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Johannes Climacus and the Leap to Faith

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My goal in this article is to explicate the perspective of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, on the leap to faith, based on Climacus' presentation in Philosophical Crumbs. *I will argue that for Climacus, during* the moment *in which this leap is a possibility, while God must bring to the individual both the truth and the condition for understanding it, the leap is a decision by the individual, an existential decision to* believe. *In attempting to understand Climacus, it is important to use his definition of faith—namely, that faith is a passion and that it is the condition for* understanding *the paradox of the Christian conception of the Incarnation (as opposed to a synonym for religiosity), because this allows us to understand why faith is not an act of will but is simultaneously a decision (because* belief *is a free expression of will).*

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Kierkegaardian moment, leap of faith, Johannes Climacus

The Kierkegaard-inspired metaphor of a "leap of faith," more accurately stated as a "leap to faith" to avoid charges of circularity, is generally taken to refer to a qualitative transition to Christian religiousness.[1] How is this leap understood by someone who has made the leap, and is therefore a Christian, such as Anti-Climacus (the pseudonymous Christian author of *Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*)? How does the leap appear from the standpoint of someone who has not made the leap and is therefore not a Christian, like Johannes Climacus (the pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Crumbs* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs*)? What is the role of the will in achieving the leap to faith? Johannes Climacus implicitly discusses the leap in *Philosophical*

[1] Jamie Ferreira, "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 207.

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Crumbs, though his explicit discussion occurs in the later *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Scholars writing on Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works have to clarify whether they are explaining the point of view of the pseudonymous author, or the point of view of Kierkegaard himself and what he is trying to teach or communicate to his reader through the particular pseudonymous work(s).

My goal in this article is to explicate the perspective of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, on the leap to faith, based on Climacus' presentation in *Philosophical Crumbs.*[2] I will argue that for Climacus, during *the moment* in which this leap is a possibility, the prospective Christian does have to exercise his or her will for the leap to occur. But the opportunity to exercise one's will does not arise unless God has, in bringing the truth (of salvation) and the condition for understanding it to the prospective Christian, created this decisive *moment* for the individual. While faith (understood here as the passion necessary for *understanding* the truth of Christianity rather than as a synonym for the religion itself) cannot be willed and is brought to the individual by God, *belief* in this truth does involve an act of will. Hence the Climacan account of the leap of faith cannot be fully assimilated under an Augustinian-type doctrine of predestination, nor under a "radically volitional view of existential commitments."[3] However, I will argue that Climacus' account is at least partially Arminian in nature. Indeed, one of the refreshing features of Climacus' account is precisely that it resists simple characterizations, reflecting the paradoxical character of grace.

My approach will be exegetical, in the sense that I will pay close attention to Climacus' own words and arguments in *Philosophical Crumbs,* although I will make the occasional detour to other Kierkegaardian works, especially Climacus' *Postscript,* for the purpose of fleshing out a concept or clarifying a possible confusion. It is important to remember that Climacus is not a Christian; as Ronald Johnson has described him, he is "an ironist with an observant eye and apparently not someone who has made the leap himself."[4] When examining the claims of some other scholars (including C. Stephen Evans, M. Jamie Ferreira, Ronald Johnson, Timothy Jackson, and Lee Barrett), I will be interested in whether their claims about the leap align

[2] Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs,* trans. M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); cited parenthetically in the text as *Philosophical Crumbs.*

[3] Lee Barrett, "The Paradox of Faith in Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments: Gift or Task," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary,* ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994), 263.

[4] Ronald Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping: Kierkegaard's Use of Hegelian Sublation," in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14 (1997): 158.

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with Climacus' views in his project in *Crumbs.* This, of course, is a different question from what Kierkegaard himself was attempting to teach us about the nature of the leap through his authorship in general. My interest here is in how the leap appears to the author Johannes Climacus, in *the moment.*

I. Johannes Climacus' Project in *Philosophical Crumbs*

In Plato's *Meno,* Socrates considers the following question about how one can go about seeking knowledge: if one does not possess knowledge of something, how can he or she go about seeking it, given that a person does not know what it is that person is looking for? Indeed, even if a person were to find said knowledge, how would he or she be able to recognize it for what it was? As Johannes Climacus notes, Socrates' answer to this puzzle is to postulate that all knowledge resides within ourselves, and thus the pursuit of knowledge is really an activity of remembering what is already within us (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 88). This is how we can at least have an idea of what it is that we seek, and how we can recognize the truth when we find it. Following Climacus (89), I will call Socrates' solution the "Socratic perspective."

From the Socratic perspective, Climacus makes the following observations: (1) Since *all* knowledge rests within us, in particular, in our souls, this suggests that when we discover this fact, we realize that our souls preexisted our current physical embodiment, and this in turn suggests to us that our souls are immortal. (2) Each person who recognizes that all knowledge exists within him or her develops the perspective that he or she is "his own center and the world is centered around him because his self-knowledge is a knowledge of God" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 90). (3) The hypothesis that all knowledge lies within us means that anyone could be the occasion for us to recollect our knowledge. On the one hand, the significance of any teacher in relation to the moment (when we discover our own possession of all knowledge) is vanishing and contingent: after all, the knowledge was *always* within us—the learners—in our *immortal* souls, and the teacher merely reminded us of it, and the moment itself only has "the importance of an accidental catalyst."[5] Again, note that under the Socratic perspective, no teacher can *give* us the truth, because knowledge is something that we already possess; at best, a teacher can serve as an occasion for us to remember what we already know.

This discussion naturally raises the following questions: what sort of truth, obtained under what circumstances, from what kind of teacher,

[5] Barrett, "The Paradox of Faith," 269.

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would be such that we, the learners, would never forget the truth, *the moment* of acquisition, or the teacher, "neither in time nor in eternity?" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 91). To distinguish this case from the Socratic perspective, I will call my discussion of this case the *religious perspective.*

Climacus begins by noting that for the relevant truth or knowledge to have such an impact on the learner, the learner should fully lack this truth—that is, it must not reside within him or her. Indeed, the learner should not even be a "seeker" of this truth; rather, the learner's state must be such that the truth is completely outside his or her ambit of knowledge (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 92). Climacus describes this state as a "state of error"; there is no possibility for the learner who is in a state of error to be reminded of the truth, for the learner does not possess it (92).

For the teacher to have decisive importance for the learner, the teacher cannot be merely an occasion for reminding the learner of something he or she already knows. The task of the teacher is twofold: (1) to make the learner aware that he or she is in a state of error, and (2) to give to the learner the relevant truth that the learner lacks. The first of these tasks does not by itself take us out of the Socratic perspective, for anyone could serve as the occasion for the learner to recognize that he or she is in a state of error. It is important to note here that the learner can realize that he or she is in a state of error only by himself or herself; the teacher, even if divine, can serve only as the occasion (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 92). However, when it comes to giving the learner the truth that she is lacking, since the truth does not reside within the learner, Climacus argues that the learner cannot even possess the condition for understanding this truth. Climacus' explanation for this turns on the completely radical nature of the truth in question: for the learner to be in a state of error, where he/she is completely separated from the truth in question, means that were a person to conceive of the truth in question even intellectually, he or she would take *offense* at it, and dismiss it as absurd.[6]

Furthermore, not only does the learner lack the condition for understanding the truth, but this condition cannot be imparted to the learner by an ordinary teacher. This, according to Climacus, is because when the learner comes to possess this condition, she is transformed; imparting the condition involves

[6] As Climacus puts it, "The offence is essentially a misunderstanding of *the moment,* because it is offence at the paradox [the truth in question], and the paradox is, again, the moment" (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Crumbs,* 123). Indeed, we will see that for the learner not to take offense at the truth, her understanding has to recognize *and accept* its inability to rationalize this truth and to set itself aside in the face of it, and this can happen only within the condition that accompanies the truth to enable the truth's acceptance by a learner; this condition is the passion of faith.

