

THE POWER OF CONTRADICTION: THE BOTH/ANDS OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD

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Abstract: Either/or is a constant refrain throughout Kierkegaard's writings, yet he endorses two specific both/ands: the individual is *both* himself *and* the race and Christ is *both* God *and* man. What are we to make of this apparent contradiction? I argue that Kierkegaard is consistently inconsistent with his preference for either/or throughout his works while endorsing these two both/ands. I start with examining Hegel and his Danish followers, focusing on the contention Kierkegaard has with a Hegelian both/and. Second, I investigate the two both/ands Kierkegaard endorses. Last, I note the nature of contradiction, paradox, and faith, demonstrating that Kierkegaard's both/ands do not go against his penchant for either/or. The power of the contradiction of Kierkegaard's both/ands acts as a mirror, pushing individuals toward authentic faith.

Keywords: either/or, both/and, Hegel, paradox, contradiction, faith

1. Introduction

In *The Moment*, no. 1, Søren Kierkegaard states, "I, who am called Either/Or, cannot serve anyone with: both-and."¹ "Either/Or" is a consistent theme throughout Kierkegaard's writing project, beginning with *Either/Or* and continuing until the final pages of *The Moment*. Such consistency is no mere coincidence, for Kierkegaard claims a unified vision throughout his life as an author.² In *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard declares the following:

¹ SKS 13, 141 / M, 101.

² As discussed below in more detail, various scholars do not agree with Kierkegaard's claims of a unified vision in his authorship. The purpose of the paper is not to *prove* that Kierkegaard is accurate in his own self-assessment of having a unified vision but rather that one *can* read his authorship that way. For more on reading Kierkegaard "backwards" from PV, see Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "The Retrospective Understanding of Søren Kierkegaard's Total Production," in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, ed. Alastair McKinnon (Montreal: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), pp. 18–38.

It is Governance that has brought me up, and the upbringing is reflected in the writing process. To that extent, then, what was developed earlier, that all the esthetic writing is a deception, proves to be in one sense not entirely true, since this expression concedes a little too much along the lines of consciousness. Yet it is not entirely untrue, because I have been conscious during the upbringing, and from the beginning.³

Kierkegaard avers a grand vision from beginning to end, focusing on “the issue: becoming a Christian.”⁴ The phrase “either/or” aligns with Kierkegaard’s self-professed mission: *either* one becomes a Christian *or* she does not. While Christendom is a birthright, authentic Christianity is a choice; one must take the leap to faith “because the leap is the category of decision.”⁵

What does Kierkegaard mean that he cannot serve anyone with both/and? Any both/and? If that were the case, then Kierkegaard uses hyperbole, for we cannot avoid both/ands in our daily lives. Kierkegaard was *both* a brother *and* a son. For lunch, he often chose to have *both* sherry *and* coffee.⁶ The object of Kierkegaard’s ire is the Hegelian both/and of dialectical mediation. G. W. F. Hegel states in *Phenomenology of Spirit* that “mediation is nothing beyond *self-moving selfsameness*, or is reflection into self, the moment of the ‘I’ which is for itself pure negativity.”⁷ “Self-moving selfsameness” is a blurring of qualitative categories between things, as Kierkegaard explains in one of his journals from 1854:

Either you have a quality in common, or you are of a different quality—but not this [“]also sort-of,[”] [“]well, not entirely, but nevertheless also sort-of.[”] But in relation to that which is qualitatively different from oneself, what is important is that even if one were, if you will, the nearest approximation to it—what is important is that one have the honesty of ideality so that one is unwilling to listen to any talk of approximations, but insists solely upon qualities, so that one therefore *finds one’s joy solely in pointing to that which is a qualitative level higher*.⁸

³ SKS 16, 56–57 / PV, 77.

⁴ SKS 16, 11 / PV, 23.

⁵ SKS 7, 97 / CUP1, 99.

⁶ Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 290–291.

⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 11 (emphasis added).

⁸ SKS 26, 106, NB31:140 / KJN 10, 104–105 (emphasis added).

Kierkegaard's sees either/or as a corrective against a fusion of Danish Hegelianism and Christianity, a fusion which turns Christianity into blasphemy.⁹

Yet is Kierkegaard *truly* consistent throughout his writing when endorsing either/or while eschewing a Hegelian both/and? Kierkegaard clearly affirms two both/ands in his works that appear to side with a Hegelian concept of mediation.¹⁰ In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard's Vigilius Haufniensis stresses "that man is *individuum*, and as such simultaneously himself and the whole race, and in such a way that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual in the whole race."¹¹ A human is *both* an individual *and* the entire race concurrently. This sounds similar to Hegel's concept of the development of *Geist* in world-history through the process of human reflection. A second both/and derives from Johannes Climacus' reflection on the God-man in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: "The thesis that God has existed in human form, was born, grew up, etc. is certainly the paradox *sensu strictissimo*, the absolute paradox."¹² In respect to the god, Climacus says the individual "must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him."¹³ In respect to man, in order for humanity to know the god, the god must take on flesh: "The god will appear in the form of a *servant*."¹⁴ Jesus Christ is *both* God *and* man, and humanity needs both aspects in order to take the leap to faith: to *either* believe *or* be offended.¹⁵ Jesus Christ sounds to be a Hegelian *mediation* of God and man into a new third of God-man.

⁹ SKS 12, 40–45 / PC, 26–31. Scholars disagree on whether Kierkegaard's criticism is of Hegel himself or of Danish Hegelianism. For the purpose of this paper such discussion is a moot point. Kierkegaard refers to "Hegel" or "Hegelianism" in his writings without differentiation from the Danish theologians he encountered, and I will follow Kierkegaard's lead.

