

READING KIERKEGAARD ON FAITH THROUGH JOHANNES CLIMACUS AND JOHANNES DE SILENTIO ¹

Kajornpat Tangyin
Assumption University of Thailand

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีเนื้อหาเกี่ยวกับความคิดเรื่องความเชื่อของคีร์เคการ์ด ในการอ่านงานของคีร์เคการ์ด ผู้เขียนไม่มั่นใจว่านี่คือความคิดที่แท้จริงของคีร์เคการ์ดหรือเป็นเพียงแค่วิธีคิดของนามแฝงที่ใช้ การที่จะตีความความคิดเรื่องความเชื่อของคีร์เคการ์ดไม่ใช่เรื่องง่าย และบางทีเราจะเห็นมุมมองที่หลากหลายหลากหลายของความเชื่อหรือกับความหลากหลายของนามแฝงของเขา ในบทความนี้ผู้เขียนต้องการมุ่งเฉพาะความคิดเรื่องความเชื่อผ่านการอ่านจากสองนามแฝง คือ Johannes Climacus และ Johannes de Silentio จากหนังสือสองเล่มก็คือ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (CUP) และ *Fear and Trembling* (FT) ในส่วนแรกของบทความนี้บรรยายความคิดเรื่องความเชื่อตามที่คณะของ Climacus และส่วนที่สองจะเป็นเรื่องการเคลื่อนไหวผ่านการก้าวกระโดดของความเชื่อจากทัศนะของ Silentio และท้ายที่สุดผู้เขียนนำเสนอความคิดเกี่ยวกับความยากลำบากและการท้าทายจากการอ่านงานสองเล่มนี้ที่มีต่อผู้ต้องการจะเป็นคริสตชน

Abstract

This paper is concerned with Kierkegaard's the notion of faith. In reading Kierkegaard's works one is never sure if they are encountering the real Kierkegaard's thoughts or merely his pseudonyms. To divine what Kierkegaard means by the notion of faith is not an easy task, as we encounter different perspectives of faith along with his pseudonyms. In this paper I want to focus on his idea on faith through my reading of two pseudonyms; Johannes Climacus and Johannes de Silentio from the books; *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (CUP) and *Fear and Trembling* (FT). This paper will first describe the notion of faith from Climacus' point of view, and secondly on the movement to the *leap of faith* from Silentio's point of view. Lastly I will reflect on the difficulties and challenges in reading these two works for those who wish to *become* Christian.

'Were your faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you. (Luke, 17: 6) ²

I

Faith is one of the main themes of Kierkegaard's two works, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* and *Fear and Trembling*, and his account of faith aims at answering his own question about the meaning of human existence. In the *Journal* Kierkegaard says, "What I really need is to get clear about *what I am to do*....to see what it really is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth that is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*" (Kierkegaard, 1978, p.8). It is clear that *the idea for which he is willing*

to live and die for is faith. But what does Kierkegaard mean by faith? His account of faith is closely related to his biography. And he is one of the philosophers whose philosophy has essential connection to his real life. Likewise his philosophy aims at the meaning of his personal existence. He does not refer to a general conception of truth, a *truth for everyone*, but, “a truth for me.” This is also a response to the philosophical situation of nineteenth century Europe. Many thinkers inquire into the objective truth, and consider *man in general*, but the existing individual is overlooked. But for Kierkegaard, human beings are first existing individuals who have a will, through which they can decide what they want to become, and could not be characterized in advance.

For Kierkegaard, the existing individual could not be reduced to only a part of any system of thought, or any organized religion or formal social structure. This individuality does not exist only in statement or proposition, but in real existence as human person. Speculative thinkers often overlook the importance of individual persons and view them too abstractly. According to Levinas, the irreducible of individuality is one of Kierkegaard’s contributions to European thought. He says,

The strong conception of existence which was Kierkegaard’s contribution to European thought insists on two basic points. The first is that human subjectivity, together with its dimension of interiority, needs to be maintained as an absolute, as something separate but located on this side of objective Being rather than beyond it. But secondly, and paradoxically, the irreducibility of the subject must be protected – on the basis of pre-philosophical experience – from the threat of idealism, even if it was idealism that first accorded a philosophical status to subjectivity. (Levinas, 1998, p.26)

Many philosophers, from its Greek beginnings up to the nineteenth century, had attempted to reach, through their pursuit of objective truth, a logical systematic explanation to take account of all things. For Kierkegaard, speculative philosophy seems to reach its culmination with Hegelian dialectic. Everything, according to Hegel, could be explained logically within his system of thought, epitomized in his statement: *What is rational is real, what is real is rational*. And this account of rationality could be applied even to the religious sphere, which means that nothing could escape his rational system of thought. Incomprehensibility is attributed to human ignorance which has not yet attained the transcendental intuition. This intuition will move us from our subjective limited reality to the objective reality, or totality. And everything exists as part of this totality. The existing individual is reduced to a part under the shadow of the whole system. The striving for the objective truth moves humans as existing individuals to be human in general, or in the words, the “human being” is separated from individual human beings. For Kierkegaard, a resistance against the objective truth of speculative thinkers, especially Hegel, has to be awakened to bring “human being” back to existing individual, so that they can find their home in the world, not in the system.