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a re-creation of the learner, so that the teacher can instruct her; and such transformation is beyond the capacity of any human being; it can be achieved only by God (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 92–93).

Climacus argues that under the religious perspective the learner is responsible for (originally) losing the condition for understanding the truth, and therefore for the learner's separation from the truth. The argument, briefly, runs as follows: the fact that the learner exists entails that he/she has been created; God is ultimately responsible for all creation, and so the learner was created by God; the possession of the condition for understanding the truth is "an essential condition" for all human beings, and so God would have created the learner (and all others) with it; it cannot be the case that humans could lose this condition accidently, for that would make possession of the condition contingent and not essential; *ergo,* the learner (and all others) must have actually "forfeited" the condition, and he or she continues to do so (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 93).

Climacus takes up the question of whether, given that the learner has forfeited the truth and the condition for understanding it, the learner can come to repossess the condition and the truth without God's help. Climacus notes that if this were possible, then this "moment of liberation" (of reacquiring the truth and the condition) would cease to have the decisive significance that Climacus has posited earlier (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 94). Thus, by "hypothesis, he is unable to free himself" (95). So, the learner's ability to lose the condition only *seems* to make the learner "free," when in reality he or she is "bound and exiled" from the condition and the truth (93).

Thus, in order for *the moment* when we acquire the relevant truth to have decisive significance, the following two conditions are necessary: (1) we must be in a state of error where we are separated from both the truth and the condition for understanding it, because we have forfeited both the truth and the condition ourselves, and (2) the teacher who now brings us the condition and the truth must be God himself.

It is worth paying attention to how Climacus describes the process of coming to (re)possess this truth: the change in the learner that occurs from possessing both the truth and the condition for understanding it "is like the transition from not being to being"; for this reason, Climacus calls this transition "rebirth" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 96). Thus God, the divine teacher, "give[s] birth to the learner," and in this we see the vast difference between the Socratic perspective and the religious perspective (105). In the former, Socrates is an assistant, as he is a midwife who allows the learner to give birth to the knowledge present within himself or herself, whereas, under the latter perspective, "to give birth belongs to God" (89). When God, as teacher, expresses his *love* for the learner, where his love is not merely of

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the "assisting" sort, but is "procreative" in nature, the learner goes from a state of "not being" (i.e., a state of error) to "being," and he or she thus owes God everything (105). A crucial observation to make here is that under the religious perspective, the change from "not being" to "being" precludes any progressive realization of the truth. For, under the religious perspective, the learner becomes "conscious *in the moment* of being born again, because his prior state was one of non-being" (98). If the learner possessed even a partial knowledge of the truth in his prior state, this would entail that the learner reside at least partially in the truth; hence, the moment would not have the decisive importance for him or her that Climacus is assuming under the religious perspective.

II. Truth, Paradox, and the Condition

So, what is this truth and accompanying condition that God brings us? To answer this question, I will consider some of Climacus' statements about why the learner will never forget the teacher (God) when the learner receives the condition and the truth from him: such a teacher the learner will never be able to forget, because in the same moment he would sink back into himself again, *like the one who once had the condition, by forgetting there was a God, sank into bondage*" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 95; emphasis added).

Thus, the learner falls into a state of error, a state of "bondage" from which "he is unable to free himself" *when he forgot that there was a God*. This is part of the truth that the learner is missing. Climacus later goes on to state that "if a person is originally in possession of the condition for understanding the truth, then he thinks there is a God, in that he exists himself. If he is in error, he may think this about himself, but recollection could not help him think anything else" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 97). Thus, possession of the condition entails, according to Climacus, that a person necessarily thinks that there is a God, but in the state where the person has lost the condition, that individual may realize that he or she exists, but is not going to infer the existence of God through introspection or recollection. So, one component of the truth that God gives to the learner is the fact that God exists. To see whether there are any additional components to the truth that the God gives to the learner, we need to understand the motivation behind God's incarnation as teacher and servant, and the resulting "paradox" that a learner must confront.

Climacus observes that God is not motivated by any *need* to reach out to the learner who is in error; rather, God's "eternal resolution" to reach out to the learner stems from his love for the learner (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 100). God, because of his love for the learner, wishes for the learner to understand

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him; indeed, as Climacus notes, the pain of not being united with the object of one's love is nothing compared to the "infinitely greater" pain that exists when lovers fail to understand each other, for the latter problem is directed "at the heart of love and injures for an eternity" (101). So, even though the learner is in sin, God wishes to win the learner back so that the latter can understand him. Though God is absolutely different from the learner (because the latter is in sin, among other reasons), in love "the different [are] made equal, [and] only in equality or unity is there understanding" (101).

So God loves the learner and wishes for the learner to understand him. Understanding, according to Climacus, is possible only in a relation of equality. Yet, God is the absolutely different, and so, the situation facing God is how he can make himself understood to the learner in light of the (absolute) difference between them, "if the difference is not to be destroyed"? (101). God resolves the situation "with the Christian conception of the incarnation": he appears in the form of a servant in order to "show Himself as equal to the most lowly," and as a teacher (106; see also 125).[7]

Thus, any learner must confront one of the following, depending on when he or she was born: (1) a learner who is a contemporary of God when God walked the earth as a human teacher, *and physically sees* his incarnation, must psychologically confront the possibility that God has at this moment in history actually taken the form of a human being, and not just any human being but a lowly servant at that, or (2) a learner who is a contemporary of God when God walked the earth as a human teacher, but *has only heard of and not seen* his incarnation, or a learner from a later historical period ("the disciple at second hand," as Climacus calls such a learner) must, based on reports, psychologically confront the possibility that there was a moment in history when God had actually taken the form of a human being, and not just any human being but a lowly servant (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 128).

Thus, in abstract terms, the truth that God gives the learner along with the condition for understanding it is that (a) God, as the absolutely different, exists; (b) the learner once possessed the condition for understanding this but forfeited this condition (i.e., the learner receives "sin-consciousness") (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 122); and (c) God, in his love for the learner, wanted to overcome the absolute difference between him and the learner, and thus chose to be born as a human being, and took the form of a servant and teacher in order to reach out to the learner and give the learner what the learner had lost: this truth and the condition for understanding it (119).

[7] Patrick Gardiner, *Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 75.