¹⁰ The issue of Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms always rears its head. I take the above statement in PV as my point of departure. As for "Kierkegaard's" view in relation to the voice of a pseudonym, I believe Kierkegaard gives us a clue in PV. By signing his name as editor on both PF and CUP he gives us "a hint, at least for someone who is concerned with or has a sense for such things" (SKS 16, 18 / PV, 31–32). I take this "hint" as Kierkegaard espousing the view while maintaining indirect communication. Regarding CA, we know that Kierkegaard almost signed his name to the work, opting for a pseudonym at the last moment (Pap. V B 42 / CA, 177). For more on reading Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, see Michael Nathan Steinmetz, *The Severed Self: The Doctrine of Sin in the Works of Søren Kierkegaard*, Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 38 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), pp. 13–22.

¹¹ SKS 4, 335 / CA, 28.

¹² SKS 7, 198 / CUP1, 217.

¹³ SKS 4, 251 / PF, 46.

¹⁴ SKS 4, 238 / PF, 31.

¹⁵ SKS 12, 122 / PC, 115.

What are we to make of Kierkegaard's contradictory position on "either/or" and these two "both/ands"? One solution is to deny an organized unity in Kierkegaard's works. Louis Mackey sees Kierkegaard as an author who beckons his readers to engage in his poetic musing, never having a unified religious purpose:

Can it be anything but disingenuous when Kierkegaard points to the "essential" ambiguity in his work and then, before the dust has settled, explains it all away? The duplicity is so carefully plotted, the explanation so breathlessly (hysterically?) offered. . . . To the charge that he began as an aesthete and ended, when older (senile?), in religion. . . . Unless, of course, he was lying—to his readers and/or to himself.¹⁶

Mackey argues Kierkegaard's statements in *The Point of View* "might be the cunningly contrived deceit of a poet who wanted to pass for religious."¹⁷ For Mackey, we encounter no problem; we merely have another opportunity for reflection while reading Kierkegaard.

A second possibility is that while Kierkegaard, in hindsight, believed he had a consistent, overarching purpose, he was in fact developing his thought as each work progressed. Kierkegaard mentions "an irresistible inner need, the only possibility for a depressed person" to publish his thoughts.¹⁸ One working out his faith with fear and trembling is bound to change points of view. The young Kierkegaard of *Either/Or* may see the world differently than the elder Kierkegaard of *The Moment*. Arne Grøn concurs, particularly regarding the both/and of the individual/universal:

The fact is that a crucial change of meaning [regarding the universal] occurs in the course of Kierkegaard's writings. In *Either/Or* the universal means what commits one ethically. . . . However, in the later writings, Kierkegaard emphasizes a different notion of the universal. Here he writes about the universally human that resists the "differences"; that is to say, the differences that exist between people and that give a society occasion to evaluate who is the most important.¹⁹

Kierkegaard, the explanation goes, adapts over time. There is not one definitive position concerning Kierkegaard and either/or.

¹⁶ Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard*, Kierkegaard and Postmodernism (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1986), pp. 182–183.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁸ SKS 16, 12 / PV, 24.

¹⁹ Arne Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Jeanette B. L. Knox (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), p. 125.

I find both of these answers to our riddle lacking. I take Kierkegaard's statement in *The Point of View* regarding a unified, religious purpose in his writing at face value, but in so doing I create a new either/or. *Either* Kierkegaard is consistent *or* inconsistent. Or, in a bit of irony that would make both Socrates and Søren smile, can both be true? Is Kierkegaard consistently inconsistent? In this paper, I argue these two specific both/ands—the human as *both* an individual *and* the race and Christ as *both* God *and* man—are not inconsistent with Kierkegaard's penchant for either/or. In fact, these two both/ands highlight three common either/or themes in Kierkegaard's writings: the absolute distinction between God and humanity, the necessity of choosing to become a Christian, and that God must reveal himself to humanity in order for humanity to know Him. These both/ands are apparent contradictions, and as Anti-Climacus declares in *Practice in Christianity*, "A contradiction placed squarely in front of a person—if one can get him to look at it—is a mirror."²⁰ The purpose of a mirror is to cause us, his readers, to reflect upon ourselves, to expose our foibles and presuppositions, to look inward, to become subjective, to take the leap to faith. These two both/ands pertain to the paradox of authentic faith rather than Hegelian mediation and thus are not contradictory to Kierkegaard's insistence on either/or.

To achieve our goals, we start with Kierkegaard's preference for either/or as opposed to both/and. Kierkegaard's first work *Either/Or* is a declarative statement against the Danish Hegelianism present in Copenhagen at the time of his authorship.²¹ We will examine Hegel and his Danish followers, explaining in detail what exactly Kierkegaard loathes about the phrase "both/and." Once clarifying Kierkegaard's understanding of either/or and both/and, we investigate the two both/ands in question—the individual as himself and the race in *The Concept of Anxiety* and Jesus Christ as God and man in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Third, we examine the nature and purpose of contradiction, paradox, and faith, showing that Kierkegaard's both/ands do not go against his insistence on either/or.

²⁰ SKS 12, 131 / PC, 127.

²¹ By "first work" I am referring to Kierkegaard's understanding of EO as the start of his writing career (SKS 16, 11 / PV, 23).