Kierkegaard, through Climacus, says: “Speculators cease to be human beings, individual existing human beings, and ‘*en famille*’ (as a family) become all sorts of things? If not, one is certainly obliged to stop with the paradox, since it is grounded in and is the expression for precisely this, that the eternal, essential truth relates itself to existing individuals with the summons that they go further and further in the inwardness of faith” (CUP, VII 183). Kierkegaard seems to love the paradox of life. He aims at preserving the paradox as a paradox, not to understand it, but to understand that it is a paradox. By no means does he reject speculative thought; he

just tries to show that there must be some sphere independent from speculative reasoning. Speculative thinkers, according to Climacus, are like dancers who are good dancers in their own way. A good dancer sometimes has a good leap to perform for the audience. But many speculative thinkers are like dancers, who believe they can fly. Climacus, in the *Postscript*, rejects this:

If a dancer could leap very high, we would admire him, but if he wanted to give the impression what he could fly – even though he could leap higher than any dancer had ever leapt before – let laughter overtake him. Leaping means to belong essentially to the earth and to respect the law of gravity so that the leap is merely the momentary, but flying means to be set free from telluric conditions, something that is reserved exclusively for winged creatures, perhaps also for inhabitants of the moon, perhaps – and perhaps that is also where the system will at long last find its true reader. To be a human being has been abolished, and every speculative thinker confuses himself with humankind, whereby he becomes something infinitely great and nothing at all. (CUP, VII 102)

Hegel, according to Climacus, might have been a good dancer if he was content merely to dance but not to try to fly. To fly would mean to understand faith. Rationality, for traditional thinkers from the middle ages to the Enlightenment, is the proper means to help man understand everything including their religious beliefs. God as the infinite also is the object of rationalization for many thinkers. This is the long last temptation of human thought to lift up, or in the other word ‘to fly’, to the infinite through finite thought. For Climacus, the infinite could not be comprehensible with finite human thought. The infinite is beyond the finite, and this gap could not be bridged through rationality. Hegel is a good exemplar of a dancer who attempts to fly, fly without wings for the infinite. Climacus wants to remind Hegel to content himself with being a good dancer. For Butler, “If one tries to think the infinite, one has already made the infinite finite...The infinite can be affirmed nonrationally and, hence, passionately, at the limits of thought, that is, at the limits of Hegelianism” (Butler, 1993, p.375). The limits of Hegelian system bring Climacus reconsider again what an account of faith is supposed to be. Rationality is not supposed to be the tool to help man understand faith. For him, the notion of faith that can be grasped by reason is always a misconception. Faith, according to him, could not be comprehended through any system of thought. On one hand, faith is related to his definition of truth: “Here is such a definition of truth: *An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth*, the highest truth there is for an existing person” (CUP, VII 170). But this definition includes uncertainty and paradox. As such the definition of faith does not *grasp* faith:

Without risk, no faith. Faith is the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am able to apprehend God objectively, I do not have faith; but because I cannot do this, I must have faith. If I want to keep myself in faith, I must continually see to it that I hold fast the objective uncertainty, see to it that in the objective uncertainty I am “out on 70,000 fathoms of water” and still have faith. (CUP, VII 170-171)

Climacus wants to show us that to intellectually apprehend God is, at the same time, to remove our faith, so that faith will have no place in the religious dimension. We still have faith because we could not comprehend God intellectually, and then faith becomes the stairway to lift up man to God, towards this absolute

incomprehensibility. What man needs at this stage is to leap into the objective uncertainty. And this leap requires the total risk as an adventure into the unseen which is absolutely unknown. Faith, in this sense, has to come out of our passion for the infinite. Just as Climacus shocks the traditional conception of Christianity when he views faith as the highest attainment that nothing can go beyond. For those who want to explain something beyond faith might not agree with him in this point, and some thinkers might not accept his view of faith in form of the infinite passion. Many thinkers and theologians may prefer to develop reason as the gift from God to open the veil of mystery, and firmly claim of all mysteries sooner or later will be understandable. He challenges all who use rationality to account for objective truth, and even theologians who want to position faith within a systematic theology. For Climacus, faith that can be understandable is not faith. To understand objectively and with certainty requires no risk, and faith has no place there.

Faith always requires risk as Climacus says: “Without risk, no faith.” With risk, faith requires a personal infinite passion, and those who have faith have to commit themselves fully into this passion despite the greatest uncertainty. For Climacus, “Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness, which is the relation of inwardness intensified to its highest. This formula fits only the one who have faith, no one else, not even a lover, or an enthusiast, or a thinker, but solely and only the one who has faith, who relates himself to the absolute paradox” (CUP, VII 532). Those who approach the infinite with objective certainty merely try to *know* the infinite intellectually, and commitment is not a requirement for them. But for those who live their lives with faith will commit themselves to the infinite with infinite passion even without any guarantee for their faith. A man with faith is a person who is not afraid of uncertainty, and the more uncertainty he encounters the more he commits himself to faith. A man with faith is a man who is ready to accept the greatest paradox, even if this paradox leads to absurdity. What does he mean by this paradox? Climacus says,

When the eternal truth relates itself to an existing person, it becomes the paradox. Through the objective uncertainty and ignorance, the paradox thrusts away in the inwardness of the existing person. But since the paradox is not in itself the paradox, it does not thrust away intensely enough, for without risk, no faith; the more risk, the more faith; the more objective reliability, the less inwardness (since inwardness is subjectivity); the less objective reliability, the deeper is the possible inwardness. When the paradox itself is the paradox, it thrusts away by virtue of the absurd, and the corresponding passion of inwardness is faith. (CUP, VII 176)

And what does Climacus mean by the absurd? He replies:

What, then, is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being, inasmuch as all immediate recognizability is pre-Socratic paganism and from the Jewish point of view is idolatry. (CUP, VII 176)

Is it possible for a man with reason to understand this paradox? If faith is the highest attainment of human being, then to remain at the level of human intellect is not enough. For Climacus, this paradox is not something that can be understood, so

ultimately we can only accept this paradox as a paradox. This seems to echo Socratic's irony: to know that I do not know. And this paradox shows us the impossibility to understand how the eternal truth comes into existence in the temporal as the infinite coming to be the finite. This is *absurd*, just as the Christian belief that God comes into existence as an existing individual. From this absurd, Climacus strongly insists on the fundamental gap between reason and faith. Faith is not the object for rational activity, and reason has its own place to play, but not in religious belief. Some may question this irrationality of faith. For Westphal, "It is not reason as such that is opposed to faith but modes of human reason that have forgotten their limits as human and have lapsed into self-deification" (Westphal, 1998, p.112). But Climacus should not be considered an irrationalist. Reason is not something to be denied. It is a gift from God, as St. Augustine claimed, but we should let it play its own role, and not extend beyond its own power.