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My development of what Climacus refers to as "truth" is derived from my exegesis of *Philosophical Crumbs.* But, to achieve a more concrete understanding of "untruth" or the "state of error," it is helpful to look beyond *Philosophical Crumbs* to other works by Kierkegaard, especially his *Upbuilding Discourses,* Climacus' *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* and Anti-Climacus' *Sickness unto Death.* George Pattison, in particular, has done this in his book *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard.* Following Pattison, we can understand a person's coming to an awareness that he or she is living in error (i.e., a state of untruth) as a state where his or her inner self is unable to satisfactorily answer the question of the reason for one's own existence, where the self is unable to "inure" itself to the inevitability of death, and, perhaps, when the self recognizes that its existence is a gift and yet is unable to affirm this existence.[8] Anti-Climacus would refer to a self in such a state as being in despair; these are disorders "introduced into the self when the polarities that constitute its being (such as freedom and necessity or time and eternity) no longer function in creative interplay but become distorted."[9] The key point that Pattison makes here in his exegesis on *Sickness unto Death* is that these states of despair are not necessarily sin, for the notion of sin is inextricably tied to one's religious outlook. As opposed to the Socratic perspective in which such states reflect "ignorance" and the claim that once we recognize "the Good, we could not not do it," sin is a Christian view involving both "consciousness and volition."[10] Quoting Pattison,

> In knowing myself to be a sinner I know myself to be under obligation towards God ("guilty" or "indebted," as it were), but also as willing what is contrary to God's will for me or, it may be, not willing what it is God wants me to will: knowing I should not steal, I steal, or knowing I should honor my father and mother, I pass over my obligations to them in favor of some piece of self-indulgence or other.[11]

Thus, while being in a state of error and being in sin are *ontologically* the same, they are *phenomenologically* different. In principle, while any teacher can be the occasion for the learner to come to a realization that he or she is living in despair, if the learner did not receive the condition and the truth from God, then the full extent of the error would never be revealed.

[8] George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 140, 143.
[9] Ibid., 158.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

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Under the religious (Christian) perspective, the learner receives both the condition and the truth in *the moment*: this includes "sin-consciousness" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 122)—that is, an awareness of ourselves as "despairing, failed, sinful beings"[12]—and the possibility of overcoming this absolute difference of sin (without destroying it) by realizing that "to know or to regard ourselves as if we were being seen with the eyes of Christ would be to know ourselves as accepted, healed, forgiven."[13]

This truth is paradoxical in (at least) two ways.[14] One paradox is that, as Patrick Gardiner puts it, "there is a moment at which the eternal enters the temporal sphere, taking on the limitations of finite existence."[15] Or, as Clare Carlisle puts it, "the incarnation is a paradox because a single individual is at once divine and fully human, at once infinite and finite, at once eternal and mortal."[16] But the truth is also paradoxical in a second way: in what amounts to a Climacan doctrine of grace. God, as infinite and eternal, is absolutely different from human beings, who are finite and mortal, and God and human beings are absolutely separated by sin; yet only God can overcome this difference "*without this difference being compromised.*"[17] In other words, only God can—by giving the condition in the moment—unite God and humanity in and through the absolute difference between God and humanity. As Climacus puts it, "The God's presence is not incidental to his teaching, but essential, and the god's presence in human form, yes, in the form of a lowly servant, is precisely the teaching" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 126).

To a learner, given that he or she is in a state of error (i.e., of sin), the truth described above is shocking to the point of completely defying the learner's understanding.[18] For the learner must contend with the fact that "one needs God simply in order to come to know that God is the different, and

[12] Ibid., 160.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), 144.

[15] Gardiner, *Kierkegaard,* 76.

[16] Carlisle, *Kierkegaard,* 143. Carlisle goes on to note that "to say that Jesus was fully human is to suggest that he understood the experience of being a sinner, and yet as the incarnation of God he must surely have been completely pure—and this seems completely contradictory." Ibid.

[17] Carlisle, *Kierkegaard,* 144; emphasis in original.

[18] C. Stephens Evans has argued that the paradox of the Incarnation should not be seen as a logical contradiction: C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 100–104; also see Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 212–19. Rather, the Incarnation only appears to be a contradiction when we try to understand and thereby "master" it from an attitude of "imperialistic reason"; see Evans, *Passionate Reason,* 139, 61. According to Evans, it is our state of sinfulness that renders

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now comes to know that God is absolutely different from himself" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 119). A person must also contend with the "double character" of the paradox, which, in addition to "emphasizing the absolute difference of sin," emphasizes God's desire "to annul this absolute difference through absolute likeness" (119).

III. The Moment and the Condition

Next, I will turn to an examination of *the moment,* and the nature of the condition for understanding the truth, and how they affect the learner's ability to deal with the above paradox. This will help in determining whether, under the religious perspective provided by Climacus, the learner has the option of rejecting the condition and the truth that God provided him or her in this moment.

The moment of confrontation with the truth is integral to the religious conception that Climacus is describing, for if "we do not assume the moment, then we go back to Socrates" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 122). In the moment, God gives the learner the truth and the condition for understanding it. Then the learner becomes aware of the possibility that she is in error: she becomes "confused" about herself, and "instead of self-knowledge, [the learner] receives sin-consciousness" (122). When confronted by the paradox, the learner's understanding is completely baffled: it cannot understand the paradox, "but senses only that [the paradox] must be its ruin" (120). This is not necessarily an unpleasant feeling for the understanding: as Climacus notes, "The highest passion of the understanding is to *desire* an obstacle, despite the fact that the obstacle … may be its downfall" (111; emphasis added).[19] The condition that comes with the paradox is a "happy passion," and Climacus names it "faith" (128–29). Upon recognizing that it cannot make sense of the paradox, the understanding reacts in one of two ways: (1) in keeping with its passionate desire for an obstacle that might lead to its annihilation, the understanding happily accepts its inability to explain the paradox, and embraces (in its defeat) the paradox; this embrace is a peaceful coexistence in which there exists a mutual understanding of difference, and takes place within the

us incapable of grasping the Incarnation for what it is, an "act which is the manifestation of pure, unselfish love," and in our pride we dismiss it. Ibid., 139.

[19] It is important to recognize here that a potentially positive feeling associated with the paradox is not inconsistent with the sense of confusion (a potentially negative feeling) that will arise in the learner when she considers the possibility that she might be in error. The emotional confusion in the moment would at least partly be the result of this mix of positive and negative feelings.

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accompanying condition: the happy passion of faith; or (2) the understanding takes offense at the very idea of the paradox and dismisses it as absurd (120, 121–22, 128). In fact, Climacus argues that while the understanding believes that it is the one offended by the paradox, this is an illusion: the offense really comes from the paradox, where the latter dismisses any attempt by the former to come up with a rational explanation for the paradox; the intensity of the expression of offense is a reflection of how profoundly the understanding has been affected by the paradox (122). Either way, the moment is decisive for the learner's eternal salvation.

Climacus explains the encounter between the understanding and the paradox by means of an analogy with romantic love. In his analogy, the understanding is akin to self-love, the paradox is akin to romantic love, and the passion of romantic love is akin to the condition. While a single (unattached) person might be motivated by self-love (i.e., by his or her own interests), and lives "unperturbed, sufficient unto himself [or herself]," the "height of [self-love's] paradoxical passion is to will its own downfall"—that is, to surrender itself to love for another being (romantic love) (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 112, 120). When self-love meets romantic love (i.e., when we fall in love with another), then "the paradox of self-love is awakened through the love of another, the one desired"; this paradoxical passion changes the lover so that the lover "hardly recognizes himself [or herself]" (112). In a similar vein, in the religious scenario, the "paradox of the understanding affects a person and his [or her] self-knowledge" (112). As a result of the encounter between self-love and romantic love, one outcome is where self-love is willingly conquered by the passion of romantic love; the other outcome is where self-love pushes away from romantic love because it is offended at the idea of putting another person's interests before its own (120).[20] Similarly, in the religious scenario, one outcome results when "the understanding surrenders itself and the paradox offers itself," and this mutual understanding of the two rests within the "happy passion" of faith that accompanies the paradox (125). The other outcome is one where the understanding "says that the paradox is the absurd"; this is the "expression of offence," which claims that "the moment is foolishness," and that "the paradox is foolishness" (123).[21]

[20] In this case, if we follow the parallel with the understanding and the paradox, it is actually romantic love that pushes self-love away, since self-love cannot make sense of the kind of radical sacrifice that forms the heart of romantic love.