2. Either/Or vs. Both/And

The discussion of either/or and both/and has its roots in Hegelian philosophy, particularly with the logical principle of the excluded middle. Copi and Cohen define the law of the excluded middle as “every statement is either true or false.”²² In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline* Hegel challenges the rationality behind the excluded middle: “With the positive and the negative, one thinks that one has an absolute difference. Both, however, are in themselves the same and one could, for that reason, name the positive also the negative and, vice versa, the negative the positive.”²³ We can use cardinal directions to illustrate the issue. One cannot understand “north” without its opposite of “south.” Let us consider the question, “Is the state of Louisiana to the north or to the south?” The answer, according to Hegelian thinking, is *both* to the north *and* to the south. For the one living in Canada, Louisiana is to the south. For the one living in Mexico, Louisiana is to the north. The differences between “north” and “south” are *relative* differences, not *absolute* differences as the law of the excluded middle would have us believe. As Shannon Nason clarifies, “Hegel argues that *all* logical and ontological properties *only* have relative opposites. . . . A relative opposite is classically understood to involve the notion that some property and its opposite are *necessary* for each other to obtain.”²⁴

The either/or of the excluded middle, Hegel argues, only *seems* intuitive to an existing person in the moment, yet “the aim of philosophy, by contrast, is to ban the indifference and come to know the necessity of things so that the other appears standing opposite to *its* other. . . . Instead of speaking in terms of the principle of the excluded middle . . . one should rather say: everything is opposed.”²⁵ As Hegel explains in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the human existing without philosophically reflecting on her place in the world is *being-in-itself* rather than *being-for-itself*. To move past either/or to both/and, one must mediate the apparent either/or via logic to come to the truth: “It is reflection that makes the True a result, but it is equally reflection that *overcomes the antithesis* between the process of its

²² Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*, 12th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2005), p. 356 (emphasis original).

²³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1: Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Klaus Brinkmann, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 184.

²⁴ Shannon Nason, “Opposites, Contradictions, and Mediation in Kierkegaard’s Critique of Hegel,” *Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 1 (January 2012): p. 26.

²⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 185.

becoming and the result.”²⁶ If logical properties only have relative opposites, then the ground of knowledge is different from classical formulations. As Hegel explains, “The *ground* is the unity of identity and difference; the truth of what the difference and the identity have turned out to be—the reflection-in-itself that is just as much reflection-in-another and vice versa. It is *the essence* posited as *totality*.”²⁷ To make sense of our place in the world, we *must* mediate between our own self-consciousness and our experiences with the other. Thus, we are always in a process of becoming, relating to relative opposites as we reflect on our situation: “Concrete existence is the immediate unity of reflection-in-itself and reflection-in-another. It is thus the indeterminate set of concretely existing entities as reflected-in-themselves that are at the same time just as much a shining-in-another.”²⁸ María Binetti clarifies the process: “The movement of self-consciousness shows the reflective structure of the actual, according to which the immediacy of the substance is *mediated by the infinite reflection of thought*, and *resolved in a third relational and reciprocal subject*, both real and ideal, contingent and necessary, existential and rational.”²⁹ Either/or is a negative position that yearns for a positive. Only by positing a third position—a mediation—does one move toward the True. In fact, Hegel classifies either/or as “*dogmatism* because, due to the nature of the finite determinations, it had to assume that of *two opposite assertions . . . one had to be true while the other was false*.”³⁰ As Jon Stewart summarizes, “Dogmatism sees truth on the one side or the other of individual disjunctive pairs, whereas speculative philosophy *overcomes these immediate contradictions* and sees them as compatible by viewing such pairs from a different, more abstract perspective.”³¹ Dogmatism—the either/or—is a naive way of living life. The true thinker moves beyond either/or to both/and.

²⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 12 (emphasis added).

²⁷ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 186.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²⁹ María J. Binetti, “Kierkegaard’s Relations to Idealism Demystified,” in *Kierkegaard in Context: A Festschrift for Jon Stewart*, ed. Lee C. Barrett and Peter Šajda (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2019), p. 100 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 71.

³¹ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 186 (emphasis added).

3. Danish Hegelianism

Hegelian philosophy greatly influences the theological discourse of Kierkegaard's epoch. For example, in *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard speaks favorably of Hegel, and he uses Hegelian concepts and terms throughout his writings.³² While Kierkegaard appreciates some of Hegel's work, he does not uncritically accept Hegel's views, particularly how they were adopted by his contemporary Danish theologians and philosophers. As Stewart comments, "If Kierkegaard looked to Hegel for inspiration, he rarely confined himself to merely parroting him. Instead, he appropriated Hegel's ideas for his own purposes by changing them slightly and placing them in new contexts."³³ In the wake of Hegel's death, his students formed into "Right" Hegelians and "Left" or "Young" Hegelians, and both "schools" existed in Copenhagen during Kierkegaard's life. The Right Hegelians sought to incorporate Hegelian philosophy with orthodox Christianity while Left Hegelians had "a commitment to overturn the conditions of human self-alienation in its myriad forms," including the orthodoxy of state churches and bourgeoisie life.³⁴ Right Hegelianism is the primary focus of Kierkegaard's opposition to both/and, and as Stewart mentions, "[Kierkegaard] saw in the left-Hegelian criticism of Christianity a useful supplement of his own critique of Christendom."³⁵

Kierkegaard is not the first thinker to challenge the Hegelian both/and. The issue was a hot topic in Copenhagen, and the pro-either/or Bishop J. P. Mynster and the pro-both/and H. L. Martensen had an academic back-and-forth in the journal *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*.³⁶ In his article "Rationalism, Supernaturalism" Mynster states the following:

³² A clear example is the opening of SUD, where Kierkegaard heavily borrows Hegelian language when he declares the self as a "relation that relates itself to itself" (SKS 11, 129 / SUD, 13).

