult, and intra-religiously most criticised doctrines, the doctrine of the trinity, or the three in one, not only makes sense but it could be no other way. The trinity is a logical necessity of having an all-powerful, all-loving creator.

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<sup>116</sup> "Swinburne: On Doubt and Faith", YouTube video, 06:17, "Biola University", 01.10.2012  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exsmSlxnbHQ>

<sup>117</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 128

<sup>118</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* ((Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28-39 (chapter 2)

## 5 Chapter 5 – Moral implications

### 5.1 God reveals himself to us through what is moral

*A theist normally holds that God is by nature morally perfectly good, and also that humans have a duty to obey the commands of God - that the commands of God create moral obligations.*<sup>119</sup>

Obligatory actions and actions we ought to do are morally good. Actions that are obligatory not to do, or that we should not do, are morally wrong, or at least morally bad. "Obvious examples of actions supererogatory for humans are caring for the parents and educating the children of others, and sacrificing one's own life in order to save the life of someone else."<sup>120</sup>

Some other apologists, William Craig amongst them, claims that the presence of (objective) morals is and of itself evidence for the existence of God.<sup>121</sup> For without God there could be no objective morals, and since objective morals do exist, God must also exist.<sup>122</sup> While the existence of objective morals is quite contentious, Swinburne does not believe that the existence of objective moral values in itself is evidence for the existence of God. He *does* believe in objective morals, but considers them rather to be ingrained in normal-functioning humans. As Swinburne sees it, that God should be necessary for knowing what is right does not bode well for humanity. That is a notion can easily be twisted into the popular atheistic caricature that religious people claim that belief in the existence of God is the only thing stopping all us from becoming murderers and rapists.<sup>123</sup> Swinburne points out that while it is true that different cultures and different persons can strongly disagree about what is good, it is also true that almost all groups think it (generally) good to care for their own non-disabled children, parents and some other members of their group (this group can be the clan, the tribe, the city, the nation or humanity). It is also generally good to keep promises, and not to steal from your own group or cheat them. Likewise, it follows that there are also bad and wrong actions, the opposite of what is good included. These are concepts that can

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<sup>119</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 200

<sup>120</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 201

<sup>121</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 175-176

<sup>122</sup> This also neatly resolves the problem of evil. Why and almighty and benevolent God would permit evil and suffering is a well-known and vexing question, but if God is a necessary precondition for objective morality, and objective morals exists, merely asking the question implicitly also means to admit that God *must* exist.

<sup>123</sup> In fairness, some Christians do believe this. While I am hard-pressed to find any academic or even somewhat intellectual defenders of this view, any perusing of the works of the late American comic writer and evangelist Jack Chick, should serve as a valid, and sincere, example.

be found in all societies, even if the specifics do not look the same.<sup>124</sup> However, while God may not be necessary for the existence of objective morals per se, Swinburne do believe that His existence creates moral duties and obligations in us that would otherwise not exist. And some actions become morally obligatory that would otherwise not be obligatory if God does exist, like thanking and praising God. While other obligations again become doubly obligatory if God exists, for example: we are obliged to feed our children, both because we made them and because God made both them and us.<sup>125</sup>

## 5.2 When the religious trumps the ethical

*Det Ethiske er som saadant det Almene, og som det Almene Det, der er gjeldende for Enhver, hvilket fra en anden Side lader sig uttrykke saaledes, at det er gjeldende i ethvert Øieblik. Det hviler immanent i sig selv, har Intent uden for sig, der er dets Telos, men er selv Telos for Alt, hvad det har udenfor sig og naar det Ethiske har opdaget dette i sig, da kommer det ikke videre. Umiddelbar sandselig og sjælelig bestemmet er den Enkelte den Enkelte, der i det almenne har sitt Telos, og dette er hans ethiske Opgave, bestandig at udtrykke sig selv i dette, at ophæve sin Enkelthed for at blive det Almene.*<sup>126</sup>

As earlier stated, one of Swinburne's main points about the nature of God is that it is possible to deduce oneself towards Him through moral reasoning. God is the ultimate good, the ultimate perfection. By this, it follows that through what is good, is also what God wants. The morally better an action is, the closer it is to God. We are not always required by God to the best possible action (the supererogatory action), but it is always a good to do so.<sup>127</sup>

Swinburne argues that morals as such is something universal amongst humans. Different norms exist of course, but certain basic codes do exist, and seems to be near universal. It is generally wrong to kill, steal and commit adultery, for examples, at least amongst your own kinsfolk. Humans can grasp this without having knowledge of God; pagans and atheist typically also believes this.

Another point, which is a direct criticism of some theologians and philosophers, is that it is meaningful to describe God as "good". It has been claimed that God is so fundamentally

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<sup>124</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 216

<sup>125</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 163

<sup>126</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2014), p. 148

<sup>127</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 35

beyond our comprehension that all attempts to describe him as "good", "powerful" or "knowledgeable", in the end constitute a diminishment of His power. This is because when we think of these terms, we cannot help but use, as a reference point what we know from our first-hand experiences. We describe God by giving him qualities we know and find admirable, comparing God to worldly objects, beings and persons. This makes God an understandable concept, and perhaps more importantly, it has a comforting function: It allows us to feel an understanding of God, making him predictable and safe. Kierkegaard considers this to be a grave misunderstanding, if not outright blasphemy. To think of God as an ethical entity is not only a diminishment, in that it seeks to explain what is inexplicable, but also an insult to God, for it anchors him in the mundane and temporal. This, to Kierkegaard, is made with extreme clarity in the biblical story of Abraham. Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio, discusses this when he writes about the *knight of faith*, who is someone that fully accepts that God can do that which is impossible, including, but far from restricted to, freeing human beings from despair. Johannes de Silentio present several examples of possible knights of faith from biblical tradition, Abraham being the most famous, and the one Kierkegaard focuses on.<sup>128</sup> Kierkegaard/Johannes De Silentio readily admits that this description of Abraham may not be historically accurate, that is unimportant. In the end, only the individual him/herself may know whether he/she is a knight of faith. Perhaps half of mankind actually are knights of faith, or perhaps there has never existed a single knight of faith at all.<sup>129</sup> We cannot know, because by definition the knight of faith is utterly alone, and cannot explain himself/herself to anyone.<sup>130</sup> The knight of faith is nonetheless an ideal, a person who choose to trust fully and completely in God, despite all doubts; and chooses to perform the leap of faith. What makes Abraham a knight of faith is his readiness to sacrifice that which is most dear to him in this world: his own son, after having received a revelation from God. Abraham does this, because he knows that whatever tests and trials God will subject him to, God in the end will do what is best. God's power and wisdom are greater than anything a human being can ever hope to comprehend. "Men Abraham troede og tvivlede ikke, han troede det Urimelige."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Another example being the Virgin Mary.

<sup>129</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 133

<sup>130</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 170

<sup>131</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 117



Abraham believed that which was unreasonable to believe, because he knew that God is beyond reason, what we may describe as "super-reason".

Abraham's unquestioning readiness to sacrifice Isaac on the orders of God is not only commendable because it shows Abraham's unshakeable faith, but it also shows that when it comes to God, words like "good" and "just" becomes fundamentally meaningless. That is not to say that God is not good and just, of course. Rather, his goodness is so perfect and pure of form that humans can have no hope of comprehending it, perhaps save by divine intervention. The ethical, and by extension all so-called "natural" moral laws are just vague imitations of what God is.

This should not be interpreted as Kierkegaard repudiating the ethical; far from it. The ethical imposes obligations upon us, and they apply provided direct commands by God are lacking. If Abraham had chosen to sacrifice himself in lieu of Isaac, he would have acted both heroically and ethically. For "faren skal elske sønnen"<sup>132</sup>, and this may be the highest ethical imperative there is. Had Abraham chosen to act according to the ethical, Kierkegaard would still hail him as a great man and a (tragic) hero. But Abraham would then not be revered as a knight of faith, for he would still have acted inside of the ethical, where the father shall love his son, love the son unconditionally and more than anything else. The religious sphere does not obliterate the ethical, it merely pushing the ethical aside. Yet even so, it is far higher than the ethical, for what is ethical is decided by humans, the religious by God. As a counterexample to Abraham, Kierkegaard uses Socrates, whom he also has enormous respect for. Socrates chose to die rather than to betray what he loved the most - truth. This makes Socrates a tragic hero, who died for a cause that was just and noble, refusing to bend the slightest in front of his adversaries. And yet, while Socrates is indisputably great, Abraham is infinitely greater. For while Socrates gave his life, Abraham was willing to sacrifice what he loved more than life itself, his only son, when God commanded it of him. Socrates can explain and defend what it is he chooses to die for. He has made his choice by himself. His choice is seen as brave and honourable by the people around him, and by posterity. Abraham cannot explain what he is doing, he does not have the luxury of being able to justify himself. No one can help him or support him in his endeavour, it is a burden given to him by God, and to him alone. "Den Sande Troens Ridder er altid den absolute

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<sup>132</sup>Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 153

isolation, den uegete er secterisk."<sup>133</sup> Therefore, Abraham and the Greek mythic king Agamemnon are not the same, even though both do sacrifice their children by divine command. But when Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia, he does so with the understanding and approval of his community. Agamemnon's action is, to them at least, understandable; Agamemnon's action is therefore ethical. It aims to benefit the community, "det Almene", and Agamemnon is viewed as a tragic hero.<sup>134</sup> What Abraham does is fundamentally unethical, both then and now. Indeed, from an ethical standpoint it is horrible, and it would be better for Abraham to die than to go through with it. Neither can he explain himself, not to Isaac nor to anyone else, for it is not Abraham that decides that Isaac must be sacrificed and why, but God. Abraham's great deed is to obey this command in silence, that is to say, with no hesitation, doubt or even fear. There are no words that can explain why Isaac must be sacrificed. Socrates has plenty to say. Even as he empties the poisoned chalice, he still talks. There is nothing Abraham can say. God is beyond human language and understanding. Yet even so, Abraham trusts God, and trusts that everything will work out for the best in the end, even though, by killing Isaac, he is at the same time ensuring that it cannot possibly do so. There is no contradiction here, because Abraham has faith that God can do what is impossible.

*Abraham kan ikke tale; thi det Alt Forklarende kan han ikke sige, (saa det er forstaaeligt), at det er en Prøvelse, vel at mærke, en saadan, hvor det Ethiske er Fristelsen. Den, der er stillet saaledes, han er en Emigrant fra det Almenes Sphære. Men det Næste kan han endnu mindre sige. Abraham gjør nemlig, som tidligere tilstrækkelig udviklet, to Bevægelser. Han gjør Resignationens uendelige Bevægelse, og opgiver Isaak, dette kan Ingen forstaae, fordi det er et private Foretagende; men dernæst gjør han i ethvert Moment Troens Bevægelse. Dette er hans Trøst. Han siger nemlig: dog vil det ikke skee, eller hvis det skeer, da vil Herren give mig en ny Isaak i Kraft nemlig af det Absurde.*<sup>135</sup>

The potential gap between what is the ethical course of action and what is the religious then becomes paramount in Kierkegaard's thinking. It is not only that it is blasphemous to submit God to human judgement and considerations, but it is also impossible. God, for humanity at least, is absurd. Not *only* absurd, to be sure, we can gain a certain level of understanding of

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<sup>133</sup>Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 170

<sup>134</sup>Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 152-154

<sup>135</sup>Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 202-203

Him, but there is much about God that will always be incomprehensible. Any hope of understanding Him requires us to accept what is absurd, which again is a logical contradiction, and we are brought up to reject logical contradictions. Here we do see a rather subtle but important difference between Kierkegaard and Swinburne, in that while Swinburne does not think that the existence of objective morals depends on the existence of God, he feels sure that God would not command us to something that is not in accordance with what is moral. God does not surpass that which is ethical, His will is the highest possible ethical alternative. Likewise, there are limits to what God can command us to do. He cannot make what is immoral moral simply by commanding it.<sup>136</sup>