[21] Again, we should note here that it only appears as if the expression of offense comes from the understanding, when in fact it is the paradox that is dismissing the understanding as "the absurd."

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IV. Decision and the Role of the Will in the Leap to Faith

While the notion of a "leap" as a qualitative transition between very different ways of life occurs throughout Kierkegaard's oeuvre, Kierkegaard never explicitly uses (the Danish equivalent of) the phrase "leap of faith."[22] But Kierkegaard does frequently employ the term "leap" in his corpus to refer to the qualitative transition to Christianity that can occur in *the moment.*[23] (The concept of a leap is not invoked in this way by Climacus in *Crumbs,* as we will see below.) I will be interested in the following two questions:

A. Does the learner have a choice in whether he or she is able to accept the condition in *the moment* from God? I will argue that the answer is no.

B. Once the learner receives the truth (that this "lowly servant" is God), must the learner *will* to believe it? In asking this question I am distinguishing between *understanding* the truth claim being made (that the lowly servant is in fact God), and actually *believing* it and therefore changing our lives. We are able to understand the truth because God brought it to us and gave us the condition for understanding it, but it doesn't follow from this that we will automatically appropriate this claim and be "reborn." Another way of putting this question is as follows: does the learner exercise her will to set her understanding aside when confronted by the paradox of the Incarnation, and does her refusal to exercise her will in this way provoke offense (from the paradox)? Here another distinction within the way Climacus uses terms will be helpful, that between *faith* and *belief*. While both faith and belief are passions (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 129, 150),[24] faith is the condition that is given to us by God so that we can grasp the paradox of the Incarnation, and this condition cannot be willed by us (132). Belief, on the other hand, is "a free act, an expression of will" (149). I will argue that the answer to B is yes.

When it comes to question A, Climacus tells us that "faith is not an act of will because all human willing is efficacious *only within the condition*" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 132; emphasis added). So there is no possibility of the learner declining the condition and the truth from God because he or she is incapable of willing to do so. While it is true that the learner forfeited the condition, and that this suggests that the learner is free, Climacus is clear that in fact the learner is *not* free, but is "bound" and "exiled" from the truth, and therefore cannot free himself or herself (93). This is what makes *the moment* decisive, for it is only in *the moment*, upon receiving the

[22] Ferreira, "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap," 207.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See p. 129 for Climacus' statement that faith is a passion, and p. 150 for his statement that belief is a passion.

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condition and the truth, that the learner becomes free, he or she becomes capable of genuine willing.

It is worth taking a moment to consider why Kierkegaard uses indirect forms of communication (in particular, pseudonyms) in many of his works. As Clare Carlisle has argued, one of Kierkegaard's goals in his writings is to communicate subjective truth—that is, to draw the reader's attention to some quality within himself or herself—and subjective truth or self-knowledge is unlike objective knowledge in that it cannot always be communicated directly from one person to another. Rather, the goal is to get the reader to look inward so that he or she may gain self-knowledge. For Kierkegaard, Carlisle argues, this is done by a two-step process. In the first step, the reader attains a theoretical understanding of the text, and in the second step the reader reflects on how his or her understanding of the text illuminates his or her own life. To this end, Kierkegaard uses pseudonyms and creates characters in order to explore for his reader various ways of living, and presents these lifestyles to him or her so that his reader might recognize himself or herself in some of these characters.[25] These characters are often stuck in some way in their lives: some are like the aesthete in *Either/Or* (who is living a life of disengaged nihilism), others are like Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* ("who becomes 'paralyzed' when he tries to understand Abraham") and still others are "abstract thinkers" like Constantin Constantius in *Repetition* (who is unable to make a religious movement because it is against his nature) and Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Crumbs* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.[26] Climacus, in declaring that he is not a Christian, is then able to explore questions about the Christian faith from the perspective of a nonbeliever; furthermore, he can do this without coming across as someone who identifies as a "true" Christian and thus is entitled to talk down to others. This allows for his reader to explore his or her own faith commitments without feeling attacked.[27]

What is interesting about Climacus, and he shares this in common with Constantius in *Repetition,* is that he is interested in abstract philosophical concepts. So, as a self-declared non-Christian, Climacus is interested in undertaking a philosophical analysis of truth, from both a Socratic perspective and a (Christian) religious perspective. The only way to genuinely regard these two perspectives as distinct is if, unlike the former, the learner in the latter is not capable of qualitative actions that are existentially significant

[25] Carlisle, *Kierkegaard*, 26–32.
[26] Ibid., 30, 36, 40–41.
[27] Ibid., 32.

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without the intervention of God. This intervention from God comes in the form of the learner's receipt of the truth and the condition for understanding it from him. Only upon receiving them is the learner free, in that "all human willing is efficacious only within the condition" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 132).

So, how are we to understand the learner's contribution during the moment? During the moment, God brings both the truth and the condition for understanding it to the learner. Upon receiving them, the learner's understanding is faced with the paradox of the Incarnation. Upon encountering the paradox, the understanding attempts to rationalize the paradox and fails, and as a result the "paradoxical passion of the understanding that wills an obstacle and wills, without really understanding itself, its own annihilation, is awakened."[28] This paradoxical passion repeatedly pushes the learner's understanding toward the paradox (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 117).[29] However, if the learner did not possess the condition that he or she had received from God in the moment, this paradoxical passion is simultaneously pushing the understanding away from the truth and pulling the understandings toward the truth. The preoccupation of the understanding, in its paradoxical passion, with the paradox results either in a qualitative leap (though Climacus does not explicitly use this phrase *in such a context* until *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) in which the understanding has been set aside, or in offense. In the case where the leap occurs, we can conceive of the paradoxical passion of the understanding as a quantitative buildup toward this qualitative leap. So the learner's contribution here matters, but only *after* and *in view of* having received the condition from God. In this sense, the learner can *look back* and say that the passion of understanding was of critical significance—as part of *the moment* within which the eternal came to be in the temporal.[30]

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* Climacus says: "Lessing opposes what I would call quantifying oneself into a qualitative decision; he contests the direct transition from historical reliability to a decision on an eternal happiness."[31] Climacus agrees with this view, saying later: "Everything that becomes historical is contingent. … Therein lies again the incommensurability between a historical truth and an eternal decision" (*Postscript*, 98). How do these statements mesh with our description above in which the paradoxical

[28] Ibid., 112.

[29] Evans has highlighted the importance of Climacus' move here, which is "to view reason as passionate in the first place." Evans, *Passionate Reason,* 61.

[30] I would like to thank one of the anonymous referees for clarifying these points for me.

[31] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments,* trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 95–96; cited parenthetically in the text as *Postscript.*

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passion of the understanding is a quantitative buildup toward this qualitative leap? In these quoted statements, Climacus is pointing out that it is not the amount of historical evidence available about Jesus (his life, prophesies, and performance of miracles) that will be decisive for a learner as to whether he or she will come to faith; indeed, "the transition whereby something historical and the relation to this becomes decisive for an eternal happiness is a shifting from one genus to another" (98). This is clearly different from our claim in which the "quantitative buildup" refers to the push of the paradoxical passion of reason toward the paradox; this push does not mean that the qualitative leap is more likely to occur than offense. Thus, my claim is different from the one that Climacus is disputing in the quoted statements above where increased quantitative evidence for historical reliability increases the probability that the qualitative leap will occur.