³³ Jon Stewart, "Hegel: Kierkegaard's Reading and Use of Hegel's Primary Texts," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries: Tome I: Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart, vol. 6, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), p. 140.

³⁴ Paul Lewis, "Young Hegelians," in *The Edinburgh Dictionary of Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Protevi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 616.

³⁵ Jon Stewart, "Kierkegaard's View of Hegel, His Followers and Critics," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Jon Stewart, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 58 (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 62.

³⁶ For a helpful summary of the conversation, see Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 188–192.

Whereas rationalism thus thinks that reason can help itself, and naturalism thinks that nature can help itself, *supernaturalism is recognized as man's drive to another and higher help*. What supernaturalism is, lies in the word; we are not satisfied with the miracles with which nature everywhere surrounds us, and we are not satisfied with the miracle of reason in our inner being.³⁷

Supernaturalism is not a form of rationalism. Divine revelation must come to aid humanity in its rational investigations: “*Aut/aut*; one can mediate between opposites but not between contradictions.”³⁸ The law of the excluded middle says we must choose. A both/and signifies that supernatural revelation is unnecessary, for mediation, as Hegel says, “is nothing beyond self-moving selfsameness.”³⁹ Martensen fires back with a pro-speculation position, arguing that Jesus Christ is the perfect mediation of divinity and humanity, the middle term between the either/or of man and God. According to Martensen, Hegelian thought

permits one to view Christianity as the *immanent* determination of God's essence and the divine world order. . . . [The God-man] cannot be understood in the sense of the *principium exclusi medii*, for then it would belong to the standpoint of the Old Testament, which conceives man's relation to God as exclusively that of creation to *the Creator*, while not recognizing the unity of the divine and human nature and the doctrine of the Trinity connected with it, in which the dogma of the creation is only a moment.⁴⁰

Martensen sees both/and as *the* Christian position, for Christ is the both/and par excellence. An excluded middle—an either/or—cannot make sense of the Christian faith.

Kierkegaard indirectly enters the ring with *Either/Or* via pseudonym Victor Eremita. Eremita discovers the writings of the aesthetic A and the ethical Judge William, and Eremita presents the two as opposing worldviews. The Judge has a curt word for the nameless A: “You yourself are a non-entity, an enigmatical figure on whose brow stands *Either/Or*.”⁴¹ Judge William chastises A's *lack* of decision. A summarizes his existence as “continually *aeterno modo*”—meaning he never settles down to make ethical decisions,

³⁷ Jakob Peter Mynster, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism,” trans. Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Karl Verstrynge (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), pp. 577–578 (emphasis added).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

³⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Hans Lassen Martensen, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *Principium Exclusi Medii*,” in Mynster's “*Rationalism, Supernaturalism*” and the *Debate about Mediation*, ed. and trans. Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2009), pp. 134–135.

⁴¹ SKS 3, 157 / EO2, 159.

living in a constant state of flux.⁴² A chases after poetic longing, yet he remains existentially bankrupt, “timorous as a *sheva*, as weak and muted as a *daghesch lene*.”⁴³ Judge William exhorts A to flee despair and make a choice: “I choose the absolute, and what is the absolute? It is myself in my eternal validity.”⁴⁴ A cannot waffle back and forth ad infinitum, avoiding the either/or of ethical life. His becoming concrete, choosing to become ethical, “is his salvation.”⁴⁵

Judge William seems to promote a simple either/or—lining up with Mynster’s position—a rejection of a Hegelian concept of mediation. By *choosing* a life of ethical living, A can mature into a proper citizen like the Judge. In fact, the Judge frequently references orthodox Christian doctrine, mentioning that his essays are “notes to Balle’s catechism.”⁴⁶ Julia Watkin comments that Judge William “appears to know more than the average layman about Church teaching,” and therefore Christian orthodoxy informs the Judge’s ethical criticisms of A.⁴⁷ Does this settle the discussion then? Kierkegaard desires people to become Christians, to choose to follow God. Judge William, informed by church teaching, beckons A to an either/or. As Jon Stewart states, “As modern commentators have also noticed, Kierkegaard seems clearly to *weight the argument in favor of Judge Wilhelm’s position*.”⁴⁸ Yet a careful reading belies such an assessment: Kierkegaard offers a word against both A and the Judge. *Either/Or* ends with a sermon from the Pastor, a close associate of Judge William. The main point of the sermon cuts to the core of both characters when the Pastor honestly declares that “in relation to God we are always in the wrong.”⁴⁹ Judge William is in the wrong just as much as A. While the Judge masquerades as an ethical man, he is just as fluid as A in his worldview. As Robert Perkins explains, “Though [the Judge] is familiar with the Lutheran form of Christianity, Judge William presents here only a phenomenological description of its congealed sentiments, stripped of their salvific content.”⁵⁰ By placing the Pastor’s sermon at the end of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard

⁴² SKS 2, 48 / EO1, 39.

⁴³ SKS 2, 30 / EO1, 22.

⁴⁴ SKS 3, 205 / EO2, 214.

⁴⁵ SKS 3, 207 / EO2, 216.

⁴⁶ SKS 3, 305 / EO2, 323.

⁴⁷ Julia Watkin, “Judge William—A Christian?,” in *Either/Or, Part II*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary 4 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), p. 120.

⁴⁸ Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 194 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ SKS 3, 332 / EO2, 353.