For Climacus, the dancer is not a person who can fly. Reason is not the key to faith. Instead it is our infinite passion of the infinite, coupled with our acceptance of paradox and the absurd, which lifts us to the level of faith. Christianity was very strange and peculiar to Greek and Jewish people precisely because of this absurdity. And this absurdity has never left Christianity as long as it accepts the paradox of God coming into existence as an existing individual. According to Climacus, a man who wants to understand faith is called a "comedian".

Or there is a man who says he has faith, but now he wants to make his faith clear to himself; he wants to understand himself in his faith. Now the comedy begins again. The object of faith becomes almost probable, it becomes as good as probable, it becomes to a high degree and exceedingly probable. He has finished; he dares to say of himself that he does not believe as shoemakers and tailors or other simple folk do but that he has also understood himself in his believing. What wondrous understanding! On the contrary, he has learned to know something different about faith than he believed and has learned to know that he no longer has faith, since he almost knows, as good as knows, to a high degree and exceedingly almost knows. (CUP, VII 211)

Before faith, no one understands better than any other, whether shoemaker, tailor, or professor. We have to understand that it is not understandable. Climacus, again, says: "The person who understands the paradox will, misunderstanding, forget that Christianity is the absolute paradox (just as its newness is the paradoxical newness) precisely because it annihilates a possibility (the analogies of paganism, an eternal becoming-of-the-deity) as an illusion and turns it into actuality" (CUP, VII 506). Any dancer who takes a fine leap, seemingly wanting to fly at last will come back to the floor. A flying dancer is ridiculous and becomes a comedian. It is mere fantasy or comedy. What a man can do is only to take a leap, and this leap is taken not through reason, but the infinite passion. And this infinite passion makes human move beyond the limits of reason. For Gardiner, "In every case faith demands, not just a leap, but a leap into the rational unthinkable which presupposes divine assistance" (Gardiner, 1988, p.76). The leap here, according to Gardiner, seems to be the leap made by faith, and it is not the intellectual activity. It is the miracle. It is the highest attainment of human life and there is nothing beyond this.

II

Kierkegaard, in the book *Fear and Trembling*, provides us a narrative through his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio concerning the story of Abraham from Genesis

22. Abraham is the great father of faith for all Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions. However, Silentio talks about Abraham only in the Christian context. The point is: how Abraham acts in response to God who asks him to sacrifice his beloved son to God? And we may have further question about how we understand Abraham's act relating to his faith, and what faith is. For those who are familiar with this story may take it for granted like a sermon about Abraham and his faith. But Silentio leads us to reread again how Abraham acts on his belief in God to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac with his conviction that he will get Isaac back. How do we understand Abraham? Silentio, in *Fear and Trembling*, begins the *Preface* with this statement: "Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas, our age stages ein wirklicher Ausverkauf (a real sale)" (FT, III 57). Many ideas concerning faith are oversimplified and easy, like a clearance sale at a supermarket. Any easy answer as we always hear from a sermon might not dig deep enough into the paradox of Abraham's faith: to sacrifice Isaac and to receive Isaac back. With ethical norms, it may shock the people who hear this story suggesting that Abraham would be a murderer. He is going to kill, or to sacrifice Isaac as an offering to God. Silentio recognizes the paradox of this story by extending it to other persons who would perform the same act like Abraham.

If faith cannot make it a holy act to be willing to murder his son, then let the same judgment be passed on Abraham as on everyone else....The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he meant to sacrifice Isaac – but precisely in this contradiction is the anxiety that can make a person sleepless, and yet without this anxiety Abraham is not who he is....In other words, if faith is taken away by becoming *Nul* and *Nichts*, all that remains is the brutal fact that Abraham meant to murder Isaac, which is easy enough for anyone to imitate if he does not have faith – that is, the faith that makes it difficult for him. (FT, III 82)

What is supposed to be the ethical norm to justify Abraham's act in this case? Because of faith, or only faith that makes Abraham to be the father of faith, not a murderer. How could we understand this event on the mount in the land of Moriah? Along the way to Moriah, there is no conversation left for us, and no one knows what Abraham thinks. Abraham was thrown into the absolute paradox which is unspeakable for the other. He said nothing to Sarah, his wife, and not fully answered to Isaac by the question: Where is the lamb for the burnt offering? This is Abraham's answer: 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering'. How could he explain to Isaac that God demands his life? This story of 'the binding of Isaac' is not only Isaac alone, but for Mark C. Taylor: "The binding of Isaac is a figure for other bindings. This narrative might better be entitled: "The binding of Abraham." The binding of the son repeats and extends the binding of the father, even as it seems to break the tie that binds the two together as one" (Taylor, 1993, p.76). This binding does not mean only in physical body that is bound but it links to other questions like human relationship, freedom, rationality, and moral law. As the father who loves his only son, Abraham will perform an act that breaks up his relationship to his son. And he will break the moral law that binds all men to live together in society because of God's command.