This brings me to question B: does the learner's will play any role, upon his or her having received the condition, in setting or refusing to set his or her understanding aside in the face of the paradox? (Note here that willing or not-willing can, of course, be full of passion.)

As noted above, under the influence of the condition, the paradoxical passion of the understanding pushes toward the paradox. The learner who becomes a disciple recognizes after conversion the role of this passion of the understanding in helping him or her become a disciple. But for Climacus, the learner's will plays an important role here.

Any account that stresses the importance of the learner's will must address three concerns: (1) that Climacus says that "whether or not [the learner] is to progress beyond ... [discovering that he or she is living in error], *the moment* must decide" (i.e., it is *the moment* that is decisive and not the learner), (2) that the learner will owe everything to the teacher, and (3) that Climacus says that "faith is not an act of will" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 97, 132).

With respect to (1), the fact that for Climacus it is *the moment* that is decisive does not mean that there is no room for a contribution or decision by the learner. What renders *the moment* as decisive rather than just the learner is that prior to *the moment,* the learner was oriented away from the truth; it is only God's intervention that creates the possibility of salvation. Furthermore, we should recall that in *Postscript,* Climacus repeatedly characterizes the leap as a decision.[32] So, rather than reading Climacus' statement that "the moment will decide" as implying that the learner does not have a decisive role, the statement should be interpreted as saying that part of what makes *the moment* decisive, *besides* God's contribution, is a crucial contribution from the learner.

[32] Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping," 164.

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With respect to (2), given that the learner/disciple was living in sin because he or she himself or herself forfeited the condition for understanding the truth, and that if it weren't God bringing the truth and the condition back to the learner, he or she would not have salvation, it seems reasonable to say that the learner/disciple owes everything to the teacher (God). To use Climacus-inspired language, the learner's contribution vanishes in *the moment* in light of the teacher's contribution.

Finally, with respect to the oft-mentioned quote that "faith is not an act of will," it is important to consider the rest of the sentence: "faith is not an act of will, because all willing is efficacious only within the condition" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 132). We should remember here that in Climacus' terminology, *faith is not the same as belief;* rather, faith is the condition for understanding the truth. It cannot be willed and must be brought to us by God because when we are in error (i.e., sin) we are polemically opposed to the truth (93). Now, when it comes to belief, Climacus expressly says that belief is "a free act, an expression of will" (149). Thus his saying that "all willing is efficacious only within the condition" just means that we cannot will to believe without possessing the condition for understanding the truth—that is, without the passion of faith. So, while faith is not an act of will for Climacus, it does not contradict his other claim that *belief* can be willed.

Climacus' discussion of the nature of becoming, of the historical, and of belief as the organ for grasping the historical is crucial to understanding the role of the will for the learner during the moment. Climacus says that anything that is historical is, by that very fact, something that came into being from something else via a process of becoming. The process of becoming is dynamic and contingent, and hence anything historical must also therefore be contingent. Now, when we perceive the presence of something as a result of using our faculties of sense and cognition, this perception is not in itself misleading. But, as the Greek skeptics have suggested, it is when we attempt to *draw inferences* from our sensory and cognitive inputs that we go astray. This, so the Greek skeptics believed, is what ruined our peace of mind. Thus, they recommended that for the sake of tranquility we make the effort to not draw inferences, so as to avoid mistakes. This skeptical belief (and its accompanying recommendation to not draw inferences) is of course not natural to human beings, and is something that must be *willed* for the sake of tranquility (according to the skeptics) (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 147–49). Climacus' point here is that belief is something that is *willed.* We apply belief to something that has occurred (and so belief is the result of a process of becoming and of all its accompanying contingencies), and as a result we annul the uncertainties behind the "how" of the event, and emphasize the fact (the "thus") that the event came into being. This is the process of

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apprehending the historical (understood as the things or events that came into being via a process of becoming): it is a process of *willing* belief, as opposed to a process of logical inferences that at the end necessarily lead to belief. Thus, when Climacus refers to the leap of faith as a decision in *Postscript,* he is referring to the fact that the learner must decide to believe; the learner in believing is in fact *willing* belief, as opposed to arriving at belief from logical necessity. So, "faith is not an act of will" only in the sense that all willing can take place only within the condition, but "*belief is not a kind of knowledge*" and so does not come about through logical necessity (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 131; emphasis added). Rather, "doubt can be cancelled only through freedom, through an act of will" (148). For Climacus, belief and doubt are "opposite passions" (150). Just as the Greek skeptics *willed their doubt* in order to keep from drawing inferences and to achieve "peace of mind," so the learner, upon receiving the truth and the condition from God, *must will to believe* (149). This is the leap to faith: to will to believe the truth that has come into being.

Climacus uses the word "leap" in *Philosophical Crumbs* when he is discussing why it doesn't make sense (for the understanding) to prove that God exists (113). He describes the attempt to prove God exists as akin to holding onto Cartesian dolls: it is only when one "let[s] go of the doll, [that] it stands on its head"; similarly, it is only when one stops attempting a proof of the existence of God that "existence is there" (115). He describes this act of letting go both as a "leap" and as his *Zuthat* (contribution), and then "existence emerges from the proof by means of a leap" (116). This imagery illuminates the learner's *Zuthat* during *the moment:* the learner lets go of (i.e., sets aside) his or her attempts to rationalize away the paradox and embraces it.

My arguments here are reinforced by examining how Climacus describes the other possible outcome of the moment: the "expression of offence" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 123). Offense, if it comes about, occurs in *the moment,* after the learner receives the truth, and the condition for understanding it.[33] Offense results when the meeting between the learner's understanding and the paradox is "not one of mutual understanding" (120). Climacus draws an analogy with love: just as self-love cannot make sense of how romantic love is in one's own self-interest, and so "unhappy [romantic] love ... has its foundation in misunderstood self-love," so also the unhappiness of the understanding results because the understanding cannot make

[33] The truth, as stated before, includes the paradox that "unites contraries, [and] is the eternalizing of the historical and the historicizing of the eternal." Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Crumbs*, 131.

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sense of the paradox, and yet it can't escape the paradox either, because the paradoxical passion of the understanding pushes the understanding toward the paradox (120–21). The key point here that is relevant for my argument is that, according to Climacus, "all offence is fundamentally passive" with respect to the understanding; that is to say, the expression of offense only appears to come from the understanding, but is really produced by the paradox (121, 123). A "distorted imitation" leads the learner to think that it is his or her understanding that is saying that "the paradox is the absurd," when in reality it is the paradox that is pointing out the absurdity of the understanding, because the understanding wishes to evaluate the paradox using probabilistic calculations when in fact the whole point of the paradox is that it "is the most improbable" (123). Climacus makes a key point in a footnote: "Thus the Socratic view that all sin is ignorance is correct; it does not truly understand itself. It does not follow from this, however, that it cannot will itself in error" (122). In other words, these probabilistic calculations that can lead to dismissal of the paradox can be *willed.* The learner, as someone who is not yet a Christian, does not recognize the full extent of his or her error even after possessing the truth and the condition; the learner can will away the truth by refusing to surrender his or her understanding to the paradox. As Climacus says, "the passive form" of offense "is always active to the extent that it cannot allow itself to be annihilated" (121).