⁵⁰ Robert L. Perkins, “Either/Or/Or: Giving the Parson His Due,” in *Either/Or, Part II*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary 4 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), p. 217.

declares that *both* Mynster *and* Martensen's positions are incorrect regarding the either/or.⁵¹

For Kierkegaard, the problem with both/and is twofold. First, it makes unbelief the *relative* opposite of faith rather than the qualitative opposite. Kierkegaard via Anti-Climacus states "that the qualitative difference between God and man is pantheistically abolished" with mediation. He continues, "No teaching on earth has ever really brought God and man so close together as Christianity, nor can any do so, for only God himself can do that, *and any human fabrication remains just a dream, a precarious delusion.*"⁵² Assigning speculation as the way to truth makes the individual the foundation of God-knowledge rather than a God qualitatively distinct from humanity who desires to communicate. Stewart summarizes Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegelian thinking well: "[Kierkegaard] is critical of the idea that Christianity can be reduced to concepts or can be fully explained or understood conceptually. This misses the inward, non-conceptual nature of Christianity, which often involves paradoxes, contradictions, and absurdities that cannot be grasped or explained by philosophical thought."⁵³

A second issue Kierkegaard has with both/and is its never-ending process. As the individual mediates relative opposites into a new position, the process starts anew. If such a process is accurate, then no one will ever arrive at faith, for faith is a new position which beckons for continual development.⁵⁴ As Climacus states in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "The great secret of the system (yet this remains *unter uns* just like the secret among the Hegelians) is close to Protagoras' sophism 'Everything is relative,' except that here *everything is relative in the continuous progress.*"⁵⁵ The both/and leaves no room for a decision, for it relies on the objective deliberations of the individual to sublimate the opposites into a new position. Kierkegaard points out that the speculative philosopher views Christian-

⁵¹ Martensen obviously rejects either/or. Mynster sees the either/or as the need for God to give humans the knowledge necessary to formulate doctrine. He states, "In the midst of this world of miracles of manifold divine revelations, we build a second world of miracles, which is distinguishable from the first one" (Mynster, "Rationalism, Supernaturalism," p. 578). The supernatural gives humans the *data*, the *objectivity* of faith, rather than faith being subjectivity.

⁵² SKS 11, 229 / SUD, 117 (emphasis added).

⁵³ Stewart, "Kierkegaard's View of Hegel," p. 56.

⁵⁴ Johannes de Silentio consistently pokes fun at Hegelian continual development: "Every speculative monitor who conscientiously signals the important trends in modern philosophy . . . is unwilling to stop with doubting everything but goes further" (SKS 4, 101 / FT, 5).

⁵⁵ SKS 7, 40 / CUP1, 33 (emphasis added).

ity as a mere historical event, and “to the historical the greatest certainty is only an *approximation*.”⁵⁶ Approximations are indefinite, and any new data may force a rebalancing of the entire equation. The both/and leads to a Christendom where no one actually decides to be a Christian: everyone simply “is” one because of cultural progression. As Climacus claims, “Now, the speculative point of view has the good quality of having no presuppositions. It proceeds from nothing, assumes nothing as given. . . . Yet one thing is assumed: Christianity as given. It is assumed that we [in Denmark] are all Christians.”⁵⁷ If one assumes his faith as a default position, then there is no need to make an either/or; one never embraces the passion of subjectivity. A cultural Christendom propagates.

Kierkegaard’s insistence upon either/or is not necessarily about rationalism vs. supernaturalism or a declaration that mediation *never* occurs. It is about a transcendent God, qualitatively distinct from humanity. This God needs no opposite to exist, yet he beckons people to *choose* to enter into the life of faith. As Anti-Climacus puts it in *Practice in Christianity*: “Now the issue is: will you be offended or will you believe. . . . Then forget the understanding; then you say: Whether it is a help or a torment, I want only one thing, I want to belong to Christ, I want to be a Christian.”⁵⁸ Kierkegaard loathes Christendom and speculative philosophy because it causes people to never truly reflect on their status before the God of Christianity.⁵⁹

4. Both/And: Individual/Race and God/Man

Having covered Kierkegaard’s passion for either/or, we now turn to the first both/and of our investigation. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis contemplates the relation of anxiety to hereditary sin, a common, contentious topic in theology. Throughout history orthodox Christianity has condemned Pelagianism, the belief stemming from the thought of the fourth century monk Pelagius who taught that original sin had no bearing on the individual’s ability to will righteousness from his unaided faculties. As Jaroslav Pelikan succinctly defines, Pelagianism “[asserts] the possibility of achieving sinless perfection

⁵⁶ SKS 7, 30 / CUP1, 23.

⁵⁷ SKS 7, 55 / CUP1, 50.

⁵⁸ SKS 12, 122 / PC, 115.

⁵⁹ Anti-Climacus states that the only life wasted is the one who “never became decisively and eternally conscious as spirit . . . never became aware and in the deepest sense never gained the impression that there is a God and that ‘he,’ he himself, his self, exists before God” (SKS 11, 142–143 / SUD, 26–27).

in this life without grace.”⁶⁰ Rejecting Pelagianism affirms that human nature is marred or deficient because of the actions of Adam. If all humans are sinners because of Adam, then why is any individual condemned before God? She could not do otherwise. Does this not make God unjust toward humans, judging them for something they are powerless to *not* do? How can someone be culpable of sin if she had no ability to avoid it?