Kierkegaard repudiates this. It is not that God is not good, of course He is. Neither will He ever require us to do something that is not good. Yet even so, He may request us to do something that is unethical, while still being good. This is a controversial standpoint, and it seems that Kierkegaard, who lives and thinks in a Lutheran setting, exposes himself to one of the primary dangers that Swinburne in *Faith and Reason* brings to attention in his description there of the Lutheran model of faith, namely that it seems to consider great faith to be good in and of itself. For a father to intentionally try to hurt his son is generally considered a great evil. Kierkegaard concurs with this, yet at the same time he claims that God cannot command anything evil. God has the power to make evil actions into good actions, and presumably turn good actions into evil ones. Of course, what God wants us to do is always the highest possible good, and if that may seem evil to us, it is only because we cannot understand all that God understands. Nonetheless, Swinburne has earlier criticized amongst others Kant for insisting that while God exists, it is impossible for humans to say anything meaningful about him. His nature is of such scope and exaltedness that it is impossible for mortal beings to fathom. It is therefore meaningless to ascribe to God qualities like "good" or "powerful", since when we use these terms we think of known quantities of goodness and power. Swinburne points out that it then becomes impossible to say anything meaningful about God, and that while our understanding of God's goodness, knowledge and power is limited, it does make sense to attribute these qualities to Him, since they are the most appropriate terms we possess.<sup>137</sup> Kierkegaard insists on the other hand that God is fundamentally incomprehensible, and that to attempt to understand Him

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<sup>136</sup> Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 127-129

<sup>137</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 90-91

can only result in approximations. The only genuine truth we can know about God, is that He is so great, so vast, that it is thoroughly incomprehensible. The only appropriate human response towards such a being is fear and trembling. Great fear and trembling.<sup>138</sup>

We see here some similarities and some deep differences between Swinburne and Kierkegaard. Both agree that God is omnibenevolent, and thus always wants what is the best possible outcome. The difference rests in the old Euthyphro dilemma: "Is the pious) loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?"<sup>139</sup> Swinburne, who thinks that we can deduce by observations and thinking what God is and wants, thinks the latter. God wants what is good, because it is good. This is in line with his overlying philosophy: We can understand God by studying the world, and ourselves. Kierkegaard attributes to God the ability to make what would else be wrong good. It is just one more of the many absurdities about God that we must accept.

## 6 Chapter 6 – Problematic aspects

### 6.1 Two different approaches, from two different backgrounds

I feel it relevant to point out the fact that Richard Swinburne is a convert from Protestantism to Eastern Orthodoxy, while Kierkegaard was born and remained a Protestant throughout his life, if of a rather idiosyncratic and peculiar type. This is important because these different forms of Christianity carry with them also different approaches towards faith. In Orthodox thinking, and even more so in Catholic, the presence of the divine within the physical world is stressed, as for example in the Eucharist, where the bread and wine becomes the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and relics, icons and particular places are said to be physical signs and proof of God's presence. Studying nature, in the tradition of medieval scholars, may then be perceived as a type of worship in and of itself, because all true science ultimately leads toward a deeper understanding of God.<sup>140</sup>

Protestantism may be seen largely as a repudiation of such practices as idolatrous and absurd, for is it not a diminishment of God's grace and power to presume that he is compelled to rely on trinkets and rites in order to reveal His power? God is everything and

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<sup>138</sup> Mjaaland, introduction in Kierkegaard, *Liljen på marken og fuglen under himmelen* (Verbum. Print Best Printing Company, Estland), p. 14-15

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<sup>140</sup> McGrath, *The twilight of atheism*, (USA: Doubleday Random House, Inc.), p. 200-202

equally at presence in all things. Everything else is a diminishment of the infiniteness that is Him. The best humanity may do is then to focus on the Bible, who is the revealed word of God, and whose unique holiness is therefore not to be questioned. Paradoxically, it is this approach that has often been blamed for the start of secularisation in Western thought, the insistence of the exclusive holiness of scripture and denying the rest of creation religious value. The result of this has been the sense that regarding spirituality, nothing but the Bible matters, ultimately leading to worldview where it seems that God does not exist outside of said book. It is not far from this to assume that God does not exist at all, or that we can choose whether he exist or not. Which again is to implicitly admit that objectively, He does not exist at all, and is nothing more than a comforting fairy tale, or at best a tool of focus in private meditation.

As the Bible became so central in protestant worship and thinking, at the cost of clerical hierarchy and tradition, so did also the necessity of ensuring that it was correctly read and interpreted, the need to ensure that heresy, due to real or perceived misunderstandings of the text, spread. And of course, the control of God's word is a paramount tool of ensuring political and civil obedience. Hence the rise and development of protestant state churches in European countries, subordinated to the king or central power. The church becomes a tool for state control and for ensuring stability. God is a national resource, monopolised and distributed by the state.

Kierkegaard recognized both of these developments, and abhorred them. He was not alone, the Pietistic movement, of which we may consider Kierkegaard to be a part of in his own way, must be seen as a reaction and rejection of the state-sanctioned, distant and stale Christianity that dominated his homeland's Lutheran churches in the period. Both Kierkegaard and Pietism also stressed the need for individual and personal devotion.<sup>141, 142</sup> Kierkegaard realizes that without the passionate and the subjective, a true, intense, genuine and devout religiosity is not possible. Rather, his wish is to make God accessible to every Christian, and not dependent on any priest or church, whom Kierkegaard denounces for soiling the incomprehensible and everlasting splendour of God. A reversal back to the original vision of Protestantism, perhaps. The historical irony is of course that just as Protestantism focus on the individual relationship between humanity and God seems to

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<sup>141</sup>Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 329

<sup>142</sup>McGrath, *The twilight of atheism*, (USA: Doubleday Random House, Inc.), p. 17-18

have played an important part on the rise of modern atheism, so did Kierkegaard also become one of the founding fathers for the very influential philosophical movement of existentialism, and where Kierkegaard stands out among the most well-known names as the sole truly religious one, either Christian or otherwise. It seems that if one insists on removing all but Man and God from the equation, someone will inevitably decide to discard God too.<sup>143</sup> The tiny insignificant human being, alone in front of God, becomes a tiny, insignificant being alone in front of the great nothingness.

This remembrance of a different context, a superficially devout authoritarian monarchy of the 19th century Denmark, with Christianity as the only dominant and publicly accepted religion, we can see that Kierkegaard, in his religious philosophy, are spared from confronting a problem that Swinburne and all modern Christian apologetics are forced to confront if they are to have any hope of gaining ground: They must explain not only *why Christianity*, but also *why not something else?* With that I do not merely think of the divide between atheism/apatheism and Christianity, for Kierkegaard does indirectly address this when stressing the leap of faith into 70 000 feet's depth of dark water.<sup>144</sup> There would be no need for any leap if there were no doubt, and there would be no darkness and uncertainty if all were light and knowledge. But for Christianity's part, it does become very problematic when the choice is no longer binary, but multiple, in that you are free to choose whatever religious worldview you may want, which is one of the trademarks of the postmodernist era. Nothing is absolutely, or at least indisputably, true. And therefore, anyone has both the right and the ability to form their own truth. At times it seems to be even a duty. And if reason plays no role in faith, why would the aspiring believer choose Christianity? Why not decide to take her leap somewhere else, into Islam, Buddhism, Spiritualism, Zoroastrianism or any mixture of those and/or other religions? Is there any reason for why faith must, or at least should, entail Christian faith? It seems hard to argue why unless we appeal to reason, and that entails a thorough analysis of both Christianity and its opponents. This is not a problem for Swinburne, but it is for Kierkegaard, whom in his dismissal of reason and logical arguments at the cost of the subjective and emotional, seems to struggle in an era and a setting where faith presents itself through multiple choices. True, Kierkegaard frequently uses direct and indirect biblical allusions in his writings, and amongst his most important

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<sup>143</sup> McGrath, *The twilight of atheism*, (USA: Doubleday Random House, Inc.), p. 200-205

<sup>144</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 139

themes is the paradox of Christ. It is a central claim in Christianity, it is absurd, makes no rational sense or meaning, at least none that human beings can fathom. And yet it is true. Reason cannot comprehend it, it is fundamentally irrational and illogical, yet the genuine believer knows it to be so with a surety no amount of approximations can ever hope to match.

But making supernatural, mystical and seemingly absurd claims is not a Christian domain. Other religions and belief systems have done so too and keep doing it. How can we defend that we choose Christianity?

The Norwegian philosopher Ralph Henk Vaags has described his conversion from atheism to Christianity as a clear example of the usefulness of apologetics. Vaags' grew up regarding Christianity as outdated, anti-intellectual and consisting of comforting fairy-tales for the weak and gullible; all common modern atheist beliefs about religious people. Vaags' journey towards Christianity began when stumbling over *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal. This began a process that eventually led him to being able to reconcile Christian faith with modern science and discoveries. But he also describes the frustration of seeking spiritual guidance and theological discussions with a priest, and being met with invitations to join the church choir, and where critical or complex questions regarding faith, doubt and knowledge were being met with remarks like: "It is a matter of faith", and the expectation that no more explanation nor defence were needed; or even that nothing more could be said about the matter.<sup>145</sup> Religion is something you may choose, or else you may choose that it does not suit you. Which of course is rather close to implying that it is only true if you want it to be true. Which is to say that it really is not true. Dismissing apologetics in its entirety seems to end up, no matter how it was intended from the start, to yield a lot of ground to sceptics, secularists and even agnostics, who interpret Christianity's silence as an admission of defeat. And that by continuing to refuse to engage, Christianity, or for that matter any other faith, gives them right.

## 6.2 God as an unassailable construction

We have seen and considered Kierkegaard's dismissal of "approximations" as demeaning towards God. More than that, it is also a distraction for humans, because overtly relying on

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<sup>145</sup> Vaags, Ralph Henk. *Min vei fra ateisme til kristen tro, med filosofi og apologetikk som hjelpere*. YouTube video, 44:35. 02.03.2018. Accessed November 26, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-\\_a-uFLL0uQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_a-uFLL0uQ)

the power of reason may make us lose sight of God, or else get bogged down in intricate distractions of pseudo-intellectual kind and conditional love. But perhaps another danger deserves just as much consideration: the risk of turning our focus away from God, the creator of the universe and a mystery beyond all comprehension, and into "God": a perfectly logical and neatly built up construction inside, made by and for our own imagination. By this I mean that the implicit goal of apologetics is to protect religious faith from attacks from sceptics and/or other religions. This however can quickly degenerate into protecting personal pride from critical examination and ridicule, and the quest of explaining God can become a quest of protecting personal intellectual unassailability, yet at the same time insist on faith in a fundamentally supernatural and unfathomable being. When seeking to understand, and even more defend God through reasoning, what are we then defending? When facing questions that we cannot answer, either because we do not have the necessary knowledge<sup>146</sup>, or because what seems to be contradictions in our religious framework are pointed out<sup>147</sup>, what is the appropriate reaction? If one does not wish to be exposed to potential ridicule, or even experience personal doubts, it seems that the easiest path is to think of counter-arguments, constructing logical explanations for why it must be so-and-so, or why such-and-such really is no contradiction at all.

Now, in and of itself this is of course a perfectly legitimate endeavour, but it may bring with it an unpleasant and disturbing implication. Is it truly God we seek to understand and comprehend, or is the goal of reasoning simply to present the world with an unassailable construction no one can attack us from worshipping? It seems rather peculiar, even intellectually dubious when, if confronted with critical arguments (be it from others or our own minds) of which the faithful have no good answer, the response is to temporarily step back while trying to drum up some sufficiently convincing or at least unassailable counterargument. Having done that, our idea of God is then restructured to fit in with the new, improved argument, and thus will it continue until another challenge comes along, and the entire process is repeated once again. Is the purpose then still to get closer to God? Or is it rather to make our own belief-system as iron-clad as possible? Even if managing to successfully defeat or at least evading, all possible challenges, what, in the end, is gained? It

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<sup>146</sup> Perhaps the true nature of communion and the Eucharist.