As further evidence that the learner's will does play a role in *the moment,* consider Climacus' description of God's state when he takes human form. God takes the form of a lowly servant; indeed, "the object of faith is not *the teaching,* but *the teacher*" (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 131). God knows that his appearance as a lowly servant is just as likely to result in offense and dismissal as belief. This is the case even after the learner has received the condition and the truth, because God loves the learner, and so for him "any other revelation would … be a deception, because it would have had to undertake a transformation of the learner and hidden from him that this had been necessary (but love does not alter the beloved, rather it alters itself)" (107–8). So the transformation of the learner cannot be the immediate result of God's work—that is, his providing the condition and the truth to the learner cannot directly result in the learner seeing the lowly servant for who he really is. Rather, once the learner possesses the truth and the condition for understanding it, he or she must still *believe* it. Hence Climacus' remark about God's anxious question for the learner—"Do you now really love me?"—because God "knows where the danger lies, and yet He knows that any easier way would be a deception" (107).

The fact that our understanding and our will are fallibly human should serve to remind us of our dependence on God for our faith. As Clare

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Carlisle has noted, this recognition encourages one to develop "an attitude of gratitude and humility."[34] Indeed, the encounter between the learner's understanding and the paradox does not occur only once; the understanding is likely to reassert itself against the paradox on many occasions, and we can never be sure that the former will always set itself aside in the face of the latter—it could be that during one of these encounters, the understanding takes offense and dismisses the paradox.[35] Thus, the moment is not something that occurs only once in an individual's life.[36] In Carlisle's words, "Existence is *always* becoming, and it is *always* dependent on God, so if it is not becoming truthfully—in faith and repentance—then it is becoming sinfully."[37] As Climacus reminds us, "Faith is always a struggle. But so long as there is still a struggle, then there is still the possibility of defeat" (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 171).

To summarize Climacus' position: the learner is incapable of thinking the paradox himself or herself; in *the moment,* God brings the paradox and the condition for understanding it to the learner; this condition is a "happy passion" that Climacus calls faith; the learner possesses, in this moment, the paradox and the condition (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 120, 128–29). The paradoxical passion of the learner's understanding (which is not the passion of faith) pushes the learner's understanding toward the paradox, and this push can happen only because of the presence of the condition (because, outside of the condition and the moment, the understanding is opposed to and moves away from the truth); as a result of this encounter between the learner's understanding and the paradox, either the learner *willingly* sets aside his or her attempts to rationalize away the paradox and the two come to coexist in the condition—that is, come to reside together in the happy passion of faith—*or* an expression of offense results from the paradox pushing away reason's incessant attempts to subsume the paradox into its domain. The contribution of the learner comes from (a) the paradoxical passion of the learner's understanding (which seeks out obstacles that could result in the understanding's annihilation) that pushes the learner's understanding toward the paradox, though the importance of this is understood by the learner only retrospectively, and only if the encounter results in mutual understanding, and (b) the learner exercising his or her will to set aside reason and its unrelenting drive to absorb the paradox into its ambit. This is the necessary leap. It is only after the leap that the (now) disciple recognizes his or her former state of ignorance as sin.

[34] Carlisle, *Kierkegaard,* 139.
[35] Ibid., 145.
[36] Ibid., 139.
[37] Ibid., 140.

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V. Other Accounts of the Role of the Will

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* Climacus refers to the leap as a decision.[38] Yet, in *Philosophical Crumbs,* Climacus declares that "faith is not an act of will" (132). Now, in interpreting "faith" as used in this quote as synonymous with the leap to faith, interpreters are faced with the puzzle of how the leap can be a decision and yet not be an act of will. In my account, this is not an issue because, as I have emphasized, for Climacus, "faith" refers to the condition to understand the truth that the learner receives from God; it is *not* the leap. Rather, the leap is the act of setting aside one's understanding to believe, and, for Climacus, belief *is* "an expression of will" (149). So, on my interpretation of Climacus, faith cannot be willed—it is God's gift to us—but once we receive this condition along with the truth, it is our decision to *believe* it. Still, it will be interesting to look at the attempts by other interpreters to bridge the *leap-as-decision* and *faith-not-being-an-act-of-will* chasm in their accounts. I will examine two influential accounts that attempt to close this gap, that of Jamie Ferreira and Stephen Evans.

Jamie Ferreira, in her book *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith,* uses (primarily) three of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works—*Either/Or Vol. 2* by Judge William and *Philosophical Crumbs* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* by Johannes Climacus—to argue for the centrality of imagination in Kierkegaard's (and not just Climacus') understanding of the leap of faith (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 155). Ferreira pays careful attention to the qualitative nature of an individual's transition to faith.[39] She argues that "the qualitativeness and freedom of the transition are what is at stake for Climacus in the concept of the leap and that they do not require an intentional volition or decision."[40] In other words, to the extent that the leap occurs in freedom, this freedom is not reducible to an *independent, willful* decision. Ferreira argues that the concepts of "leap" and "passion" mutually correct and qualify each other in "an activity which, even at the level of human agency, is more dialectical than a unilateral choice among alternatives."[41] She uses the example of a "*Gestalt* shift" in viewing a well-known ambiguous illustration to illustrate how a decision can be a "qualitative transition" as opposed to "an intentional decision to do something or a self-conscious selection among perceived alternatives."[42] She writes:

[38] Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping," 164.

[39] Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 19.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 15, 10.

[42] Ibid., 34.

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> In a situation where a *Gestalt* shift can occur, initially we see only one possibility (for example a duck figure); at some point after concentrated attention or perhaps after coaching and guidance, another alternative (a rabbit figure) comes into focus for us. Seeing the rabbit figure for the first time is not the *direct* or *immediate* result of a decision or volition, although it may take much preliminary effort (and hence be an indirect result). It is not a choice in any standard sense because we see only the one possibility; at the outset we *recognize* no other equally real alternatives from among which to choose. We can decide to *look for* the rabbit figure which we are told is there and cannot yet see, but we cannot decide or choose to see (recognize) it. We can directly do what will in all probability lead us to see the figure, but we cannot directly make ourselves see it. Recognizing it, then, is a qualitative transition which is not achievable by fiat; it is not the direct result of willing, nor is it the necessary result of the effort to look for it.[43]

Ferreira's example of a *Gestalt* shift as an illustration of a qualitative transition is very helpful, though I will qualify it when applying it to Climacus' account of *the moment*. The parallels are as follows. A learner's being in error is equivalent to his or her only being able to see the duck figure. The idea that the figure is really a rabbit would never even occur to the learner. In *the moment,* the learner is presented with the information that the figure is really a rabbit, and that it is the learner's own fault that his or her eyesight is compromised. Learners do not have a choice as to whether to possess this information; rather, it is given to them from without. The learner's passion is aroused, and it pushes the learner to repeatedly stare at the figure to see if the figure is really a rabbit. But, on Ferreira's telling, the learner cannot will himself or herself into seeing the rabbit, nor is there any guarantee that continuous effort at attempting to see the rabbit will necessarily result in seeing the rabbit. So Ferreira's claim that we can "directly do what will in all probability lead us to see the figure" is only true to the extent that one does have to focus upon the figure in order to have a chance to see the rabbit, but the transition to seeing the rabbit "is not the direct result of willing, nor … the necessary result of … effort."[44] This part does not translate over to my interpretation: while I can agree with Ferreira that the truth and the condition are given to the learner from without, and that "faith is not an act of will," I understand faith as the condition that allows the learner to see that the figure could in fact be a rabbit, while Ferreira interprets faith as actually seeing the rabbit (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 132). Ferreira thinks that the qualitative transition of a leap is not the direct result of willing, but, on

[43] Ibid., 35, emphasis in the original.
[44] Ibid.