Haufniensis wants to affirm the inevitability of sin while concurrently denying sin as a necessary attribute of humanity.⁶¹ To achieve his goal, he states “at every moment the individual is *both* himself *and* the race.”⁶² Like Adam, each individual *willingly* chooses to sin against God: “Just as Adam lost innocence by guilt, so every man loses it in the same way.”⁶³ Yet, we would be foolish to think that the actions of others do not negatively affect our individual endeavors. Humans do not exist in isolation but rather live within a nexus of communal relationships. Haufniensis states, “The quantitative accumulation left behind by the race now makes itself felt in the individual.”⁶⁴ How is it “felt” in the individual? The answer is in *anxiety*, which Haufniensis defines as “freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility. . . . Anxiety is a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*.”⁶⁵ We, as individuals, encounter possibilities all throughout our day. For example, what will I eat for breakfast? Toast? Eggs? Nothing? What do I do with my options? As Grøn explicates, “What evokes anxiety is that we not only can but *must* take a stance towards our situation, a situation that opens before us as *indeterminate or unsettled*.”⁶⁶ Anxiety is the unease we experience when we are faced with a choice, “the dizziness of freedom.”⁶⁷ I will not know which option is best—toast or eggs or nothing—until *after* I choose. Furthermore, the nature of being an existing individual is that the interrelationship between myself and others drastically informs what I choose. Let us say that I was born into poverty, and since I had very little growing up, I always look for an opportunity to save money. When the possibility of breakfast arrives, I choose “nothing” because it is free, and I then convince myself that breakfast is *not* the most important meal of the day.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 313.

⁶¹ Haufniensis explicitly distances himself from Pelagianism in numerous places. See SKS 4, 335, 341, 343, 363 / CA, 28, 34, 37, 59.

⁶² SKS 4, 335 / CA, 28 (emphasis added).

⁶³ SKS 4, 342 / CA, 35.

⁶⁴ SKS 4, 357 / CA, 52.

⁶⁵ SKS 4, 348 / CA, 42.

⁶⁶ Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 15 (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ SKS 4, 365 / CA, 61.

I then go to work hungry, which makes me more irritable. I then snap at a coworker, and now he is presented with a possibility: how to respond to my rudeness. The reverberation of the action continues throughout the race, echoing with every new possibility. While this may be a silly example, it illustrates the interconnectedness of choice, possibility, and the world around us. As Lee Barrett correctly comments, Haufniensis “employs ‘anxiety’ to show how the coinherence of the individual and the race can be regarded as a psychological phenomenon in everyone. The race is neither an automatic multiplication of the members of an animal species, nor is it a collection of atomistically separated individuals.”⁶⁸

The both/and of the individual and the race is a *paradox* not a mediation. In his personal journals, Kierkegaard explains the paradoxical nature of original sin:

That “Original Sin” Is “Guilt[”] is the real paradox. How paradoxical it is can best be seen as follows. It is formed from a composite of *qualitatively unlike categories*. To “inherit” is a category of nature; “guilt” is an ethical category of spirit. The understanding says, How could it ever occur to a person to put them together, to say that something can be inherited that according to its concept cannot possibly be inherited[?] It must be believed. The paradox in the Christian truth is always linked to the fact that it is the truth as it is for God. A superhuman measure and criterion is employed, and in relation to this only one relation is possible, that of faith.⁶⁹

We see that the both/and of individual/race pertains to Christian faith, and it *neither* dissolves the qualitative distinction between God and humanity *nor* delays individuals from accepting Christian faith.

We discover the second both/and—that Christ is both God and man—in various places throughout Kierkegaard’s corpus, but we will focus on how Johannes Climacus posits the problem in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Postscript*. Climacus starts with Socratic recollection, noting that if the Socratic teacher is merely a midwife to the student’s recollection, then “every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge.”⁷⁰ Yet, if we believe that the teacher actually brings knowledge to the learner, then “the moment in time must have such decisive significance that for no moment will I be able to forget it, neither in time nor in

⁶⁸ Lee Barrett, “Kierkegaard’s ‘Anxiety’ and the Augustinian Doctrine of Original Sin,” in *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary 8 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), p. 58.

⁶⁹ SKS 23, 103–104, NB16:13 / KJN 7, 103–104 (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ SKS 4, 220 / PF, 11.

eternity, because the eternal, previously nonexistent, came into existence in that moment.”⁷¹ If we need a teacher to bring us knowledge, then we have a problem when attempting to learn something eternal. How can the finite know the infinite? “Eternal” is a qualitatively different category from “contingent,” so, argues Climacus, it is impossible to know the eternal unless the god grants the individual “the condition for understanding the truth.”⁷²

The individual’s inability to know the eternal truth is not the fault of the god, for he “prompts the learner to be reminded that [the learner] is untruth and is that through his own fault.”⁷³ Because the teacher gives the condition to the learner, the teacher becomes savior, deliverer, and reconciler:

Let us call [the teacher] a *savior*, for he does indeed save the learner from unfreedom, saves him from himself. Let us call him a *deliverer*, for he does indeed deliver the person who had imprisoned himself. . . . And if that teacher gives him the condition and the truth, then he is, of course, a *reconciler* who takes away the wrath that lay over the incurred guilt.⁷⁴

The learner becomes a *follower* through conversion and repentance, “becoming aware of that it was through his own fault, and with this consciousness he takes leave of his former state.”⁷⁵ As C. Stephen Evans comments, “Kierkegaard recognises that even ‘damaged’ reason must not be so damaged that it is impossible for it to recognise that truth about its condition.”⁷⁶ The god as teacher desires “to bring about equality” of reciprocal love.⁷⁷ As Hugh Pyper elucidates, “The role of the teacher, then, is to point to the realizability of possibility in the learner’s life.”⁷⁸ The new possibility of knowing the eternal comes with another conundrum: how does the god communicate? If the god appears in his glory to the learner, then the god will not achieve a loving relationship, for being in the presence of greatness will cause the learner to forever realize that he cannot properly love the

⁷¹ SKS 4, 222 / PF, 13.