Abraham occupies a place no one knows what he thinks, and no one understands what he is going to do. Some may question him in the manner that he negotiated with God for Sodom and Gomorrah: "Are you going to destroy the just man with the sinner?" "Will the judge of the whole earth not administer justice?" (Gen 18: 23, 25). He dares to raise questions to God for Sodom and Gomorrah, but in

the case of his own beloved son Isaac, he keeps silence. “Here I am” is the absolute answer for a man of faith like Abraham. Why does Abraham not ask God for his only son and himself? For Abraham, his faith might lead him to accept the angel’s statement, “for nothing is impossible to God” (Luke 1:37). To sacrifice Isaac and to receive Isaac back is not understandable for man, that is why Silentio states: “In order to perceive the prodigious paradox of faith, a paradox that makes a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham again, which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops” (FT, III 103).

I repeat here again: *faith begins precisely where thought stops*. Along the way to the mount in the land of Moriah, Abraham takes with him not only fire, wood, two servants, Isaac, but also faith. Because of his faith, he left everything else behind and keeps faith in his blood and bones as he always answers to God: “Here I am.” He is ready for everything that God commands. About his character, Silentio expresses, “By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers and became an alien in the promised land. He left one thing behind, took one thing along: he left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith”(FT, III 69). For Silentio, “faith begins precisely where thought stops,” it is by no means to his firmly assertion about the contradiction between faith and thinking. On the contrary, faith itself begins only when thinking stops. Some may interpret faith begins when thinking is limited. When thinking stops, doubt also cast away from us. As far as we are thinking, questioning, doubting, faith is not there. Abraham lives his faith in his real life, not only in proposition or in any system of thought. Abraham never doubt in sacrificing Isaac and his beloved son never will be lost because “for nothing is impossible to God.” For Silentio, if Abraham doubts, he would do something else, as Silentio says:

But Abraham had faith and did not doubt; he believed the preposterous. If Abraham had doubted, then he would have done something else, something great and glorious, for how could Abraham do anything else but what is great and glorious! He would have gone to Mount Moriah, he would have split the firewood, lit the fire, drawn the knife. He would have cried out to God, “Reject not this sacrifice; it is not the best that I have, that I know very well, for what is an old man compared with the child of promise, but it is the best I can give you. Let Isaac never find this out so that he may take comfort in his youth.” He would have thrust the knife into his own breast. He would have been admired in the world, and his name would never be forgotten; but it is one thing to be admired and another to become a guiding star that saves the anguished. (FT, III 73)

If Abraham begins to doubt and decide to sacrifice his life instead of his beloved son, he might be great like any other great hero who sacrifices himself for his beloved person. His name will be honored and immortal, and becomes the story from generation to generation. But he has faith, and this faith is the absurd for anyone else. How could we believe in Abraham sacrificing his son and receiving his son back again? When he begs God for Sodom and Gomorrah, it is understandable. It is his love of just people as one human being love for mankind. But in the case of Isaac, we can only stand with *fear and trembling* before him. People tend to give this story only lip service and oversimplify its reference to faith, like a fairy tale. But for Silentio, faith leaves him in silence. For him, his difficulty to understand Hegel is not the same as his inability to grasp Abraham’s faith. He says, “Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered...I stretch every muscle to get a perspective, and at the very instant I become paralyzed” (FT, III 84). To understand Hegel, according to Silentio, is possible if we take time considering Hegelian

philosophy, but not the case of Abraham. It is always beyond our penetration. At that stage of faith, no one else except Abraham stands alone before God. Faith is not just a consistent set of propositions in a complete system of thought, but it exists where “thinking stops.” Faith is not an object of our intellect. It is beyond the category of reason. It is the inward experience of God. It is not just a short story where it ceases to be when that story comes to an end. It does not end after Abraham receives Isaac back. His response “Here I am” is always and everywhere for God from the beginning to the end. His relationship to God is anything, anywhere, anytime, and nothing could separate him from God, even his beloved son. Abraham follows the call of God in his own vocation. Each one has each own vocation to respond to God. It means that every one can be like Abraham in faith, not in his particular trial of faith. Kellenberger insists, “What makes Abraham the father of faith is his faith, not his trial of faith” (Kellenberger, 1997, p.48). We can see many great persons in the history of mankind and the different criteria to justify their greatness. According to Silentio, what is the criterion to justify the greatness of Abraham? Let us read his *Speech in Praise of Abraham*:

No! No one who was great in the world will be forgotten, but everyone was great in his own way, and everyone in proportion to the greatness of that which he loved. He who loved himself became great by virtue of himself, and he who loved other men became great by his devotedness, but he who loved God became the greatest of all...There was one who was great by virtue of his power, and one who was great by virtue of his wisdom, and one who was great by virtue of his hope, and one who was great by virtue of his love, but Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself. (FT, III 69)

Silentio gives us an account of the degree of greatness, and where his criterion comes from: he who loves God became greater than all; he who expects the impossible became greater than all; he who strives with God became greater than all; and greater than all was the one who believes in God. And this, for Silentio, belongs to Abraham. However, Silentio exalts Abraham concerning his love, his striving, his expectation of the impossible, and his faith in God. Silentio probably wants to show us the movement to faith as the movement from the great to the greater; from those who love themselves to those who love others and greater than all are those who love God. And those who expect the impossible are like Abraham who expects the absurd in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and expectation to receive Isaac back. Heraclitus of Ephesus once said long time ago concerning faith: “If you do not expect the unexpected you will not discover it; for it cannot be tracked down and offers no passage” (Barnes, 1987, p.113). To expect the unexpected is the point that Heraclitus claims about faith, and we can see the similarity between Silentio and Heraclitus. The prophet Isaiah, in his warning to Ahaz, proclaims the character of faith: “If you do not stand by me, you will not stand at all” (Isaiah 7: 9). Let the angel remind us always: *for nothing is impossible to God*.