<sup>147</sup> The discrepancy between the often harsh and wrathful God of The Old Testament versus the all-loving and forgiving God in The New Testament.



seems to me eminently possible that the God such an endeavour will end up with is a man-made one, constructed by a human mind to be as intellectually, and maybe ethically, impregnable as possible. What it will not be is God Himself, He is a person, not a construction. A person Christians must believe is real and autonomous, in fact, more real and autonomous than any human person could possibly be. But is this what the apologetic has gotten closer to? Is it not at least as possible that what he ultimately is left with is an imitation of what he and others think to be the most logically sound deity? A construction that ultimately exists in said apologist's head, and nowhere else? I do believe this is to be an important part of Kierkegaard's hostility towards reason-based religion. The very word he uses about the discipline, approximations, seems to imply that a temporary sketch of God is supplanting God Himself. To be certain, it is the hope that the approximation eventually shall match God, fully resemble Him. The honest apologist does not stop before there can be no doubt that the approximation fully matches the real God, the two of them interchangeable. But even if something like that was possible, and Kierkegaard states rather clearly that he does not think that is the case, what are we left with in the meantime? An imitation, that the Christian apologists nonetheless insists is worthy of devotion and worship. The worship is conditional, it is only required until someone can spot a weak link in the logical chain that invalidates the approximation. Then, another approximation will supplant it, and the whole process will start anew. At best, the apologist will get no closer, at worst, and more likely, she will end up getting further away from God, because it is not God she works towards, but a homemade idol, created in her own head, to suit the apologist's immediate needs and scope of thinking. Kierkegaard would probably say that most apologists are in the realm of the aesthetical rather than ethical. The God(s) they construct may be impressive logical features, spectacular enough, as personal works of art, but they are personal contractions, made so that the individual philosopher need not feel embarrassed by his faith, but can safely present it to the world in the wrappings of scholarly epistemology.

Kierkegaard's rejection of approximations entails a rejection of such idolatry. The goal of the person wanting to become a truly religious person is after all to discard all earthly pretensions, distractions and illusions. That which is common and associated with the much-

loathed multitudes.<sup>148</sup> In order to know God, we must seek Him out, not create a fantasy image. In order to get to know God, some of the same that applies to getting to know anyone else, applies, namely that He must be sought out without prejudice. And then He must be interacted with be an open mind. The religious person does not simply go boldly forward into the unknown, but does so without any equipment. It is first when all intellectual defences are being willingly discarded that a human may truly see God. In the approximations, we find a deeply held, and very understandable, fear of doing so. Choosing to trust God is frightening, as it always is to trust someone. And no trust can be more frightening to give than to God, because the stakes of the bet are so very high; our immortal souls. Approximations serves as a precaution towards having to make the frightening leap of faith.<sup>149</sup> In this lies the paradox: it is first when we give up understanding God that we may begin to have any hope of understanding Him.

### 6.3 In defence of approximations

Unlike Kierkegaard, Swinburne most certainly does not dismiss reason's role in reaching and strengthening faith, and much of his philosophical workings is devoted to arguing for the rationality and coherence of theism in general, and in particular for the existence of the Christian God. Both of these may be done as we argue for the strengths and weaknesses of any ordinary philosophical position. Being a theist, in the Christian sense, is rational and coherent, there is no genuine conflict between reason and faith.<sup>150</sup>

I would be remiss if I did not note that Swinburne claims that he does not start by presupposing the existence of God, though his philosophy does aim to argue for God's existence (through reason) and is from their continuing to discuss the relationship between faith and reason. His claim is that belief in God is a rational choice, as the existence of God, more specifically the Christian God, is the most logical assumption to make, having considered all epistemological and physical aspects of the universe and reality as we know it. I cannot help but feel, however, and I think Kierkegaard would agree with me, that in doing so Swinburne is giving away important ground to his philosophical adversaries: that in seeking to justify Christianity on an intellectual basis, he implicitly sets aside the more mystical and incomprehensible (though not necessarily false) aspects of Christianity, the

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<sup>148</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 154

<sup>149</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 90-93

<sup>150</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 1

subjective reality, and I do wonder if not something important is lost in this process. Christianity may in part be rational, but it certainly also has a mystical and incomprehensible aspect. But again, we cannot really expect that this would convince any rational-based sceptic of the validity of Christianity. The danger is rather that Swinburne ends up ignoring it altogether.

Kierkegaard does not care about any of that. It is not his endeavour to convince those that dismiss faith as a starting point, that have repudiated the very idea of religion, but rather to convince those that consider themselves religious that they are doing it wrong.

God is absolute, he is beyond human comprehension, and all attempts to understand Him and how He works are essentially meaningless, approximations, that will never lead to anything lasting, certainly not true faith. God does not owe mankind any explanations, it is for us to reach into the depths of ourselves and call out for Him. If we do, we shall also find Him, though the process requires courage, steadfastness and determination on our part. As either an early existentialist or a proto-existentialist, Kierkegaard stresses the absolute human freedom, the freedom of the self to choose, a freedom which is also a compulsion. But since the self always is moving, and will never stand still, then so neither can any choice we make ever transfix us, no matter how much we might wish it could. This also includes Christianity. It is not enough, for Kierkegaard, to simply proclaim yourself a Christian. Christianity is a choice, it is the ultimate choice, but it must be lived in order to be chosen. Being a Christian is something you must *do*, and you must do it constantly. It is not something anyone else may do for you, but must be the result of a personal choice, a subjective decision to give yourself over to God. Your entire life must be lived in Christ, every breath you take infused with him. First then you may be said to be a true Christian, and first then may your earthly salvation, the escape from despair, be guaranteed. Needless to say, this is intensely difficult, and Kierkegaard himself appears uncertain as if anyone truly has ever actually been able to do so, though it is nonetheless the ideal all Christians should strive towards.<sup>151</sup> More important for the subject of this paper, is the implicit critique of reason that such a view must by necessity entail.

When we use reason as a tool of faith, we implicitly admit that faith is a conclusion to a rational process. When this conclusion is made, it will also stand. The conclusion is the end

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<sup>151</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2014), p. 133

of the journey; it becomes an objective truth, indifferent to how we may feel about it. What more, it does not really require anything more from us in order to be true. Is it not then reasonable to assume that we have succeeded in securing our faith: we have proved its validity.

Kierkegaard firmly rejects this argument. We have not proven anything at all, least of all the truth of faith. Objective faith is not faith at all, at best it is an approximation. In fact, the very term “objective faith” is an oxymoron and rests on two fundamental misconceptions. The first is that faith, or the act of being a Christian, is the same to everyone. But each self is unique, and their approach towards, and experience of Christianity will by necessity be affected by this. God may be perfect and unchangeable, but we as humans are neither. Each one of us has a personal road to walk when walking towards Christianity; and this part of our life, this choice, is so personal and intimate that we cannot share it with others.<sup>152</sup> To be sure, we may learn from and draw advice from others' thinking and deeds, but these can in the end only help us make the start of our road to become Christians. The choice in the end rests with each and one of us. To claim objective knowledge that is universally applicable, is to rob us of that choice. And then, we can never truly establish a personal connection with God, because we ourselves have never offered anything. It is not a personal relationship, but a business transaction the apologist offers: Faith in exchange for proof. That is of course demeaning to God, who in the end owns everything we got. The best the religious person may do is to prove him or her to be a grateful creation by returning what God generously has lent us and show gratitude for what he has freely given us, without any discernible benefit to Himself.

The second misconception is closely interlinked with the first: The presumption that it is faith, by Christianity, that must prove its worth to us. On the contrary, according to Kierkegaard: It is the aspiring Christian that must prove his or her worthiness to Christ. It is our choice to make, and we that must adapt ourselves to faith, not Christianity that must adapt itself to our wishes, prejudices and preferences. This helps explain Kierkegaard's admiration of the earliest possible Christianity, that which Jesus himself proclaimed.

Kierkegaard's own faith and life project is a return to the original, pure and all-encompassing

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<sup>152</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 46

Christianity that he claims Jesus demonstrated.<sup>153</sup> A way of life that later churches unforgivably have corrupted and diluted, to make it more accessible and acceptable to the fickle and constantly evolving preferences of the masses.<sup>154</sup> What is the conclusion of apologetics, that we ought to accept God and the Christian faith, is for Kierkegaard not the end at all. It is in fact merely the beginning of our spiritual and mental journey. If you do not have the courage to begin it, then that is your choice; and yours and not God's loss.

Paradoxically, Kierkegaard has been criticized to do exactly what he set out to fight against: diminishing the majesty and mystery of God. For while Kierkegaard rejects all notions of a God that may be perceived and understood by human reason, considering it absurd that God should be expected to be understandable to humans, by doing so he also implicitly rejects all attempts to find God in creation, save in the individual believers own personal mind. If reason cannot help us towards faith, we must rely on our own senses, our emotions, to feel him. The way towards reducing God to simply exists inside us, and only there, as a source of spiritual comfort that we may reach out to and feel whenever we like, is short. God becomes a tool to dull human anxiety, not unlike a drug, and not at all the all-encompassing, incomprehensible, mysterious, majestic and wonderful being beyond all being that Kierkegaard long for and seeks to give proper credit.<sup>155</sup> Kierkegaard finds apologetics to be a debasement of the divine. He finds an outwardly Christian culture to be both shallow and hypocritical. Yet his insistence on refusing religiosity no other expression or practice than that of having God as an invisible best friend risks becoming self-defeating. God, in Kierkegaardian thinking seems to also be alone, waiting for us to seek Him out. In fact, at times it may almost seem as if it to Kierkegaard does not matter whether the historical Jesus correlates with the one found in the gospels, or whether he was resurrected, or even if God truly exists or not. After all, Kierkegaard candidly admits that his version of Abraham may or may not be the historically accurate one, but this is irrelevant.<sup>156</sup> It is the character of Abraham created by Kierkegaard, who is the one we should admire. What matters is the lesson *this* Abraham can teach us, as he is presented by Johannes De Silentio.

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<sup>153</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that Kierkegaard's interpretation of Jesus and his message is controversial and highly questionable. The truth of that is however a clearly theological question, and of lesser importance here.

<sup>154</sup> Garaventa, 2013, p. 491-492

<sup>155</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 15

<sup>156</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2014), p. 105-111

The gospels presents a Jesus and a faith that offers us a way out of despair, and that is all that matters.

We see here what may be said to be a conflict where religious faith is being pulled between two philosophical viewpoints, that both risks destroying what they set out to save, namely the validity of faith. We have the rationalist viewpoint of apologetics, and its tendency to reduce God to an omnipotent and omniscient watchmaker, a fully rational entity, that the correct application of human intellect can comprehend and accept as the most valid hypothesis for why the universe is as it is. Logical and sound as this may or may not be, it cannot help but feel impersonal, for how do you maintain, let alone establish, a personal, intimate relationship with such a type of divinity? Dismissing rationality in its entirety is however at least equally problematic, for relying exclusively on emotions and subjective truths may easily make the agent conclude that truth is whatever we choose it to be. If you accept Christ and Christianity, this problem at least becomes solved. Christ died for your sins and did so because he loves you. What more, Christ is God, and therefore God loves you, He is a person, and his power is active, benevolent and enormous.<sup>157, 158</sup>

#### 6.4 The problem of conditional love

Where, in Swinburne's Christianity, are we to find love? Besides betraying, as I have previously argued, an inherent insecurity in the validity of God, a strictly reason-based, or even reason-dominated approach, it is also problematic in a theistic worldview that offers the possibility, and stress the importance of, a personal and close relationship to God. This is because a rational-based, structured and logical justification for a relationship, is also a conditional relationship. And as the Christian faith, of for that matter all of the main theistic faiths, requires the believer to strive towards a state of unconditional love and submission to God, the inherent contradiction in this approach may quickly turn out to be intolerable. For truly unconditional love can never be conditional, that is to say, dependent upon external factors, or be exposed and endangered by newly acquired critical arguments. The

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<sup>157</sup> This approach does of course not solve all philosophical nor theological problems. Abrahamic theism must struggle with the problem of evil, the problem of hell, etc. But these are not relevant for the topic of this paper, and I therefore feel justified in not addressing them here.