⁷² SKS 4, 223 / PF, 15.

⁷³ SKS 4, 224 / PF, 15.

⁷⁴ SKS 4, 226 / PF, 17.

⁷⁵ SKS 4, 227 / PF, 19.

⁷⁶ C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 104.

⁷⁷ SKS 4, 235 / PF, 28.

⁷⁸ Hugh S. Pyper, “The Lesson of Eternity: Christ as Teacher in Kierkegaard and Hegel,” in *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary 7 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994), p. 143.

god. For the teacher to reach out so that the learner enters a reciprocal, loving relationship, the god *must* take on the form of a servant.⁷⁹ Because of the qualitative difference between humanity and the god, the god must become both God and man.

Becoming a servant is, indeed, what God does in Jesus Christ. Being God means that Christ can communicate divine truth to individuals who “[have] forfeited and [are] forfeiting the condition.”⁸⁰ Being a servant means that Christ sympathizes with humans, “precisely because the god is not zealous for himself but in love wants to be the equal of the most lowly of the lowly.”⁸¹ With Jesus Christ we have *both* God *and* man, “the ultimate *paradox* of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.”⁸² For Hegelianism “thought cannot think” this paradox because mediation seeks a solution to relative opposites. For Kierkegaard, the absolute opposites *are* the solution. This both/and—like the individual/race—does not blur qualitative distinctions between God and humanity. While Jesus Christ is both God and man, he is not a third “something” of mediation. The Council of Chalcedon proclaims that Christ “must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, distinctly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence.”⁸³ A Hegelian mediation of Christ would be Eutychianism in modern dress. Kierkegaard, via Anti-Climacus, stresses the *synthetic* role of spirit in the dynamics of the self: “a synthesis is a relation between two,” *not* a sublation/mediation/*Aufhebung* between the two.⁸⁴ While Christ is both God and man, he is not fused into a third of God-man, otherwise Christ would not be *truly* God and *truly* man. For Kierkegaard, the poles of body/soul retain their properties but *relate* properly *via* spirit, not fusing into a third *of* spirit.

⁷⁹ SKS 4, 238 / PF, 31.

⁸⁰ SKS 4, 224 / PF, 15.

⁸¹ SKS 4, 240 / PF, 34.

⁸² SKS 4, 243 / PF, 37 (emphasis added).

⁸³ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., “The Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon,” in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Henry R. Percival, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 14 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), pp. 264–265.

⁸⁴ SKS 11, 129 / SUD, 13.

4. Contradiction as a Mirror: Paradox, Offense, and Faith

Upon first examination, the two both/ands discussed are contradictions. Anti-Climacus explains the power of contradiction in *Practice in Christianity*:

A contradiction placed squarely in front of a person—if one can get him to look at it—is a mirror; as he is forming a judgment, what dwells within him must be disclosed. It is a riddle, but as he is guessing the riddle, what dwells within him is disclosed by the way he guesses. The contradiction confronts him with a choice.⁸⁵

A contradiction, a paradox to the understanding, confronts us with an either/or: *either* we attempt to explain away the enigma *or* we accept the paradox. We can explain away a relative paradox because it “is related to a relative difference between more or less sagacious people.”⁸⁶ Relative differences *can* be mediated with Hegelian logic. Paradoxes which relate to faith, though, are absolute paradoxes because they concern the qualitative difference between God and humanity. Climacus explains in *Postscript*:

Christianity has itself proclaimed itself to be the eternal essential truth that has come into existence in time; it has proclaimed itself as *the paradox* and has required the inwardness of faith with regard to what is an offense to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks—and an absurdity to the understanding. It cannot be expressed more strongly that subjectivity is truth and that objectivity only thrusts away, precisely by virtue of the absurd, and it seems strange that Christianity came into the world in order to be explained.⁸⁷

For Kierkegaard, “the understanding” cannot mediate an absolute paradox. From the Hegelian perspective, all opposites are relative and therefore logic can mediate them. Declaring that an opposite *cannot* be sublated is absurd to the one who buys into the Hegelian system. The contradictions, the both/ands which pertain to faith, arrest the speculative thinker, causing him to look in the mirror and ponder anew. We see such a dynamic in *Fear and Trembling*. Johannes de Silentio is baffled by Abraham’s offering of Isaac at Mount Moriah. He states: “Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham’s life. . . . I cannot think myself into Abraham.”⁸⁸ Silentio confesses to lacking

⁸⁵ SKS 12, 131 / PC, 127.

⁸⁶ SKS 7, 198 / CUP1, 217.

⁸⁷ SKS 7, 195 / CUP1, 213.

⁸⁸ SKS 4, 128 / FT, 33.

faith, for he attempts to understand faith within the framework of Hegelian thinking.⁸⁹ Silentio cannot get past the absurdity of Abraham's faith, for Abraham moves beyond the ethical to the religious—something Hegelian philosophy is impotent to do. The paradox is a mirror—Silentio looks back at himself, realizing that Abraham runs afoul of the system.