Silentio makes a comparison between the tragic hero and the knight of faith, between Agamemnon and Abraham. Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek forces in the Trojan War, has to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis in order to calm the wind for his troops. For Silentio, Agamemnon is the tragic hero who sacrifices his daughter to save the army. In his sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia, every one understands how much he has to sacrifice and how

difficult to make a decision. And everybody pays respect to his act of suffering leading to the triumph. But Agamemnon's tragic hero is incompatible with Abraham's the knight of faith. Mark C. Taylor remarks of this distinction between Agamemnon and Abraham:

Agamemnon's slaying of Iphigenia is an expression of civic duty. His fellow citizens understand his impasse and empathize with the agony he suffers. Furthermore, they admire Agamemnon for his willingness to set aside personal feelings and responsibilities for his daughter in order to secure the common good. When understood within its proper social context, Agamemnon's deed is not horrifying but is completely reasonable.... Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac suspends or transgresses the ethical in the name of something that surpasses or is exterior to the entire moral order. Though faith is not unrelated to morality, religion cannot be reduced to ethics. (Taylor, 1993, p.79)

For tragic hero, he knows that he acts according to the superior duty in which he himself has to sacrifice something or someone he loves. His act is not something surpassed by the ethical sphere. His ethical duty is within the universal. He suffers from his decision but it is the most reasonable for that moment. The tragic hero is great in his own way, and his name will never be forgotten. Agamemnon is great in his moral duty to the state, and his act is always understandable. But it is not for Abraham. Silentio considers Abraham the knight of faith who suspends the ethical sphere to God. Morality does not contradict with faith, but faith could not be reduced merely to ethics. There must be a movement beyond the ethical sphere, this is why Silentio entitled *Problema I, Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?* (FT, III 104) and the suspension of the ethical to faith is the great paradox as he says: "Faith is precisely the paradox that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, is justified before it, not as inferior to it but as superior... that the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute" (FT, III 106). Agamemnon might have to make a tragic choice. Abraham does not encounter the tragic, but an absolute paradox. This supposes to be the difference between Agamemnon and Abraham. "The tragic hero relinquishes himself in order to express the universal; the knight of faith relinquishes the universal in order to become the single individual" (FT, III 124). Agamemnon renounces himself for the state through his moral duty and everyone recognizes his justification. Abraham sacrifices his beloved son Isaac because of his response "Here I am" to God, not to save the nation or anything else. He himself alone stands in his relation to God, and at that point ethical norms cannot be applicable. It is not understandable and not within the universality of reason. Silentio says: "The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself; he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others, but he has no vain desire to instruct others" (FT, III 128). For Silentio, this event is only Abraham and for Abraham, not someone else. And it is impossible for Abraham to tell anyone about this event. Silentio says: "Abraham cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me" (FT, III 110). He just keeps 'the silence.' And again he adds: "Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal, for thereby it is canceled. Faith is this paradox, and the single individual simply cannot make himself understandable to anyone... The one knight of faith cannot help the other at all" (FT, III 120).

III

The important part of Kierkegaard whether in the *Postscript* or *Fear and Trembling* is his critical view of Hegel and other speculative thinkers who subsume the individual a part of the system. For him, faith is beyond an account of reason and religious experience exists in relation between the existing individual and the absolute. For the case of Abraham, Silentio can speak about him in his many aspects and shows us conditions and movements of faith. But as for faith itself, Silentio maintains ‘silence.’ Abraham maintains silence when he leaves his fatherland. Before he arrives at the mount in the land of Moriah, no one knows what he wants to do. Sarah knows nothing and Isaac breaks the silence when it reaches the critical point. Behind the scenes, only Abraham and his God know. At this religious stage, this suspension belongs to the absolute individuality. Abraham, according to Silentio, seems to be a counter-Hegelianism as Butler says, “According to Kierkegaard, Hegel fails to understand that the individual is higher than the universal ethical norm, that there are times when ethical laws must be ‘suspended’ or ‘surrendered’ so that a higher value can be affirmed, namely, the value of faith – which, of course, for Kierkegaard, is always an individual affair” (Butler, 1993, p.381).

This is the confrontation between Abraham and Hegel, the individual and the totality. Silentio probably views that the Hegelian system, in the end, will lead to the destruction of faith rather than to support it. Abraham, therefore, is the prototypical person who moves beyond any system of thought. Faith in any system of thought seems to cease to be faith because it submits to be understood through rational explanation. For Silentio, this is a wrong view about faith. And some may ask what faith is, what is the proper answer? Silentio, in *Fear and Trembling*, just takes account of the movement of faith by retelling the story of Abraham. The main question in this project supposes to ask how to be the knight of faith rather than what faith really is. In this point, Abraham the knight of faith steps beyond the universal ethical norms, and beyond Hegel’s system of thought. To be a knight of faith, for Silentio, requires a prior stage of infinite resignation. Silentio says: “Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith” (FT, III 96). The knight of infinite resignation is a person who feels not at home in the world and wants to renounce everything in order to be back to the infinite. His view of happiness in this world is incompatible with blissfulness in God. “Infinite resignation is that shirt mentioned in an old legend. The thread is spun with tears, bleached with tears; the shirt is sewn in tears – but then it also gives protection better than iron or steel....In infinite resignation there is peace and rest and comfort in the pain, that is, when the movement is made normatively” (FT, III 96). A knight of infinite resignation could not be a knight of faith because he still could not stand on the strength of the absurdity.