<sup>158</sup> From an esthetical perspective, this also enables us to an important aspect of religious faith that may best be summed up as this: The ability to make hymns. In that, I feel that much more is implicit, because hymns must by necessity entail that someone can hear them. Someone can hear our prayers, sense our devotion, and equally important, appreciate the art we create to its honour.

positivistic apologetic approach, on the other hand, seems to inherently rest on the assumption that it is sensible and good to be a Christian only unless and until a new argument, or a new discovery (like a logically plausible explanation for how the universe could begin that does not require God) invalidates the argument(s) made for the existence of God. In short, God will only have our unconditional love and obedience until we find some better alternative. I would like to make two analogies, to better illustrate what is meant by this. Let us imagine a marriage where the husband has this approach towards his wife, and furthermore makes no attempt to hide it. That is to say, he will calmly and reasonably promise his wife eternal devotion and faithfulness, with the caveat that no smarter, more good-looking, younger or else while more desirable mate should ever present herself. To add insult to injury, it would also be made perfectly clear that the wife would be frequently and critically evaluated, to see if any decline in her desirability could be observed whatsoever. It is hard to imagine how under such preconditions what is widely held in both Christianity and in secularism to be the ideal marriage, a state where two parties agree to give themselves to each other in mutual love, respect and trust, could ever blossom. Yet how common is it not to refer to the union between God and human in marriage metaphors? Just as common, the use of the relation between a parent and a child. Suppose a mother was in the frequent habit of considering the case for why she ought to love and assume responsibility for her child, presenting a string of reason-based considerations that in the end concluded that she should not neglect her child, while making it clear that were she ever presented with more logical counter-arguments for why she ought not, she would immediately renounce any bond with her child, admitting that she could see no good reason for why she ought to care for it in any way. Surely any decent person would react with utter shock and revulsion towards such a person and declare her totally unfit to take care of any child. In short, our immediate reaction is to sense that something is deeply wrong with both of these unions; they are fundamentally based on conditional love, which is not true love, whereas unconditional love is love that can never be broken and requires no defence. Yet both marriage and the parent-child relationship are common Christian analogies between God and humans. Not only that, but it is insisted that God, as the supreme source of everything good and the ultimate perfection where nothing more perfect is possible, naturally is ultimately more deserving of our love than any spouse or child could ever hope to be. Swinburne and his fellow apologetics agree and accept this. Even so, they keep

insisting that the love and devotion we give God may be safely reconsidered should the need ever arise. Of course, the point of apologetics is that in the end it is both hoped and believed that any philosophical challenge the believer may face can be beaten back, and the harmony and equilibrium between believer and God restored. But all the while, at the same time, there is an underlying admission that should ever the apologist be confronted with an inescapable logical dilemma, a hindrance that forces him to choose between logical consistency and God, he must choose the former and discard the latter, if he is to stay true to the method he uses. His, or her, devotion to God is in the end therefore always conditional, and therefore both limited and inferior to the love we are capable of giving to fellow human beings.

Hence Kierkegaard's stressing of the need for meeting God with *silence*.<sup>159</sup> Silence being here both literal and metaphorical, in that it is the only somewhat appropriate response a human being can show when standing in front of the master of the universe, and the source of all life, knowledge and power. Human life, human knowledge, and whatever power we may possess is only given to us by God, as an act of grace, and therefore everything we got, rightfully belongs to him. In order for the human being to come closer to God, there must be a point where we realize this, and that the only thing that we may give God is our silence, for by that we acknowledge that we really have nothing to give or to offer God, and nothing that we may demand of him, as everything we got ultimately belongs to him in the first place. Not before you have learned to be silent may you then again learn how to talk meaningfully about, and with, God. In such a view, apologetics becomes conditional praise for God, all arguments defending His existence tools to mollify the doubt that never truly goes away. A state where a "but" is always near. The ultimate, greatest love must be a state where no reason or arguments can dispel it, it is unassailable from reason and logic, because it rejects their supremacy. First then, when this is acknowledged, will it be appropriate for the human to speak once again. Arguing for the existence of God is to implicitly question God, and demand of him that he presents himself to us in a logical fashion. It does not demand that the believer must commit his/her heart as well as the mind, and thus it is inferior to the love between a couple, or the love between a parent and a child.

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<sup>159</sup> "Kierkegaard, Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen", in *Søren Kierkegaard Samlede Værker*, p. 135



Then if, as a hypothesis, we assumed Richard Swinburne ever encountered an atheistic (or simply non-Christian) philosopher of such intellectual magnitude that he or she could disprove the foundations of Swinburne's apologetics, by a way of intellectual reasoning and detection of logical flaws, would not this then compel Swinburne to renounce his religion, since the paradigm that he previously believed to be accurate and espoused, is proven invalid? It is highly unlikely. Rather, it seems more plausible that the passionate part of his mind would have overridden the logical and calculating one, and that he would have tried to save his original claim, that Christianity is true and valid, either by working from a new angle, or by trying to save his original theories by introducing additional ad-hoc hypotheses, to save his original one. In the beginning of *Was Jesus God?* Swinburne states that "However, unlike a perfectly free person, humans are sometimes influenced by irrational forces."<sup>160</sup> He was not thinking of Christianity of course, but an atheist probably would, finding the irony irresistible, particularly if he believed in determinism.

Nonetheless, we should be careful not to impose a false dichotomy between (positivistic) apologetics and the Kierkegaardian/pragmatist view. There is precedence for a more nuanced and syncretised approach towards faith's relationship to apologetics. At the end of *The Coherence of Theism?* Swinburne reminds us that "... theologians of all theistic traditions have long emphasised the inability of humans in any way fully or adequately to understand what is being said when it is claimed that there is a God."<sup>161</sup> True, he immediately afterwards states that this does not mean that there is no coherence, just that it may be so complex and opaque that we do not have the means and/or ability to grasp it, but he also admits that apologetics do not pertain to be completely objective, and that the discipline therefore uses logic and rationality with an agenda, hoping that it may be used to prove, or at least make probable, what the apologist by and large already has decided to be true. Then apologetics claim to be able to prove faith by philosophical analyses comes dangerously close to admitting that the discipline itself is being based upon a lie; in reality, reason is only useful or welcome so long as it may be used to confirm already established opinions. This is of course not a trait exclusive to apologetics, human nature dictates that it far too often influences both philosophy and the world in general. Nobody likes to have their worldview, or simply their personal prestige, assaulted. And when it comes to

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<sup>160</sup> Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8

<sup>161</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 295-6

apologetics, we are not merely talking about salaries or personal reputation, but rather if eternal salvation is possible, and if yes, how. What could be more at stake to the individual human being than that?

### 6.5 When the natural and the revealed comes into conflict

What do we do when the revealed religion, told to us by prophets and scripture, comes into conflict with what “nature”, as in reason and ethics, comes into conflict? There is knowledge and moral imperatives we can deduce ourselves towards by study of nature; all theistic religions agree on that. Then there is knowledge and moral imperatives that can only be fathomed by divine revelations, Christianity and many other religions agree on that. But what would happen if these two sources of truth and goodness comes into conflict?

Swinburne’s answer is simple, if not entirely satisfying: There cannot really be any conflict. This is because God is good, and he is fundamentally logical. Granted, humanity cannot fully comprehend what either of these qualities entail, though we can get vague notions. (if not, the very terms would become meaningless when talking about God.) But God and Natural laws cannot ever truly come into conflict, since one of them (God) is the direct cause of the other (nature). Incorporated into this is the idea of natural moral law, that says that what is morally right is something all mentally healthy people have inside of them. They often disagree about the specifics, of course, but nearly everyone, in nearly every society, agrees that stealing, cheating, and killing those who trust you, is wrong. Therefore, it is plausible, even probable, to assume that the same moral framework is somehow coded into us. This is not acceptable to Kierkegaard, who dismiss the notion that we can master God by studying nature, either in the natural or social sciences. God is simply above all of these. This also means that he is above all that is ethical. Thus it is also entirely plausible that a prophet of God can be commanded, by God, into doing acts that are entirely immoral, and yet be commendable for acting out on them. The ethical is superseded by the religious. This is not to say that Kierkegaard dismiss ethics altogether of course, but he insists that when in direct contact with God, our ethical obligations evaporates, because while God is both good and wise, He is both of these qualities in such a pure form that it for us becomes unfathomable. God is absolute, and to be absurd is his prerogative.

This is, or so I at least believe, Kierkegaard's strongest card against apologists. Reason-based philosophy and theology requires that what is supernatural should be studied through what

is natural. While what is supernatural insist that it must be accepted on its own terms, or at least, it cannot be understood by the use of naturalistic method. Modern science, history and much philosophy are of course dictated by a strict naturalism, in that all theories and hypotheses that contain supernatural means are instantly ridiculed and dismissed as unserious. Philosophy are one of the few remaining branches of academic work where it is still occasionally possible to make claims that contain supernatural elements, like that Jesus was resurrected, which is a miracle, or that the universe was created, which requires theism.

### 6.6 Just how necessary is having the correct faith?

Kierkegaard is not unaware of the aforementioned problem, and it is notable that while he quite clearly declares himself a Christian, it is notable, even remarkable, how little attention he devotes to exploring the nature and power of God.<sup>162</sup> God in Kierkegaard's thinking is seemingly given little space, apart from being the goal of the act of faith. He is important because he gives mankind something to have faith in, and, it may seem, only because of that. Perhaps therefore, it seems at times as if being a Christian is not what is the most important to Kierkegaard, but to have faith. The passion, more than focusing on the correct target, is what matters the most. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, in the guise of Johannes de Silentio, Kierkegaard states that:

*Dersom En, der lever midt i Christendinnen gaaer op i Guds Huus, i den sande Guds Huus, med den sande Forestilling om Gud i Viden, og nu beder, men beder i Usandhed; og naar En lever i et afgudisk Land, men beder med Uendelighedens hele Lidenskab, skjønt hans Øie hviler paa en Afguds Billede: hvor er saa meest Sandhed? Den Ene beder i Sandhed til Gud, skjøndt han tilbeder en Afgud; Den Anden beder i Usandhed til den sande Gud, og tilbeder derfor i Sandhed en Afgud.*<sup>163</sup>

It must be remembered that this is written under a pseudonym, and might not therefore reflect Kierkegaard's personal convictions. Nonetheless, it does also state that also pagans may pray with "Uendelighedens hele Lidenskab", which is a synonym for the leap of faith. It therefore *seems* that Kierkegaard thinks that also non-Christians may perform the leap of faith, and may thereby become Religious. Christianity may not be the only way to the truth, it may not be the only way to be freed from despair. This may in part explain why

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<sup>162</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 15-16

<sup>163</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 137

Kierkegaard has so little interest in apologetics, for him, it is not the specific faith that is of central importance, but rather the act of having faith and committing to it. The question is legitimate, but there are some caveats that need to be considered. Firstly, this is written under a pseudonym, and Kierkegaard makes it clear that he does not always agree with what his pseudonyms claims. Secondly, and more importantly, while the pagan may also grasp the true God, the Christian God is still that, the *true* God. The pagan that makes the leap of faith is no longer a true pagan, though perhaps not yet a true Christian either. Being taught of Christ is a great help, though it does appear to be essential for making the leap of faith. Likewise, being taught of Christ does not guarantee that you become a true Christian, as exemplified by the impostor that disguise himself as a Christian, without having made the leap. The virtuous pagan is better than the false Christian, but better than both is to be both Christian and virtuous. Yet even so, it seems that Christ, or at least knowledge of Him, is not what is the most essential. Kierkegaard did not discuss the topic of universal reconciliation at any great length in his authorship, and the few snippets we have leaves an ambiguous interpretation of his views in the matter. Nonetheless, it seems quite certain that he believes that all humans have been offered the possibility of salvation; the possibility depends on the individual's choice. The potential damned have all voluntarily chosen to keep away from God, and God respects their wishes; their right to make their own choices.<sup>164</sup> If so, that must by default also include those that never had or never will have the opportunity of learning of Christianity. Also pagans may be saved, and being a "good" pagan, a pagan that performs the leap, is better than being bad Christian. Kierkegaard's respect and admiration for Socrates is unquestionable, and it does not appear plausible at all that he would think Socrates to be in hell. It does appear that for Kierkegaard obedience to Christianity specifically is not the only way to salvation, though it certainly is the best. To understand the latter point, it may be useful to remember Kierkegaard's Protestant background: The religion of Christianity is nothing holy in and of itself, rather it is a tool of focus for humans. Kierkegaard goes so far as to claim that in Heaven there will be no Christianity, because by then the religion will have served its purpose.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Mulder, "Must all be saved?", p. 13-15