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my reading, the leap is the qualitative transition of *believing what has come into being,* and as Climacus notes, just as "the skeptics doubted not by virtue of knowledge but by will" and that "every Greek skeptic … did not want to do away with his skepticism because he *wanted to* doubt," so too does the learner not believe because he or she doubts by *willing* this doubt, for "belief is not a type of knowledge, but a free act, an expression of will" (148–49; emphasis in the original). I agree with Ferreira that for Climacus the leap is qualitative, and that it constitutes a break, but on my interpretation this break happens through an existential decision, an act of will. To stick with Ferreira's imagery, when the truth is given to the learner, it is not that the learner does not see the truth (i.e., that the figure could be a rabbit). The learner now sees that the figure could be a duck or a rabbit, but when it comes to making a choice, he or she may not commit to saying that the figure is a rabbit because the learner's understanding is saying that the figure must be a duck, and that to think that it is a rabbit is absurd. Indeed, at one point in his discussion of the leap in *Postscript,* Climacus points out that what makes the leap very difficult (in his words, "makes the ditch infinitely broad") is the "dialectically passionate loathing of it" (99). But this doesn't change the fact that "the leap is the category of decision" (99).

According to Ferreira, a *Gestalt* shift takes place "when a 'critical threshold' has been reached: just as in the case of an explosive, the material does not explode by degrees but gradually gets hotter until the qualitative change occurs."[45] She quotes Kierkegaard's comments in his journals about the connection between leaps and critical thresholds, such as "when he speaks of 'the leap by which water turns to ice, the leap by which I understand an author'," though she notes that he does this "in a context of examples which illustrate a 'qualitative difference between leaps.'"[46] But, despite that context, Ferreira suggests that the notion of a critical threshold can illuminate Kierkegaard's idea of the kind of leap that occurs in *the moment.* She writes:

> The model of *Gestalt* shift is relevant here because in such a case the shift in perspective occurs only when a "critical threshold" has been reached. Initially we perceive only one option, only one is "real" to us. Although we can be told of and admit the possibility of another option, at the critical moment of transition there is no set of equally real alternatives which we recognize from among which to choose—the moment of transition is rather the point at which what has already been an abstract possibility (one we have been assured is there) suddenly comes into focus for us, the point at which it is so real that it seems to be the only way to see it

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

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> (though, of course, we can try to revive the earlier picture by an effort of refocusing). The examples I have considered suggest that this point or "critical threshold" is what in the description of faith is often called "the decision."[47]

Ferreira is arguing here that when a certain critical threshold of *pathos* is reached, a "shift in perspective"—the qualitative leap—occurs. This *pathos* is not will but imagination. When imaginative activity reaches a critical threshold, there is both "a suspension of the understanding through imaginatively holding opposites in tension" and an "imaginative synthesis and extension … which constitutes the imaginative revisioning."[48] With this account, Ferreira is able to close the gap between the *leap-as-decision* and *faith-not-being-an-act-of-will* ideas in Climacus' works: "The decision which seems necessary turns out to be the recognition or realization that we have already decided."[49]

But Ferreira also says that the qualitative leap "is the result of a 'piecemeal' effort without being the cumulative issue of a quantitative process."[50] Yet her account gives the impression that the qualitative leap happens mechanically when a critical threshold of *pathos* is reached. As Ronald Johnson has argued, this whole notion of a "critical threshold" (or, as Johnson puts it, an "Archimedean point") is problematic, since it gives the idea that the qualitative leap can be *earned* beforehand.[51] As Johnson argues, Climacus is at pains to point out that the leap is a powerful counterexample to "Hegel's attempt to systematize the flow of existence."[52] The leap, by its very nature, is a decisive break; the leap does not follow logically or in a causally necessary way from the antecedent events, and there is no "Archimedean point" from which the leap occurs (*Postscript,* 102).[53] Thus Ferreira's use of a critical threshold is inconsistent with Climacus' view of the leap.

In his book, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments,* C. Stephen Evans takes the Johannes Climacus pseudonym seriously (rather than as a mask for Kierkegaard) and provides an account of Climacus' views as articulated in *Fragments.*[54] Evans makes room for the role of the learner's will indirectly by emphasizing the importance of humility

[47] Ibid., 109–10.
[48] Ibid., 113.
[49] Ibid., 110.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping," 164–65.
[52] Ibid., 164.
[53] Also see Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping," 164–65.
[54] Evans, *Passionate Reason,* 6.

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of character when it comes to the learner's ability to accept the truth. According to Evans, we must relinquish our tendency to "imperialistic reason."[55] A "transformation from pride to humility is essentially moral and practical," and "humility is a moral quality which it is quite proper to see as something which must be willed."[56] Evans builds his argument around the following remarks by Climacus in *Crumbs:* "With respect to this act of consciousness [discovering my error/untruth] the Socratic applies. That is, the teacher, whoever he might be, even if he is a god, is only an occasion; because I can discover my own error only by myself" (92). Based on this passage, Evans argues:

> Even my sinfulness is something that must be revealed; on Climacus' view I cannot discover it by myself. However, when it is revealed to me in the encounter with the god I have a choice as to whether to accept this insight. This choice turns out to be decisive for whether I acquire faith or not, since it in turn is decisive for whether I can come to understand the limitations of my reason and its natural reaction to the paradox, since that reaction is itself shaped by my sin.[57]

I will examine this argument more closely. First, as I have noted before, being in error and being in sin are *ontologically* the same, but they are *phenomenologically* different. As the quoted passage from *Crumbs* above notes, only the learner can discover that he or she is in error; a teacher is merely the occasion. Indeed, under the Socratic paradigm, a teacher may not even be necessary, since truth is obtained via recollection. In my descriptions of George Pattison's work on despair and sin above, I noted that the Christian notion of sin is tied to one's religious outlook. Christianity defines one's untruth or error as sin or as a willful *rejection* of the truth, not simply as a state of being outside the truth, or of lacking the truth. So, outside of *the moment,* a person in error (say, in despair) may cast about for an explanation of his or her state. But, while the person's despair *is* sin, when outside *the moment* its phenomenological status is only that of error (i.e., as a lack of the truth). In *the moment*, upon reception of the condition for understanding the truth the full nature of a person's error is revealed (though, on my account, not yet believed by the learner). Thus, when Evans claims that "even my sinfulness is something that must be revealed; on Climacus's view I cannot discover it by myself," he is correct, though his citing of the above passage from

[55] Ibid., 141.
[56] Ibid., 141, 140.
[57] Ibid., 140.

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Crumbs (which says that "I can discover my own error only by myself") is confusing.

But there are deeper difficulties with Evans' argument. To make space for the role of choice and will, Evans argues as follows:

1. In *the moment,* God reveals to us that we are sinful beings and confronts us with the paradox (of the Incarnation).
2. We need to accept that we are sinful beings, and that therefore our "own ideas about God are irredeemably flawed;"[58] this is necessary for us to recognize the limits of our understanding.
3. It is only upon recognizing the limits of our understanding that there is a possibility that our collision with the paradox will be a mutually happy one.
4. Our ability to accept that we are sinful beings is conditional on our possessing an attitude of humility.
5. Humility is a moral character trait that we can choose to cultivate.
6. Since we can choose to cultivate humility, it follows that we have a choice about whether to accept God's insight that we are in sin.