For Silentio, “Through resignation I renounce everything....By faith I do not renounce anything, on the contrary, by faith I receive everything exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains....By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac” (FT, III 98-99). For those who could not stand on the strength of the absurdity deserve not to be knight of faith. Faith, for Silentio, is not a plain word and can have an easy talk to anyone who stays in religion. Infinite resignation is prior and necessary to faith. If we stop there, it is not yet faith. Faith is like a double

movement from his renouncing of everything, and his ‘strength of the absurd’ of receiving back everything. A knight of infinite resignation does not mean one who withdraws from the world. He is not the one who lives an ascetic form of life. On the contrary, he is in the world as ordinary person like tax collector, and any person. But we could not find any means to judge him from outside. He lives with high hopes to attain the infinite but he seems to end with his conviction about this unattainable. He could not live and be satisfied with the perishable and finite things in the world. He could not accept the absurd with joy. He could not climb up to the statement: for nothing is impossible to God. In the movement of faith, Silentio confesses: “But this movement I cannot make. As soon as I want to begin, everything reverses itself, and I take refuge in the pain of resignation. I am able to swim in life, but I am too heavy for this mythical hovering” (FT, III 99).

A knight of faith, according to Silentio, is the highest attainment and nothing is higher. Silentio accepts his limits and could not stand on ‘the strength of absurdity’ as a knight of faith. He says, “For my part, I presumably can describe the movement of faith, but I cannot make them. In learning to go through the motions of swimming, one can be suspended from the ceiling in a harness and then presumably describes the movements, but one is not swimming” (FT, III 88). Silentio just describes the movement of faith like a trainer who teaches us how to swim, but he himself can stand only on the edge of a swimming pool. He could not take a leap into the absurdity. What the best he can be is only a knight of infinite resignation. This might be the reason why he could not explain what faith is, and he realizes that he could not be like Abraham, a knight of faith. “He must be ‘silent’, for he cannot understand faith. He stands in awe before Abraham’s faith and cannot comprehend it. But, though he cannot directly state what faith is, Johannes can indirectly communicate the nature and demands of faith, which he does by describing and celebrating Abraham through retelling the story of Abraham’s trial of faith” (Kellenberger, 1997, p.12).

A knight of faith is not a tragic hero who plays the most ethical significance within the universal, and his act is always understandable for everyone. A knight of faith is not a knight of infinite resignation, but infinite resignation is the prior requirement of being a knight of faith. A knight of infinite resignation just renounces everything he loves and wants to cherish and could not take the additional step through the ‘strength of absurdity’ to grasp back all what he renounces. Silentio seems to renounce everything through his infinite resignation but he dares not to take this leap into the absurdity. He merely admires at a distance Abraham who is able to take this leap. A man of faith is the one who can hold the ‘strength of the absurd’ and carry it along in his life as Abraham carried it through his whole life. Before Abraham, Silentio stood with fear and trembling. He might not have understood how Abraham took his leap. Faith, therefore, is possible when the movement of infinite resignation takes a leap into the absurdity. That is the paradox of why the particular is above the universal; a knight of faith is above the tragic hero. A tragic hero stands on his moral duty in the universal, but a knight of faith takes a leap beyond the universal ethical sphere. Faith is, then, beyond the ethical dimension or: ‘a teleological suspension of the ethical.’ A teleological suspension of the ethical to faith allows the movement from infinite resignation to the state of being a knight of faith.

For Butler, fear and trembling has to turn into the state of grace because as far as we fear and doubt, we will still be far away from faith (Butler, 1993, p.380). Doubt and fear will move us from a state of grace and cause us to sink in the water like Peter when he begins to fear the storm, whereupon Jesus said to him: ‘Man of little faith,

why did you doubt?’ (Matthew 14: 34). And with his disciples on a boat in the midst of storm: ‘Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?’ (Mark 4:40). These words might be in accord with what Silentio wants to express about faith in *Fear and Trembling*. Then the character of fear and trembling belongs to Silentio, not Abraham. Abraham continually lives his faith, and his response “Here I am” to God’s demand of Isaac is beyond any category of reason. For Silentio, a positive description about faith in his *Fear and Trembling* is: “The essential human is passion, in which one generation perfectly understands another and understands itself....But the highest passion in a person is faith....Faith is the highest passion in a person. There perhaps are many in every generation who do not come to faith, but no one goes further” (FT, III 167). Just as Silentio was shocked when he encountered Abraham’s faith, the readers may be shocked when they encounter Silentio’s remarks about faith.

IV

Kierkegaard’s philosophy is essentially related to his biography. He is clever in transforming the problems of his life into his philosophy. The problem of faith is his deepest concern relating to both his family and the religious situation of the time. And he proposes his ideas through pseudonyms in his indirect communication with the reader. We investigated here two main works from Climacus and Silentio. Both of them talked about faith, and they accepted faith as the absolute paradox. Silentio does not give us a positive description of faith but retells the story of Abraham, the father of faith. Climacus gives us some more positive accounts of faith in several places. But both of them have a crucial link in that: one has to set aside an intellectual understanding to faith. Faith is the absolute paradox, and the most we can do is to understand that it is a paradox. This is the main point where Kierkegaard departs from traditional Christian thinkers like Augustine’s *Credo ut intellegam*, or Anselm’s *Fides quaeran intellectum*. Kierkegaard, does not *believe in order to understand*, nor does he see a role for faith in the search for understanding. But according to him, “faith begins precisely where thought stops.” For Kierkegaard, there is no bridge to cross between faith and understanding. For faith, we have to take a leap. So if the question is: Is faith understandable? Kierkegaard firmly holds on to the negative answer to this question. But a further question is: Is faith possible? Is it possible to be Christian with Kierkegaard’s view of faith? For Kellenberger, he might say it is possible by seeing a person in the Bible like Mother Mary. He says,

Mary, like Abraham, is immured in silence. It is for this reason that, as Johannes says, no one can understand her. And, like Abraham, she must therefore proceed in anxiety. This too Johannes brings out....Although Johannes does not make it explicit, Mary, like Abraham, believes and acts by virtue of the absurd. She trusts God absolutely. She is joyful in the knowledge that she has been chosen. (Kellenberger, 1997, p.55)

But if one asks the same question to Ricoeur, the answer might be different:

Surely the Christianity he described is so extreme that no one could possibly practice it. The subjective thinker before God, the pure contemporary of Christ, suffering crucifixion with Him, without church, without tradition, and without ritual, can only exist outside of history....To understand him one would need to be able to grasp him unprecedented combination of irony, melancholy, purity of

heart and corrosive rhetoric, add a dash of buffoonery, and then perhaps top it off with religious aestheticism and martyrdom.... (Ricoeur, 1998, p.13)

Both Kellenberger and Ricoeur see Kierkegaard from different perspectives. Kellenberger applies Kierkegaard's faith with the other persons in the Bible whether Job or Mary, not any person outside the Bible. Ricoeur, on the contrary, puts Kierkegaard's view of faith applicable to common person in society and he sees that it could not really be put into practice. Ricoeur proposes to view Kierkegaard's idea of faith relating to his background, his reacting to Hegelian and Christendom in Denmark during his lifetime. He lived during the time of the critique of ideology. The organized Church and Hegel's philosophical system are taken into criticism by his works. Kierkegaard wants to defend and differentiate his idea of faith from Hegelian system of thought because he views that speculative thought will lead to the abolition of Christian faith. He seems to bring Christianity back to its origins, an acceptance of the absolute paradox of faith. Christianity at that time, for him, seemed too academic and losing the essence of faith. For someone to become Christian was too easy, and involved an ignorance involving the difficult nature of what being a Christian really is.

What it really means to be a Christian seems to be a question to which he wishes to supply his own answer. For him, to be Christian should come out of the will to become, which begins with his inwardness, not only through innately hereditary or traditionally accepted. It should be based on free decision to become authentically a Christian. He may see that being a Christian, according to the traditional manner, is too easy, and, does not result from any decision rooted in the will to become. Baptism at an early age, according to Climacus, is not the proper because a child cannot know what to become a Christian is, and cannot decide for himself. Climacus says:

To become a Christian then becomes the most terrible of all decisions in a person's life, since it is a matter of winning faith through despair and offense. An infant two weeks old cannot have passed the most terrible examination in this life, one in which eternity is the examiner, even if it has ever so many Baptism certificates from the parish clerk. But for the baptized person there must also come a later moment...when he, although a Christian, asks what Christianity is – in order to become a Christian. By Baptism, Christianity gives him a name, and he is a Christian *de nomine*; but in the decision he becomes a Christian and gives Christianity his name (*nomen dare alicui* [to give a name to someone]). (CUP, VII 322-323)

To be a Christian by name is not important if we never live our lives as Christian. To become Christian is to make a choice to be truly Christian. The significance of being Christian is not on what you are, but how you are. Lip service and what is traditionally accepted are not taken into account in being a Christian, and Climacus suggests here that we need to begin through a free decision at the bottom of our heart. That is why Climacus said: 'To become a Christian then becomes the most terrible of all decision in a person's life.' And again he says: "But to become a Christian is actually the most difficult of all tasks, because the task, although the same, varies in relation to the capabilities of the respective individuals" (CUP, VII 326). Climacus challenges not only Kierkegaard's Lutheran tradition but includes all Christian tradition, not only in his situation but also the contemporary. Before anyone

makes decision to become Christian, according to Climacus, he has to know indeed what Christianity is and is not.

For my part, I recognize Kierkegaard's notions concerning faith as difficult and challenging. His task is not to proclaim what Christianity is, or what faith is. He uses indirect communication with his readers through pseudonyms concerning the possibilities of becoming Christian and becoming a knight of faith. He confessed that he himself could not be a knight of faith and he could not call himself a Christian. He says, "The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian – I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the idea free), but I can make it manifest that the others are that even less (Kierkegaard, 1978, p.446). His Socratic task aims at not giving the answer to become Christian but to make people aware of becoming Christian which is not just public affair. Kierkegaard wishes "to shake off "the crowd" in order to get hold of "the single individual," religiously understood" (Kierkegaard, 1978, p.452-453). He seems to show the movement from "the crowd" to "the single individual" and for him "there is in a *religious sense* no public but only individuals" (Kierkegaard, 1978, p.453). For Kierkegaard, people who have an easy and secure life as part of the public should awaken to think of themselves in order to live their lives guided by their own wills even the will to become a Christian. Climacus says, "Out of love of mankind, out of despair over my awkward predicament of having achieved nothing and of being unable to make everything easier than it had already been made, out of genuine interest in those who makes everything easy, I comprehend that it was my task: to make difficulties everywhere" (CUP, VII 155). This seems to be Socratic task playing the important role in Kierkegaard's thoughts. If we have to accept Kierkegaard's notion of faith as the essential foundation of religion, religion will be just an individual affair. We could not reject that existing religion is an organized institution, and its structure needs to have an organized system of thoughts and beliefs. It is not just pure faith as in its beginning like Abraham's story, but the point we can learn here is that organized religion should not deny that religious experience, in the end, is the individual's relationship to God. Yet we cannot reject social dimension of religion. Religion could not be just a public or private affair. Kierkegaard seems to challenge the systematic thought of the organized church by putting more emphasis on faith. When Silentio retells the story of Abraham and the binding of Isaac, Levinas might not agree with him about his much emphasis only on the first voice of God demanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Because Levinas thinks that the second voice of God telling Abraham not to kill Isaac is much more important: "Do not raise your hand against the boy, do not harm him" (Genesis 22:12). Levinas says,

Kierkegaard was drawn to the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac. He saw in it an encounter between subjectivity raising itself to the level of the religious, and a God elevated above the ethical order. But the story can also be taken in a very different sense. The high point of the whole drama could be the moment when Abraham lent an ear to the voice summoning him back to the ethical order. (Levinas, 1998, p.33)