<sup>165</sup> Mulder, "Must all be saved?", p. 14

This interpretation helps explain why Kierkegaard is so indifferent towards apologetics, and thinks it fruitless and pointless to spend any time doing so. That is not to say that he thinks that all religions are equally true, but rather that all genuine believers, that is those that perform the leap of faith, can find God, though they may not yet be aware of quite what they have found. I think this also is an important point in Kierkegaard's thinking, namely that humans do not exist for the sake of being Christians, rather Christianity exists to help people become free from despair. Religion itself is just a tool. If it helps people to do so, as being a true Christian does, then it is good. If it leads people away from Christianity, as the organized practice of false Christianity did in Kierkegaard's contemporary Denmark, it is bad. Yet at the same time, Christianity is not merely first among equals amongst faiths. It is the true faith, and no other faith can truly offer salvation and/or release from despair. Jesus is both God and man, and this paradox is essential to Kierkegaardian thinking, as well as being an exclusive and fundamental Christian belief. This is so because it shows us two things: 1) That a union between God and mankind is possible. 2) That God may do what defy all human reason and logic. True Christianity is therefore not to be rooted in the intellectual, but in the passionate. To become a Christian is primarily a moral choice. It is not a logical assumption based on assessments of the truths of its claims. True Christianity is not the result of philosophical reasoning and logical conclusions, but choosing a way of life, the Christian life.<sup>166</sup> What more, this is something all humans can fathom. Everyone of sound mind can become a Christian, the possibility is present in all of us, and equally so. And all that you need is to have the will to become a Christian, to want to attempt to develop a relationship with God, and to believe that this is possible for everyone. After all, Christ died for all of us.<sup>167</sup>

You cannot, Kierkegaard thinks, find any religion that comes remotely close to having the same acute sense of the true human predicament as Christianity. His own philosophy is an attempt to prove just that, and to show how Christianity offers a mirror into the human soul and its acute, ever-present soul-sickness, and from there a way out.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 63-64

<sup>167</sup> Moser & McCreary, "Kierkegaard's Conception of God", p. 132-133

<sup>168</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 301-303

## 6.7 Swinburne's motivation

Swinburne gives three motivations for why having faith is a good thing, and what purpose having the correct faith is supposed to serve.

First: To render proper worship and obedience to whatever God or gods there are. The amount of gratitude and service we owe might depend on what creed we subscribe to but nearly all theistic religions, and certainly Christianity, think that we have obligations to God, and ought to give Him worship.<sup>169</sup>

Second: To obtain our own, personal salvation. Salvation essentially means well-being. Well-being is gained by conducting oneself in a way that is good, in a situation that is good to be in, where in individual knows that he is in such a situation, and wishes to be there. "If I am of use to others, that pleases God who made both me and those others. If, however, there is a God and I fail in my obligations to him, then clearly it is good for me that I should seek forgiveness from God and reconciliation to Him."<sup>170</sup> If so, having faith provides a limited salvation now, and the promise of a complete salvation in the hereafter.

Third: If our own salvation is good and perfect, it follows that it would be good for others too to take part in it. It is good of us to help them towards this if we can. It would however be wrong to try and force others when making such a personal decision. What sort of person one wishes to be, is the most important question any human can make. It must also be made freely by the individual. The best others can do, including God Himself, is to encourage and discourage.<sup>171</sup> Having said that, also Swinburne believes it possible that people may make the wrong choice, and still be saved, provided that they made their decision for the right reasons. To pursue good, but fail through ignorance, is sufficient for salvation.<sup>172</sup>

It can be noted that Kierkegaard probably would not disagree with this assessment.

Regarding the question of ultimate salvation, Swinburne and Kierkegaard are not that dissimilar either. Kierkegaard do (seem to) think that the offer of salvation is open to everyone that wants it, and also here Swinburne is in agreement.<sup>173</sup> Both of them seem to say that salvation is possible to everyone, as opposed to predestination, but also that the

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<sup>169</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 199-203

<sup>170</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 170

<sup>171</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 212-216

<sup>172</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 208

<sup>173</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 210

possibility for damnation, as in rejecting the salvation, is equally available to everyone, as opposed to universal reconciliation. The destiny of your soul is in your own hands, hence why it is so important to make the correct choice.

#### 6.8 Is God external or internal?

Kierkegaard and Swinburne agree that God is the ultimate good. Moreover, they agree that it is good for humanity to pursue closeness and eventual union with this ultimate being. As has hopefully been established by now, they do however vehemently disagree on how to do so. Swinburne tries to show that the existence and goodness God can be made probable or even proven by rigorous philosophical reasoning, Kierkegaard stresses the leap of faith regarding both questions, and in the leap the presence of doubt is crucial, else there would be nothing to leap over. Nonetheless, the goal is the same: To be one with God. The perhaps most worthwhile question to ask is then: Which of them succeeds the best at it?

A running theme in Kierkegaard's writings is the emphasis he puts upon the closeness that we may enjoy with God, and how near it in actuality is, if just we wish for it, asks for it and are prepared to receive it. Everything else, all human choices, our entire lives and existence, is spent in struggle. We can either struggle to get nearer to God, or struggle to get further away from Him. Ultimately, there is no third option.

When we struggle to get away from God, we sin, for sinning is choosing to turn away from that which is good, and God is the source of all good things. From sin we feel despair, the realization that no matter what we do, we cannot create or do anything worthwhile without God. The human being that turns away from God is doomed to find nothing but meaninglessness and temporality, for true meaning and true eternity can only be reached through God. God is the wellspring of love", the source of all love. This source is in each and every one of us, God is in us. Kierkegaard strongly rejects the notion that God is external, or should be approached as if He was.<sup>174</sup> Other humans, even our closest family and friends, even a most beloved spouse, is fundamentally separate from us. We are, in the end, alone. That is what it means to be a person. Unless with the help of God, for (the Christian) God can do what is absurd. But in order for this to happen, we must seek God inside ourselves.

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<sup>174</sup> Kierkegaard, *Filosofiske smuler* (Danmark: Søren Kierkegaard Kulturproduktion, 2014), p. 76-78

Having read several of Swinburne's books, and studied his general philosophy and way of thinking, I am struck by the lack of intimacy that is to be found in his texts. By that, I mean to say that Swinburne very rarely makes emotional arguments, arguments meant to appeal to the passionate and trusting aspects of faith, the personal. One almost gets the sense that he would find it rather embarrassing to have to appeal to personal and subjective experiences in order to defend faith. He does acknowledge that such experiences are important, and may be very powerful indeed, but they have little value in his philosophy, they are more of an afterthought.<sup>175</sup> Swinburne is strictly rational, strictly stoic and strictly empiric. His goal is to be as objective as is possible, and to go where logic and objectivity takes him. Swinburne is a believing Christian, and he does believe that a personal relationship with God is both possible and desirable. Objective reasoning has led him to Christianity, and his works in religious philosophy are meant to help others reach the same logical conclusions that he himself has reached. In order for that to happen, he must distance himself. Swinburne's apologetics cannot be personal, his own (subjective) experiences of Christianity may be powerful and important, but they cannot be experienced by others, and accounts of them cannot expect to convince anyone of rational, sound mind. At best, Swinburne can say it is probable that those that accept his conclusions and analyses of reality will agree with him, and that they *may* then find God also at a personal subjective and intimate level, after having accepted Him as the creator of the universe and the source of everything truly good and beautiful; though this is far from certain.<sup>176</sup> But in doing so, Swinburne by necessity compels the image of God professed in his philosophy to be a clearly external one, versus the Kierkegaardian one, which is distinctly internal and subjective. It is not so that Kierkegaard thinks that the truth equals the subjective, he does not. But it is in the subjective that we may have any hope of finding *worthwhile* truth, which ultimately leads to reconciliation with God. Neither expatiating poets or steely scientists can help us in that endeavour. Swinburne does not ask you to look into your own heart in order to find God. Rather, observe the known world, and from the facts acquired by this, and, if you are being objective, you will conclude that the Christian God is the most plausible explanation, and faith in Him warranted. For Swinburne, God is not chosen, but brought forward by logical

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<sup>175</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 341-342

<sup>176</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 264-268



compulsion. Likewise, the personal subjective relationship with God that each and every one of us (in Christian thinking) is meant to have becomes strictly supplementary.

It is these preconditions that Kierkegaard so thoroughly despise when he denounces them as "approximations", in that rather than making the case for God's majesty, they distance humans, and perhaps in particular the scholars and intellectuals, who are the only ones that can understand them to begin with, away from God. Speculations on metaphysics and theological nitpicking are distractions and a waste of time. Christ has shown us a way out of the human predicament, and people like Richard Swinburne response to this enormous gift is to insist on wasting time and energy debating hows, whys and whats. And what more, the more advanced it gets, the more complicated and difficult it gets to reconcile apologetics with the fundamental equality that together with love of God is Christianity's starting point: Namely that salvation is equally open to everyone, and that everyone has the will and capability of accepting it. Is there here perhaps another inherent danger in apologetics? In that the more sophisticated and advanced it becomes, the more complex its reasoning becomes, a develops danger in that if apologetics leads to deeper truths and meanings in Christianity, Christianity becomes inaccessible to most people, or at least, some exclusive circle of enlightened people will have access to mysteries and knowledge that many, very possibly most, of their fellow believers will lack. Those familiar with the early history of Christianity will be aware of the controversies and disputes regarding various so-called Gnostic offshoots and movements within and besides Christianity.<sup>177</sup> One of the most important and distinguished of Christian Gnostic beliefs, was that by access to secret and mysterious knowledge, specially chosen men (and maybe even the occasional woman), could get access to a deeper, truer Christianity that the ignorant multitudes were barred from. True Christianity was not to be gained simply by praying and devoting oneself to God, but by controlling and suppressing natural impulses, and by learning the deeper, truer meaning of Christ's teachings. Now, Richard Swinburne is of course no Gnostic. He does not deem anyone unworthy as such of accessing the deeper meanings and knowledge of Christianity. Nor does he try to prevent anyone from studying his own teachings. Quite the contrary, Swinburne would presumably ideally want everyone to study and think as much as he has done about which faith is the right one, and how to best understand it. If Christianity

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<sup>177</sup> Nock, "Gnosticism", p. 256-259

is true, there can after all be nothing more important than to understand it as well as possible. Yet even so, apologetics, like every other discipline, gets more and more complex the more advanced and developed its teachings become. And the more advanced and complicated any discipline gets, the more difficult it will be for those without training to access it and understand it. Swinburne's reasoning is complex, and his arguments often difficult to comprehend. It could be argued that not everyone needs to understand Swinburne's reasoning in order to accept it to be true. Swinburne himself thinks that the fact that something is supported by and/or believed in by many people of high intelligence is a good reason to accept the (probable) truth of said beliefs, even though we may not understand them ourselves.<sup>178</sup> It is widely considered good to listen to medical experts when seeking advice on health matters. The patient is not required to understand fully why a certain medicine is good, or a certain form of therapy beneficial. We listen to doctors and other health professionals because we know they have studied these matters for a long time. The same applies to legal experts, financial experts and gastronomic experts. We listen to their advice in the fields they have studied, and it is generally considered good to accept their conclusions unless there are strong and explicit reasons to think that they may be mistaken. Why should we not treat philosophers of religion with the same respect? That men like Swinburne, Craig, Alvin Plantinga, and even Kierkegaard himself are Christians are in and of itself a good reason to think that Christianity is plausible. They study difficult and complex matters of faith so that the average believer does not have to, and anyone that wish to follows their example is free to do so. Their works help give answers to the difficult questions and problems that so often assail the aspiring faithful, and sometimes cause individuals or even groups to break away from their faith. Intellectual apologetics may smack of elitism, but they are also good and necessary, for a faith that cannot defend itself from criticism and attacks cannot get anywhere. Certainly it would not have spread from Jerusalem to Copenhagen.