Now, although it is prima facie reasonable to accept that humility is a *necessary* condition for accepting that we are in sin, Evans' argument for the importance of the will requires the *sufficiency* of humility for accepting our sin—if we cultivate the virtue of humility, then we *will* accept God's insight on our sinful nature. But it is hardly obvious that humility is sufficient for such acceptance. Indeed, a person in despair who is looking for an explanation of his or her state is not unlikely to have an attitude of humility (though this certainly may not always be the case). But while this may make it *more likely* that they will accept God's insight on sin, there is no reason to suppose (at least based on anything Climacus says in *Crumbs*) that this acceptance is inevitable.[59] So *willing* (understood as the choice to cultivate humility) cannot by itself bear the weight of Evans' argument for the importance of the will. Also, in considering point 6 above, *even if* cultivating the virtue of humility would in fact result in our accepting God's insight, *unless we cultivated humility with the express purpose of preparing for such a moment,* it would be a stretch to see

[58] Ibid.

[59] I argued above that if the learner can choose to set her understanding aside in the face of the paradox, because she recognizes that she has reached the limits of her understanding, then her action is based on reasons, and this would contradict Climacus' claim that faith is not an act of will. Note that this same argument would apply here if the learner could choose to accept God's insight on sin, and such acceptance was sufficient to guarantee that the understanding would set itself aside.

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that we *willed* ourselves into accepting God's insight (for how could we have antecedently known that such insight was forthcoming?). But there are two other issues with Evans' argument. First, the breakdown of *the moment* into successive temporal decision-parts, where we first accept that we are sinful beings and that therefore we are more likely to accept (rather than be offended by) the paradox, seems inaccurate. Our discussion here is taking place in a Christian context, and in *the moment* we receive sin-consciousness and the paradox *together;* it is dubious that in this context a learner might possibly conclude that she is a sinful being (in the Christian sense) *first,* and *then* believe the truth about the Incarnation, or that a learner might possibly conclude that she is a sinful being (in the Christian sense) *and also simultaneously* take offense at and dismiss the Incarnation as foolishness; yet both these outcomes are conceivable under Evans' account. And second, with respect to Climacus' doctrine, the whole idea of cultivating a certain virtue in preparing ourselves for a "moment of truth" or "insight"—that is, a *progressive preparation* for the truth—seems to dangerously parallel the Hegelian-type paradigm of *progressive realization* of the truth that Climacus rejects. After all, according to Climacus, outside of the moment we are "outside the truth (not approaching it as a proselyte, *but going away from it*)"; this suggests that the notion that the leap can in some way be *earned* beforehand is ruled out by Climacus (*Philosophical Crumbs,* 92; emphasis added). For these reasons, Evans' account of the role of the will in the Climacan paradigm seems mistaken.

The main point that emerges from my examination of both Ferreira's account and Evans' account is that anything that would "militate against the decisiveness of the moment" by suggesting that the leap can be earned beforehand, whether it be through the cultivation of an "innate capacity" or a "spiritual potential" (such as the ability to reach a critical threshold of imaginative activity or a certain amount of humility) is not consonant with Climacus' account of the leap of faith.[60]

VI. Is Johannes Climacus a Kind of Arminian?

Timothy Jackson, in his "Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will," reads Kierkegaard as a kind of Arminian. According to Jackson, "Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms offer a consistent, and consistently Arminian, account of grace and freedom."[61] An Arminian account

[60] Barrett, "The Paradox of Faith," 274.

[61] Timothy Jackson, "Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 237.

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asserts that "we cannot independently reach for the gift of salvation, much less grasp it as a right, but we can either accept it or refuse it," and so the "human role with respect to God is thus voluntary but exclusively receptive."[62] According to Jackson, for Kierkegaard, "*God's grace is indispensable but not irresistible, a necessary but not a sufficient condition, for human faith, hope, and love*"; "the individual remains free to accept or reject the divine invitation. One is accountable for saying either 'Yes' or 'No' to the grace extended to all."[63] Given the Climacan account of grace and free will that I have laid out, it is reasonable to ask if this account could be regarded as reminiscent of Arminian theology.

Here I will consider two questions. First, does Climacus' account entail, in keeping with Arminian theology, that grace be extended to all human beings? And second, does Climacus' account reflect a belief in human freedom of choice, such that it would be fair to hold one "accountable for saying either 'Yes' or 'No' to the grace extended to all"?[64]

With respect to the first question, Jackson argues persuasively (using Kierkegaard's journal entries) that Kierkegaard believed unambiguously in the "universality of access" to grace.[65] His pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, however, does not appear to take a position on this question. On Climacus' telling, under the Socratic perspective, truth (as knowledge) is inherent, so under that perspective everyone has access to it. But under the religious perspective, truth (as salvation or grace) must be brought to the learner by God. He doesn't explicitly say that under the religious perspective God brings the truth to everyone. One could argue that as a thinker, Climacus must surely have been aware of the existence of non-Christian societies where people did not have access to the Christian religion. Since Climacus never explicitly says that under the religious perspective God brings the truth to everyone, it would appear that the Climacan account does not affirm a "universality of access" to grace. So at least this part of his account does not seem Arminian in character.

The second question is more interesting. According to Jackson's description of Arminian theology, Arminianism embraces "true freedom," which Jackson, following Augustine, defines as "the moral concreteness one acquires *in and through choosing* a specific alternative and subsequently binding oneself to it. True freedom is … a dynamic commitment to a virtuous

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 241; emphasis in the original.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 239.

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end, rather than formal indifference as an initial means to that end."[66] True freedom, understood in this way, involves a "positive capacity" and suggests that willing *is central* to the act of choosing (though it doesn't imply that choosing is an act of *sheer* will).[67] On our exposition of Climacus' account, he does regard the leap as a decision. Furthermore, the opportunity to make the leap comes about only in *the moment,* which is when God brings the truth and the condition for understanding it to the learner. It is upon receiving this condition that the learner can choose whether to believe and become a Christian. The decisiveness of the moment, on my telling, is connected to the fact that without God's initial gift, there is no salvation, and that without the leap by the learner, there is no conversion. That the learner has to take this existential step by himself or herself, must *will* himself or herself to believe, would suggest that at least this part of Climacus' account appears Arminian in character.

My admittedly rather brief analysis of Jackson's interpretation does not by itself mean that Jackson is right or wrong in his claim to see Kierkegaard as an Arminian. I am only pointing out that the *Climican* doctrine of grace reflects some aspects of Arminian theology. This is a fertile topic for additional exploration.

Conclusion

Johannes Climacus lays out an account of grace and free will that resists simple classification under systematic theologies of predestination or of radical autonomy. This is in keeping with Climacus' view that the transition to Christianity is both qualitative and decisive: God must bring to the individual both the truth and the condition for understanding it, but the leap is a decision by the individual, an existential decision to *believe,* and not an essential outcome of Hegelian sublation. In attempting to understand Climacus, it is important to use his definition of faith, that faith is a passion and that it is the condition for understanding the truth of Christianity (as opposed to a synonym for religiosity), because this allows us to understand why "faith is not an act of will," and yet that the leap is a decision (because belief is "a free act, an expression of will") (*Philosophical Crumbs*, 132, 149).

[66] Ibid., 247; emphasis in original.
[67] Ibid.

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