This is the critical point between Kierkegaard and Levinas as Jeffrey Stolle observes: "Today nobody will stop with faith; they all go further." This was Kierkegaard's complaint. "Today nobody will stop with ethics; they all go further." This is Levinas's complaint, and it is his complaint with Kierkegaard as well" (Stolle, 2001, p.132). For Levinas, Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical

seems to be not possible. This is the main difference between Kierkegaard's view of faith and Levinas's philosophy of ethics. Levinas claims ethics as first philosophy, prior to ontology and epistemology. But Levinas's ethics is not in the Western tradition of deontology, utilitarian, and virtue-based ethics. Levinas views ethics differently, in such a way that there is a place for the singularity of the subject. For Kierkegaard, Kantian ethics and Hegelian system of thought have no place for subjectivity because we have to conform to the ethical laws which is applicable for all human beings without realizing the differences among individuals. For Kierkegaard, faith could not be reduced to mere ethics in this sense. That is why Abraham comes to the point of his suspension of ethics for something higher. Faith is beyond, whether we call it irrational or super-rational, or an infinite passion of the finite for the infinite, or the absolute surrender to the divine, or even a mystery. I, for my part, do not think that Kierkegaard wants to remove reason away from human affairs, he just shows the sphere where reason cannot be applicable. He challenges the church and provides the alternative way for the individual commitment to religion surpassing the religious structures in society. Faith in Christianity is perhaps the one single idea that he can live and die for, and because of his inquiring into faith, he strongly challenges the church and Hegelian system of thought at that time. Even I dare not say that faith is irrational, I nevertheless have to read and reread carefully his reopening the difficult notion of faith.

Faith, according to Kierkegaard, is not just a common talk, or what many people easily pay lip service to. On the contrary, it is the highest attainment of life which we have no language to positively describe. For faith, he asserts that there is nothing higher and we could not go further. For those who attain faith like Abraham could not express in word to other people, and for those who say about faith like *Silentio* and *Climacus* could not attain. I personally realize that philosophers, thinkers, or even theologians take the approach of Thomas, the Apostle, who wants to prove Jesus's resurrection by his saying: "Unless I see the holes and that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe" (John 20: 25). They would like to consider God rationally. Like Thomas, we always say 'unless' and 'unless' in order to believe. Jesus might perhaps be speaking to philosophers in general when he said to Thomas: "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe" (John 20: 27). "Doubt no longer but believe" seems to be a hard thing for many thinkers who are always concerned with epistemological or rational proof for their beliefs. They perhaps cannot believe if they cannot prove rationally, and for them understanding is always prior to faith. Kierkegaard partly walks in Augustinian tradition but he seems to end differently. He moves from Augustine's 'I believe in order to understand' to 'I believe because it is not understandable.'

Silentio believes the demands of faith are too high for him to fulfill, but he does not deny the possibility in his reference to ordinary persons like a tax collector for example. Because we could not judge any other person concerning his faith from outside aspects, it exists inwardly in his individual relationship to God. Many thinkers who always say 'unless' and 'unless' seem to be very far from faith. Faith might not be an object for intellectual exercise, but it is the way of life that people live. This is perhaps why farmers, fisherman, tax collectors, live their faith. But it is hardly for some thinkers as Jesus says: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children" (Matthew 11: 25). Children here are representative of those who live

their faith without any ‘unless.’ For these persons, Jesus says to them: “Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20: 29). Happy are those who have no doubt and believe: they live their faith. I repeat again Silentio’s words: “faith begins precisely where thought stops.” As long as Silentio keeps thinking about faith, he has not yet been the knight of faith even though he renounces all worldly things for the kingdom of God. Climacus, the wise and the learned, could not be a Christian because he sets so many conditions of becoming a Christian. Kierkegaard accomplishes his Socratic’s task: to make difficulty everywhere. I, one of the readers, could not hide myself from these difficulties. And I cannot take refuge in merely reading his works. At some point I need to stop thinking, writing, and maintain profound silence. And upon hearing the call of God, and my inner experience can awaken me to respond “Here I am.”

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are in use throughout this article referring to works by Kierkegaard.

- CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong. (Eds. & Trans.). New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- FT *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong. (Eds. & Trans.). New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, Jonathan. (1987). *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Penguin Books.
- Butler, Judith. (1993). Kierkegaard’s Speculative Despair. In Robert C. Solomon & Kathleen M. Higgins. (Eds.). *Routledge History of Philosophy Vol. VI: The Age of German Idealism*. New York: Routledge.
- Gardiner, Patrick. (1988). *Kierkegaard*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, Alexander. (Ed.). (1966). *The Jerusalem Bible*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- Kellenberger, J. (1997). *Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: Faith and Eternal Acceptance*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1978). *The Essential Kierkegaard*. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong. (Eds. & trans.). New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. (1998). Existence and Ethics. In Jonathan Rée & Jane Chamberlain. (Eds.). *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Ltd.
- Ricoeur, Paul. (1998). Philosophy after Kierkegaard. In Jonathan Rée & Jane Chamberlain. (Eds.). *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Ltd.
- Stolle, Jeffrey. (2001). Levinas and the Akedah: An Alternative to Kierkegaard. *Philosophy Today*. Vol.45, No.2, pp.132-143.
- Taylor, Mark C. (1993). *Nots*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Westphal, Merold. (1998). Kierkegaard and Hegel. In Alastair Hannay and Gordon D.

Marino. (Eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Endnotes

¹ Some parts of this paper were presented at International Conference on *Reasoning in Faith: Cultural Foundations for Civil Society and Globalization*. The Council of Research in Values and Philosophy. Catholic University of America, 15 September – 15 November, 2004.

² The Biblical words through all this paper quoted from *The Jerusalem Bible*. Alexander Jones, (Ed.). (1966). New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.