At the same time, a description of the core of Christianity is not, or at least is not supposed to be, difficult to grasp. God is infinite love, He loves us, each and every one of us, and wants us to freely choose to love Him. Doing so requires some courage, but no fancy education. The illiterate slave or the noble polymath access the same salvation, and receive

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<sup>178</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 261-262

the same love. Trying to understand God by approximations betrays an arrogance that suggest that some of us may be more equal than others in the eyes of God. It is important to make clear that I do not say that overall Kierkegaard's philosophy is easy to comprehend. Anyone that has tried to comprehend *Sickness unto Death*, will know that it is not. The human state of sinfulness, and the nature of despair, are difficult concept and hard to understand. God however, is supposed to be a remedy, in that God's love is everywhere and always available to us. God's essence is simple, Kierkegaard and Swinburne agree on this. He is perfect, and it is this perfection that humanity, in its imperfect state, finds so hard to comprehend.

Christ has already given us all the answers we need, and that is that God loves us, and if we would just get around to love Him back, we could finally be truly free!

But is Kierkegaard's concept of God truly infinite? In his writings, it may seem at times that God is the wellspring of love, residing in each of us, but little else. So while Swinburne may be accused of turning God into a highly external figure, Kierkegaard is reducing Him into something near-exclusively internal. Kierkegaard is clear that God is the all-mighty creator of the world, and that everything, down to the least lily and the smallest of birds, are created by Him, and loved by Him. He even states that humans can learn much from them, provided that we do not start to believe that they can teach us *everything*.<sup>179</sup>

Then why is he so hostile to apologetics and natural theology? It stands to reason that while feeling God in our hearts is the most important aspect of faith, studying and contemplating the rest of His creations should hardly be a bad thing. If God is everywhere, so presumably He would also be in human reasoning, and rational deduction would, if correctly performed, serve to bring us even closer to Him. In order to fully understand and appreciate God's magnificence, we must also be able to understand and appreciate God's flawless reasoning, and how perfect all His creation is. If apologetics can do so, does not that in and of itself make it a marvellous endeavour? Humans after all do live and act in a setting, and this setting is all created by God. It stands to reason then that we can find God everywhere, not merely in ourselves.

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<sup>179</sup> "Kierkegaard, Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen", in *Søren Kierkegaard Samlede Værker*<sup>179</sup>, s. 135

## 7 Chapter 7 – Looking for a synthesis, of some sort

I began my writing this essay with an instinctive sympathy for Kierkegaard's approach towards faith. Actual, complete and true *Faith* neither should nor can be guided by reason alone, anymore than love in general is. And being a genuine Christian is the ultimate act of love. It is an act of passion, but also courage and discipline, for it means risking everything to perform the leap into the unknown, with faith in God as your only support and comfort; the synthesis above all others of the ultimate Faith, Hope and Charity. The poetical beauty of such an approach is indisputable. What more, it also seems to have a deeper impact than what rational arguments can have, in that it demands by necessity a living, constant religion, Christianity, according to Kierkegaard, is something that must be done, not merely spoken, and it must be done constantly.

It is not enough to conclude by saying that Christianity is logically sound and the most plausible conclusion from a long string of logical argumentation. It may be done, but what does this give us? It seems hardly to inspire devotion; in fact, I would go so far as to argue that establishing a conclusion seems to imply that it is time to conclude the question, and that it need not be addressed anymore, unless and until someone challenges it. Proving or disproving God's existence seems to give us nothing regarding faith, who asks us to believe in what cannot truly be comprehended. Between faith and rationality, where the former asks us to believe in something we cannot know, and the latter demands that we believe nothing without evidence, there seems to be an unbridgeable gap.

Yet if faith and reason can never fully blend together, so can they never be fully separated either. After all, we are not born with Christian faith, becoming Christian necessitate a certain degree of knowledge, and the ability to perform rational thought. Reason may not be the ultimate goal, but it must be a part of the way towards it. Likewise, there will always be an element of faith in reason, if not necessarily of a religious type. After all, all scientific discoveries and claims ultimately are hypotheses, not possible to fully and permanently prove (with the possible exception of mathematic formulas).

More importantly, apologetics are the ultimate tool against the spiritual relativism that else may threaten to devour it, in that faith alone, without any rational framework, will dissolve into nothing, lacking any bounds. When two types of faith compete, be they religions or more secular doctrines, it stands to reason that the individual must choose which of them he or she deems the most plausible one. Kierkegaard's situation is fundamentally different

from Swinburne's, in that it in Kierkegaard's context is still feasible to think that there is one overlaying truth that may encompass everything. In Kierkegaard's case, this is Christianity. Other disciplines, like physics, biology and history, he shows next to no interest in. He does not have to, they are, by and large, irrelevant to his project.

He may be right, or at least he may have been right *then*. At the time of Kierkegaard, the natural sciences at least represented no threat to Christianity or to a Christian worldview. Kierkegaard died four years before Charles Darwin published *The Origin of the Species*, and began a challenge from biology that Christianity still grapples with. Ironically enough, this creates a parallel between Kierkegaard and Hegel, whose thinking Kierkegaard else despised for trying to submit Christianity to philosophical reasoning, speculation.<sup>180</sup> Hegel and Kierkegaard both represent the very last generation of thinkers that attempted to subsume everything else under one Truth. In Hegel's case, this was philosophy, in Kierkegaard's, Christianity.<sup>181</sup> In the later part of the nineteenth century and onwards, the sciences, both social and natural alike, advances and fractures to such a degree that it is no longer possible to try to encompass the entire human discipline under one single Truth. We can see this budding tension also in Kierkegaard, as his Christianity in equal amounts consist of theology, philosophy and psychology. Kierkegaard insist that they all lead to the same conclusion, and ultimately are the same discipline, a claim that today is impossible, and will be, until someone can prove otherwise. Swinburne is aware of this fragmentation, and in his apologetics he does express the, if not belief so at least hope, that one day all scientific and philosophical disciplines may (once again) be united into one single whole, which Swinburne hopes will be Christianity. That day, if it ever comes, is far away though.<sup>182</sup> Swinburne himself is after all also a philosopher of the natural sciences, and his first book, *Space and Time*, published in 1968, is not an apologetic work, but concern itself with the properties the dimensions of space and time must have as logical necessities. From this, Swinburne undoubtedly ultimately hopes that logical necessity will lead to Christianity, but neither philosophy nor science as disciplines are there yet. And the only thing that is for certain is that, without the works of Christian philosophers like Richard Swinburne, we will never get there.

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<sup>180</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 59-61

<sup>181</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 322

<sup>182</sup> Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 262-263

Does this mean that we must award by default victory to Richard Swinburne and apologetics? Not quite, for while modern apologists are forced to grapple with more and other problems and challenges than Kierkegaard was faced with in his philosophical undertakings, they have not defeated his main challenge: That most proclaimed Christians are not true Christians. It is easy enough to construct an intellectual and logical defence of Christianity that would persuade many sceptics and agnostics reading it, but where to go from there? Does accepting the validity of Christian apologetics, whether the arguments presented are truly sound or not, entail that the audience will become devout Christians? No, not at all, for simple logical conviction, in and of itself need not be life-altering. What is to stop the intellectually convinced believer to simply get baptised, say some words, and then walk away, never to truly think of God and Christ ever again? He or she may now call him/herself a Christian, but if that is all there is, what then has been gained? I feel quite confident in stating that the vast majority of Christians in Kierkegaard's contemporary Denmark felt that they had perfectly logically valid reasons to consider themselves to be good Christians, any genuine doubt about its truths were in all likelihood almost exclusively reserved for a rather small part of the comparatively well-educated and affluent members of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The society as such would find it perfectly reasonable to be Christian, most of its members probably barely being able to grasp that an alternative was possible. And yet, Kierkegaard found most of them sorely lacking in their piety, and as I stated earlier, he seems to have had good reasons for thinking so. The point I try to make is that logical conviction of the truth of a religious worldview does not, in and of itself, mean that the convinced will become deeply immersed in it, or make it a part of his or her life in a genuine and sincere way.

This aspect is not restricted to religion, for what value does any conviction has if we merely contend ourselves with espousing belief in them, without actually acting in accordance with them? Merely declaring yourself to be politically conservative, socially liberal, a patriot, courteous, a sports fanatic, a heavy drinker, these are all easy to claim. But ultimately, they are just labels that have no value if you do not in fact act upon them. How much more profound must not this disparity be if we talk about a commitment where the fate of your immortal soul is supposed to be at stake, which, when becoming a Christian, you declare it to be? The acknowledgement of a commitment alone does not mean anything if you are not prepared to follow through on it.

I will therefore claim that Swinburne's apologetics, as well as the entirety of the positive apologetic tradition, cannot in the end be anything else than the means to an end when it comes to religiosity. This end may then very well be the Kierkegaardian approach, who while not dismissing reason as a both useful and necessary tool in the mundane world, rejects its value in obtaining true and full salvation, by fully and unconditionally surrendering your soul to God, which again means freeing the self from the curse of temporality, the world, and reunite it with eternity, God. This immense spiritual journey again cannot be a declaration of pure reason, or even reason foremost, but an act of love and passion.

As perhaps was to be expected, a certain kind of compromise is necessary. Faith as the supreme, all-surpassing act of love may and perhaps should reach a point where we are forced to say that we believe what cannot be known, what cannot be understood and most of all cannot be described with human language. Of God, as He is presented in Christianity, nothing less can be even remotely sufficient. Yet this is not where we can begin.

Kierkegaard, living and dying as he did in a society filled with out-front displays of deep piety, thought and wrote in a context where the dominance and close presence of Christianity was undisputed, was spared the "indignity" of having to explain and defend the basic tenets of his belief system from the challenge of other narratives. He was of course aware of naked atheism, but it was not a grave challenge to Christianity, rather it was Christianity that required saving from aesthetics and ethics. Swinburne cannot do as Kierkegaard, because the country and era he lives in is so different, and so much more sensitive to the existence of rival narratives. Why should anyone say that Christianity is the superior one? To be able to answer that question in the affirmative, rational arguments are necessary. Christian doctrines must be explained and defended, or else become irrelevant. Such endeavours done successfully may not be the end result as far as faith is concerned, however. Logical compulsions to accept Christianity as at least plausible does not appear to be based on genuine love or unconditional devotion. Though perhaps it can be interpreted more as a start on a very long journey. Love can also develop in arranged marriages of convenience. A journey where logical doubt may eventually be discarded, and where the presence of logic and rationality must give way to a form of knowledge founded on love, not wisdom. This is of course what Swinburne has claimed he has been doing all along: clearing away reason's doubt so that the surety of faith may grow and bloom. His path may easily

risk losing sight of the target, but it may very well be the sincere and intellectually honest believer's only possible path.

It may very well have been different in Kierkegaard's contemporary Denmark, where the basic tenets of Christianity were more or less subconsciously fed into nearly every person in the country from the crib and upwards. Christianity, or at least its decorations, were universally known and accepted. Kierkegaard was preaching to people whom were supposed to be his fellow-believers. This can no longer be taken for granted in today's mainstream Denmark, any less than it can in Norway. One could perhaps argue that this fairly rapid decline of Christianity, from near-universal to a minority in just a little over a hundred and fifty years seems to prove one of Kierkegaard's main points: The Christianity of his fellow Danes were never that strong or deeply held by large swathes of the population to begin with, easily overwhelmed by the alluring trappings of a hedonistic and rationalistic modernity. A mile wide and an inch deep, as the saying goes. Whether this has been a good or bad development is in this context irrelevant, the point is that we can no longer take it for granted that the vast majority of either Danes, Norwegians, Frenchmen or Brits consider themselves Christians, and it is therefore useless to begin to try to shake them into firmer, more authentic Christian devotion, as they never really had any genuine Christian devotion to begin with. Or perhaps Kierkegaard would say that nothing much has really changed, except perhaps that the non-Christian majority is a tad more honest today, by not even pretending to be Christians. He is not blind to the fact of historical context, but do not think that it matters regarding the prevalence or lack of faith.

*Men den høieste Lidenskab i et Menneske er Troen, og ingen Slægt begynder her paa et andet Punkt end den foregaaende, enhver Slægt begynder forfra, den følgende Slægt kommer ikke videre end den foregaaende, forsaavidt denne blev sin Opgave troe og ikke lod den i Stikken.*<sup>183</sup>

Kierkegaard was, in his own strange way, on the offensive. He was attacking his contemporaries for not living up to the ideals they claimed to follow. I do not think any Christian who sets out to follow his footsteps today would be able to claim the same, at least not in Denmark, Norway or the rest of the Western world. Explicit religious ideals are no longer a part of our common cultural ground, if anything, it is regarded rather with

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<sup>183</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2013), p. 209



suspicion from both mainstream popular cultures, and from the philosophical discourse. If any Christian that hopes to successfully proselytise is to come any way and convince more people on the validity and goodness of Christianity, something Christianity requires Christians to do, we must therefore accept that apologetics have a role to play, and that is to defend Christianity from criticism from non-Christians.

Kierkegaard may have dismissed this argument however, even if he knew how weakened public Christianity would one day become in his homeland. That is due to a consequence of the difference between the objective and subjective approach which more than anything differentiates the unconditional and complete faith Kierkegaard was a proponent for, and the reason-backed religion apologetics, both today and in Kierkegaard's contemporary times: Kierkegaard never really cared about the public religion in his philosophy, and he became increasingly hostile to it as his authorship and thinking evolved. A process that culminated in the last years of his life, when he openly attacked the Lutheran state church and, it would seem, all organised religion, as no true religion at all. Certainly not truly Christian.<sup>184</sup> Public religion, more than anything represented by the celestial bureaucracy of the church, is a man-made construction consisting of the masses, and Kierkegaard, despised the masses, adhering to them almost satanic will and powers.<sup>185</sup> Amongst the many, the individual is both enabled and compelled to disappear; the choices it makes and the anxiety and/or despair that follows becomes drowned out by the conformist multitudes. In such a setting, there will be no room, time or energy for life-changing, mind-altering faith. The very concept itself, faith, may be endangered.

Granted, Kierkegaard does not altogether dismiss his fellow citizens, else it seems unlikely he would have bothered to get published the remarkable amount of philosophical and theological writings he authored, where he shares so much of his own thoughts and reflections; his life's journey. Kierkegaard is a public figure, and he wants to be one. His philosophy is deeply personal, and that is exactly why other may also benefit from it. We are after all subjective beings, every one of us, and we ought to come to terms with this fundamental truth. Kierkegaard, both in his writings and in his public persona, overwhelmingly tries to appeal to the individuals within the masses. The more individuals that study him and follows his example in intense, individual Christianity, the better, yet

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<sup>184</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 357-358

<sup>185</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 254-256

whether millions or none do so, ultimately will not change an iota of his project.<sup>186</sup> Becoming, or at least trying to become, a true Christian is in the end a personal matter between yourself and God, and that alone should be your highest, perhaps only, goal in life.<sup>187</sup> The best any intellectual Christian may do is to help his fellow seeker see what the problem is, and where he must look in order to solve it. He cannot walk the path for others. This is a burden we must all undertake ourselves. Kierkegaard's Christianity is fundamentally a question of quality over quantity.<sup>188</sup> The overall state of the world means little to him, as do the so-called Christian churches, though he is highly critical of the way they distort Christianity, tricking the masses into thinking they may become Christian by getting baptized, confirmed and occasionally attending worship and receiving communion, when in fact that merely by doing so neither the priests nor the believers are any closer to the truth than the chained cavemen in Plato's allegory of the cave are.

It is in many ways easy to have sympathy, or at least an admiration, for Kierkegaard's uncompromising approach, if nothing else, so for the uncompromising heroism of it. Kierkegaard's eventual repudiation of all organized religion, and of political and social compromises<sup>189</sup>, makes it very hard to follow his path though. He is by nature a rebel, rebelling against the culture and norms of the society he lived in, that is superficially Christian but which Christianity is in reality nothing but empty decorations. Kierkegaard's aim is to become a Christian within Christendom, by rejecting the public faith, he shall find the true faith, undiluted by social and political adjustments. Kierkegaard's perception of the true faith may entail that Christianity, or at least genuine Christianity, is unlikely to ever gain a mass following. Indeed, a Christian culture, or a Christian population, is fundamentally an oxymoron, because true Christianity can never thrive in a crowd, or even in a small group. Every one of us must seek out God by ourselves. The individual and God are the only components that truly matter. Culture, bureaucracy and even doctrine itself are distractions. Indeed, the *Christian faith* has been overshadowed by the *Christian religion*, and the two are not the same thing, nor ever was. Kierkegaard goes so far as to state that Christ, in the gospels, do not espouse a doctrine, but rather a new way of life. It is after his

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<sup>186</sup> Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (København: Gyldendal A/S, 2014), p. 160-161

<sup>187</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 112

<sup>188</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 60

<sup>189</sup> Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 358

death, beginning with Paul and the other apostles, that Christianity becomes a doctrine, and thus begins the earliest sprouts of the separation between Christ's faith and the Christian religion.<sup>190</sup> For Kierkegaard, true faith is by necessity an individual undertaking, and only that. It is a relationship between each and every one of us, and God. Other people cannot partake in this special relationship, they can only try to establish their own, with God.

### 7.1 A (somewhere in the) middle ground?

But perhaps we are setting up a false dichotomy. I feel secure in saying that Swinburne's apologetics, while compelling and sound in and of themselves, risks neglecting the subjective experience and the trust typically required from the faithful, certainly in Christianity. Swinburne's insistence that not only is faith equal to science, as well as his belief that we may gain a priori and inductive understanding of God by philosophical studies and natural theology, makes him quite radical also among Christian apologists. There are more moderate views to be found. For example in the case of Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga, while arguing that the existence, and to some degree nature, of God can be proven by rational use of epistemology, does not follow Swinburne in thinking that God can be proven through a priori natural theology, and thereby subscribes to a more moderate version of epistemic heroism, which Plantinga himself dubs "reformed epistemology"<sup>191</sup>, which again is considered not the only alternative to fideism, Kierkegaardian or otherwise, but rather considered to be another extreme in the field.

Perhaps it would be beneficial to briefly discuss the religious foundation of another philosopher, who alongside Plantinga is somewhere in the middle of Swinburne and Kierkegaard. William Lane Craig is another renowned Christian apologist, famous and even feared for his frequent debates with prominent atheist and agnostics.<sup>192</sup> Debates that focuses on the philosophical, the physical and historical aspects of faith. Naturally, these requires that both parties, also the Christian apologist, relies on rational arguments and objective experiences. The point is precisely to show that being a Christian does not force you to discard reason. And yet, Craig also makes it perfectly clear that while he absolutely believes that reason must be a part of the defence of (Christian) faith, he insists that for

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<sup>190</sup>Eriksen, *Den fromme spotteren* (Finland: Forlaget Press, 2013), p. 318

<sup>191</sup>Pritchard, "Faith and Reason", p. 101-103

<sup>192</sup>Sam Harris has described Craig as "the one Christian apologist who seems to have put the fear of God into many of my fellow atheists". ("William Lane Craig puts the fear of God in atheists", YouTube video, 02:10, "drcraigvideos", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpMOD-MHyzs>)

him, the reasonability of Christianity as such is not paramount. The cornerstone of his personal faith is an intense personal divine revelation he rather suddenly experienced "on September 11, 1965, at around 8:00 o'clock in the evening."<sup>193</sup> It is this experience, not intense studying of philosophy and theology, that is the basis of his own faith. He then proceeds to describe and criticise the academic theological discourse in his own youth in the sixties as one dominated by scepticism and cynicism, where:

*Among the students, doubt was touted as a virtue of the mature Christian life, and one was supposed to follow unflinchingly the demands of reason wherever it might lead. I remember well one of my theology professors commenting that if he were persuaded that Christianity were unreasonable, then he would renounce Christianity.*

*Now that frightened and troubled me. For me, Christ was so real and had invested my life with such significance that I could not make the confession of my professor. If somehow through my studies my reason were to turn against my faith, then so much the worse for my reason! It would only mean that I had made some mistake in my reasoning.*<sup>194</sup>

Craig here makes it perfectly clear that his own faith is not built upon logical reasoning. While a proponent of apologetics, it is his inner conviction of the fundamental truth of Christianity. The unpleasantness of the early encounters with rationalist theology made him for a period approach Kierkegaard's thought of rejecting reason in the meeting of faith. Finding this unsatisfying he keeps studying, and eventually becomes convinced, through the study of apologetics, «that reason might be used to show the systematic consistency of Christian faith without thereby becoming the basis of that faith.»<sup>195</sup> For an example, Craig (as Swinburne) believes that there are strong, empirical evidence and implications for why the resurrection of Jesus is true, which again proves that he, Jesus, had a miraculous nature.<sup>196</sup> Regarding Kierkegaard, I will remind of two points there. 1) Kierkegaard himself maintains that any empirical evidence (or counter-evidence) regarding the truth of Jesus' resurrection and Christianity are irrelevant. That is not only a rejection of counterarguments to Christianity, but also of positive ones. Even if reason and empirical evidence ends up

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<sup>193</sup> Craig, 2007, "Faith and Doubt", on *Reasonable Faith*

<sup>194</sup> Craig, 2007, "Faith and Doubt", on *Reasonable Faith*

<sup>195</sup> Craig, 2007, "Faith and Doubt", on *Reasonable Faith*

<sup>196</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Illinois, Good News Publishers, 2008), p. 395-396

supporting Christian faith and its claims, be they scientific or historical, nothing of true value has been gained.<sup>197</sup> Faith built simply on reason, with all its fickleness and inherent doubting, is no true faith at all. Craig implicitly acknowledges this, because he readily admits that his faith is not preconditioned upon reason, but upon revelation. And that his own revelation was an experience so dramatic and profound that whatever sceptical arguments can be mustered, it cannot threaten the surety of the one that has experienced the Holy Spirit. 2) But even if those of true faith can safely deal with any amount of scepticism and approximations without coming to spiritual harm, that only means that the personal, inner faith is secure. What of those that have not (yet?) received the Spirit? Unless they have been fortunate enough to have been born into Christianity, and the correct version at that, they must by necessity be persuaded by other means. There seems to be no other way, and though Kierkegaard might have afforded himself the luxury of ignoring this, Christian philosophers as of today cannot. Regarding faith, apologetics is not the goal in and of itself, and it is important to remember that. Yet even so, it seems that even the apologist must admit that the experience of faith is at its heart and core a mysterious one. Reason might be a useful tool, but there will come a time and a point where it can no longer serve to bring us closer to God. At the core of faith then, is a sense of mystery. But that does not entail that everything about it must be mysterious

*The point is this: the secret to dealing with doubt in the Christian life is not to resolve all of one's doubts. One will always have unanswered questions. Rather, the secret is learning to live victoriously with one's unanswered questions. By understanding the true foundation of our faith and by assigning the proper role to argument and evidence, we can prevent unanswered questions from turning into destructive doubts. In such a case, we shall not have answers to all our questions, but in a deeper sense that won't matter. For we shall know that our faith is true on the basis of the Spirit's witness, and we can live confidently even while having questions we cannot answer. That's why it is so important to keep in mind the proper relationship between faith and reason.*<sup>198</sup>

What is then interesting and ironic, perhaps even amusing, is to note that the overlaying lengthy quote could more or less fit also the Kierkegaardian approach, of whom Craig (and

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<sup>197</sup> Kierkegaard, *Avsluttende uvitenskapelig etterskrift* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1994), p. 41-44

<sup>198</sup> Craig, 2007, "Faith and Doubt", on *Reasonable Faith*

of course Swinburne) are deeply critical, if not outright contemptuous. It is an admission that reason can only get us so far. This is of course what Kierkegaard thinks as well. Kierkegaard, who was a highly educated and cultivated man, is not hostile towards reason per se, but rather towards the notion that it should or could be used in an attempt to somehow subjugate God. Reason is mundane and worldly, God is of an entirely different nature. And, like Craig and Swinburne, Kierkegaard makes it perfectly clear that he believes that there are questions regarding God we cannot truly answer, much less comprehend.<sup>199</sup> To attempt to totally disband with all doubt before starting on faith is a fool's errand, and the probably result is that we never truly will get anywhere further. There are always new doubts that may be raised, new objections to be made. These doubts should not be ignored, but they should not be put at the centre of the faith. That is exactly what faith at its core is, to proceed, regardless of doubts, forward. If then the apologists may admit only that , perhaps it would be possible to bridge the gap between themselves and Kierkegaard, provided that Kierkegaard, or his modern adherents at least, could agree that reason might be useful in a society where the knowledge and outward adherence to Christian dogmas and thinking cannot be taken for granted.

## 8 Chapter 8 – Conclusions

Regarding the initial challenge of who is (the most) right in their approach towards religious faith, Søren Kierkegaard and Richard Swinburne, I do conclude that both of them have valid points in their approaches. That is not to say that they are both equally right and/or equally wrong. Swinburne's thinking and reasoning, while impressive and fascinating in their organized, methodical building, are in the end attempts at imposing objective criteria on experiences that must be, by their very nature, subjective and personal. Swinburne is not unaware of this dimension of faith, of course, and he does acknowledge it in passing. But at the same time, it does become clear that he does not give much regard to religious arguments based on subjective experiences. His philosophical works, at the end of the day, is to force objective criteria and epistemology upon faith, and by creating and showing evidence for why Christianity is logically sound and true, force his reader into accepting his conclusions and believe as he himself does. And this is, at the risk of being banal, simply not

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<sup>199</sup> Moser, McCreary, "Kierkegaard's conception of God", 2010, p. 131-134

how religious faith tends to work. Faith is a personal matter, a personal choice. Religion may very well be a collective and social institution, but when religious believers, be they Christian, Muslims or Hindu, describe their faith, logical compulsion is not the typical basis, but rather passion and a sense of deeply personal commitment and contact with something that one may not be able to fully understand, but still can sense and trust. I conclude that Swinburne, in his decades-long endeavours to prove Christianity's logical coherence and its compatibility with science and epistemology, has forgotten something crucial: The close relationship the faithful seeks with his or her god. While I do think he would strenuously deny this, it seems to me that we have to, judging by his philosophical works at least, to place Swinburne together with Craig's professor: He is a Christian because he thinks that Christianity is the most rational option, and only because of that. I am not saying that I believe that this is how Swinburne himself would describe his faith. His personal piety and reasoning is in the end only for him to know. Rather, I say that by studying his works and accepting his conclusions, his public thinking, this is the conclusion you will end up with.

Did Kierkegaard then get it right? Not quite. For while it is true that Kierkegaard convincingly marks out a difference between the inner, subjective truths of religious experience and the objective truths of empiricism, his insistence that faith must altogether discard the latter seems perplexing. It seems to circumscribe and demean the God that is in everything, that he only can be found in our own minds. And even if our own subjective and personal commitments represent the highest aspect and echelon of faith, how do we get there? Kierkegaard do think that faith in God is a great blessing, that is for certain. But for that to be even possible, it requires that the opportunity is present, and that groups and individuals alike are aware of it. And when there exist alternative views, both from other faiths and from no faith at all, then what other choices are there than to argue, both for the soundness and reasonableness of your own faith, and for the flaws and failings of the alternatives. Apologetics, absolutely including Richard Swinburne's works and thinking, are invaluable tools in these endeavours. They are turning the weapons of religious faiths opponents towards themselves. Swinburne has accepted the challenge made by sceptics and atheists, and gone forth to show why the evidence for theism in general and Christianity in particular is strong. And for that, Christians ought to be grateful. So long as they remember that this alone is not enough. It is not logical and objective acceptance that Kierkegaard wants, but

personal and courageous commitment. Faith is, after all, just that. Daring to go forward, even when you cannot be certain. Because only by doing so can you ever have a reasonable hope of finding out if you were right to make the leap. In order for faith to be truly complete, it must be of such a nature that reason may no longer assail it. But in order to get to this ideal state however, some application of reason and logic must first be used. It seems hard to imagine how Christianity can survive if it refuses to engage with the present culture at all. If Kierkegaard was "a Christian within Christendom"<sup>200</sup>, perhaps today's Christians must strive to be Christians within rationality. Rationality, imagined or real, is perceived to be the highest virtue in modern, Western societies. The core of our culture and our thinking. Christians must understand it, and be able to explain why it is current scepticism towards theism is insufficient and/or false, else they cannot rebel from within it. Apologetics could thus represent the need of taking a step back. The Christian culture Kierkegaard attacks is perhaps shallow and hypocritical, but at least it was possible to shame it for being insufficiently Christian. In a culture where the label "unchristian" is just as likely to be worn as a badge of honour as not, dismissing reason-based arguments from the get-go may not be possible. If one like, one could even regard it as an attempt at re-proselytising, going back to the earliest Christian in the aftermath of the ascension. To try to give the religion itself a certain comeback, which it first then will be possible, desirable and even necessary to rebel against. No one said it was easy to be human.

As far as I know there exists no church that claims Kierkegaard as their spiritual leader, nor do I think such an entity would be possible. For Kierkegaard, we all stand alone in front of God, and that is how it must be. But for the true believer, that is of no consequence, except for the obviously lamentable truth that so many people will never get around to seeking God, preoccupied as they are with their trivial and ridiculously fleeting, insignificant choices and decisions; they will therefore never make the only choice that truly matters. This changes nothing in regard to Christianity. God's power, wisdom and eternity cannot be threatened the least, even if all of mankind were to turn away from him. And obviously, genuine devotion cannot simply be built upon fear or rational compulsion, but only love, willingly given. And the love must be both unconditional and forever enduring. One cannot force someone to love another person, group or doctrine, neither by the threat of violence,

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<sup>200</sup> Garaventa, "Kierkegaard and Christianity", p. 491



the threat of hellfire or by intellectual bludgeoning. In fact, the apologetic attempts of doing so seems to suggest that behind all the intricate and elegant logical systems and arguments, there hides deep inside the apologist's soul a deep fear and insecurity, a gnawing worry that what they believe in and espouse may not be so certain at all. Behind all rationalization there is at least an element of doubt, that maybe, just maybe, our faith is misplaced, no more than empty exultations and pleadings towards an enormous, incomprehensible, uncaring nothingness. If you need to prove God and Christianity, you are not really fully committed to either. This is in the end the great danger of approximations, the feeble and frantic attempts to claw closer to God's infiniteness by human reasoning. What more, it may even be regarded as sacrilegious, because reasoning oneself towards God seems to imply that God is placed in a submissive position to human reasoning. The project is doomed to fail because it lacks the first and the most important of all the building blocks: the unconditional and unquestioning commitment to God, to silently blow down before Him with all you got. The apologist then is afraid, afraid because try as he might he can never truly free himself from anxiety and despair. It is not possible to unquestioningly trust something or someone, yet at the same insisting on the prerogative of questioning everything. And the true Christian is never afraid, because his faith is not a mere theory, but a type of knowledge, or at least experience, so deep and sure that there exists no word for it in any language. For languages are human constructions, while the supreme faith, which is also the supreme knowledge, is divine.

It may seem as if both Swinburne and Kierkegaard, while attempting to glorify God, may end up doing exactly the opposite. Make God too mysterious, or try to understand Him too much and too closely. Either way, one risks ending up with an entity that regardless of its relationship to objective reasoning, seems a rather poor and small target for devotion.

This means that apologetics must accept to be a means to an end, and it must be acknowledged that one cannot reach the end, that is to say genuine Christianity, by apologetics alone. Sooner or later one must discard all intellectual defences, all precautions, and allow oneself to fall madly in love. Implicitly this may be thought of as a rejection of the very starting point of apologetics: that objective truths about God are possible to discover and fathom by humans. It seems that Kierkegaard rejects this notion, but more than that, he considers the whole idea, that mankind can force its way closer to God by building blocks on

building blocks, to be next to blasphemy. There is a tension between different impulses here. Rationality teaches us to question everything, while faith requires us to commit to something without evidence. Certainty, as far as that is possible, might come in both, though by very different means. Through rational thinking we can deduce ourselves towards hypotheses and conclusions that are more or less impossible to falsify, and whom we are then compelled to consider true. Through revelations and visions, we may experience the divine. These are crucial differences. Rationality strives to always be as objective as possible, while faith is inherently subjective. Rationality claims that anyone presented with the evidence, will, if they study it in good faith, adopt the same conclusions. Faith is in its essence subjective, due to its personal nature, and divine experiences are never guaranteed, nor is it so that visions are the same for anyone experiencing them. Even though both concepts promise knowledge, they are not the same, and attempts to fuse them together can never succeed entirely. Conflicts may very well be inevitable. And then we are required to choose which path to take, hoping that in the end the conflict may be solved. This does not seem to be what Kierkegaard, or most other theologians, would consider satisfying Christianity.

But we do not need to consider Swinburne's theism an end in and of itself. Rather, we can regard his philosophy as the beginning of a lifelong, if not eternal, journey. Apologetics can be understood as a tool, useful in resisting Christianity's most uninformed, yet at the same time often most aggressive, adversaries? It is important to remember that at the core of Christian doctrine, the relationship between God and Man, both as a species and as an individual, is one of love, a love that is unconditional. It follows from this that sooner or later rational considerations and scepticism must be put aside. We may still have unanswered questions, to be sure, but they do not rock nor challenge the core of the faith. Unconditional love cannot be shaken, but at the same time it ought to be so sure of itself that some disagreements and difficult questions safely can be raised.

Just because we reject epistemic heroism, we do not need to resort to epistemic *capitulation*. Epistemic reasoning can be helpful, even crucial, and there can still be room for subjective experience and beliefs. Faith and objectivity are not the same, but that is not to say that they are mutually excluding one another. In fact, there will always be at least a tiny speck of faith in all scientific knowledge. (For example, in the theory of gravity.) Likewise, all

faith must have some objective knowledge attached to it. It is no longer feasible to espouse belief in Greek or Norse paganism, because these religions are scientifically refutable. And it is necessary to understand the context and setting Jesus operated in, and to be able to rebut philosophical and scientific challenges towards Christianity. Christianity claims to be objectively true, God does exist no matter what we may think of Him, and He is the creator of everything. Therefore, it follows that at least something can be learned of Him by studying and contemplating His being and His creation. Anything else seems to impose human limits on the infiniteness of God, and to reduce His dominion to a small cupboard within our own minds. How can faith thrive when that is the case? At the end of the day, it is not rational inquiries and evidence-based objectivity that motivates faith, at least not Christian faith. It is a doctrine of love, and requires at least some element of trust in order to be fully understood. Scholars, philosophers and scientists alike, are by their profession required to doubt everything, and may easily forget that. But at the same time, what apart from apologetics can help ensuring that we fall in love with the right deity? Faith without trust is stillborn, faith without justification impotent.

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