The absurdity of the paradox is offensive to Silentio and all people who have not taken the leap to faith. When we see the word “absurd” in philosophical discourse, we tend to define it as “irrational” or “nonsensical,” but this is not how Kierkegaard uses the term. In *Postscript* “absurd” is defined as “that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc.”⁹⁰ Why is a statement of orthodox Christianity labeled “absurd?” From the perspective of the Hegelians of Kierkegaard's time, an either/or—an absolute difference between God and humanity—was “absurd,” for as Hegel states, “Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward.”⁹¹ For Martensen and his ilk, to discover God, we must look to God's development through world history.⁹² Moving beyond world history to a truly supernatural, absolutely distinct God does not fit the speculative program. Rather than using “irrational” as a synonym to “absurd” in Kierkegaard's thought, I follow Jorge Luis Ortiz Rivera's use of “the term ‘nonrational’ to indicate what is found in a different sphere from the ‘rational.’”⁹³ Kierkegaardian absurdity is nonrational—meaning it does not follow the “scientific” logical system of Hegelianism.

To a culture steeped in a speculative philosophy encroaching on theology, a nonrational view of God was passé. The apparent contradictions found in essential doctrines of the Christian faith act as a mirror. A mirror allows us to see ourselves, both in exposing our

⁸⁹ Olivia Blanchette comments that “*Fear and Trembling* is a polemic against philosophy that uses philosophy to overcome philosophy, largely Hegelian philosophy.” Olivia Blanchette, “The Silencing of Philosophy,” in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary 6 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), p. 30.

⁹⁰ SKS 7, 193 / CUP1, 210.

⁹¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 6.

⁹² Hans Lassen Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics: Compendium of the Doctrines of Christianity*, trans. William Urwick, Clark's Foreign Theological Library 12 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1866), pp. 12–14.

⁹³ Jorge Luis Ortiz Rivera, “Un salto bienaventurado en la eternidad. Exigencias del hombre de fe según el pensamiento de Sören Kierkegaard en *Temor y temblor*,” *Intersticios* 14, no. 31 (July 2009): p. 131 (my translation).

faults and in causing us to reflect on who we truly are. Will we accept that God is nonrational, meaning we cannot completely understand him and all his ways through our unaided exercise of logic, or will we be offended? Anti-Climacus states, “The person who abolishes faith abolishes the possibility of offense.”⁹⁴ There is no offense of a mediated God-man in Hegelian thinking: it is the natural progression of Spirit in the world. If God is the transcendent God of Christianity, then it is highly offensive to the rationalist philosopher that the only way he will ever meet this God is from God’s direct revelation of himself rather than the philosopher’s own intellectual discovery of the truth. The contradictions of Kierkegaard’s both/ands hold up the mirror to the Danish Hegelians: they simply endorse Pelagianism with a new coat of paint. True orthodoxy is abandoning the system and taking the leap to authentic faith.

5. Conclusion

Kierkegaard is correct in his later assessment—he is “called Either/Or, [who] cannot serve anyone with: both-and.”⁹⁵ By examining Kierkegaard’s disagreement with Hegelianism, we see why Kierkegaard opposes a Hegelian both/and. The Hegelian both/and understands all properties as relative opposites, erasing any concept of a qualitative difference between God and humanity. The both/and of Hegel makes the choice of faith moot: faith is not something one arrives at from a decisive moment but rather a continual process of speculative reflection.

Kierkegaard’s both/ands are categorically different than the Hegelian both/and. In fact, Kierkegaard’s both/ands force Hegelians to reflect on the nature of God, rationality, and nonrationality. How one responds to the paradox reveals what she truly believes. Ironically, Hegel states that an either/or is mere dogmatism, championing the both/and of speculation as the preferred way of thinking. Kierkegaard’s both/ands—that an individual is *both* himself *and* the race and Jesus Christ is *both* God *and* man—are both dogmatic tenets of orthodox Christianity. Kierkegaard’s both/ands *are dogmatism*, for they derive from faith rather than speculation. Some may challenge such a reading of Kierkegaard. By emphasizing an either/or, an absolute, qualitative distinction between God and humanity, is not Kierkegaard now defining a paradox? Would not clarity nullify a paradox? Would not dogmatism simply be another system? Does not Climacus even say something

⁹⁴ SKS 12, 146 / PC, 143.

⁹⁵ SKS 13, 141 / M, 101.

similar in *Fragments*, where he comments, “If the difference cannot be grasped securely because there is no distinguishing mark, then, as with all such dialectical opposites, so it is with the difference and the likeness—they are identical.”⁹⁶ My answer, and I believe Kierkegaard’s as well, is either/or. Either we come to know God by his revelation to us, or we come to know God through our exercise of reason.⁹⁷ The Hegelianism of Martensen creates, as Emil Brunner eloquently states, “a God who does not speak *to* me so much as *out of* me—a God who is nothing other than the depth of my own spirit; therefore a God who is neither personal nor the creator.”⁹⁸ For Kierkegaard, Hegelianism creates a God who is the established order, an everyday immanence, a reflection of our values, rather than a God who reveals himself specifically to us.

Kierkegaard is consistently inconsistent in his use of either/or and both/and. By challenging the philosophical presuppositions of his day, Kierkegaard took “indirect polemical aim at that enormous illusion, Christendom.”⁹⁹ Having both/ands which relate to absolute distinctions indirectly assaulted the Hegelianism popular amongst the academic elite in Copenhagen. Kierkegaard’s writings give all of us pause, causing us to look into the mirror of contradiction: either believe or be offended.

⁹⁶ SKS 4, 250 / PF, 45.

⁹⁷ In various places, Kierkegaard states we must be taught by God to know him (SKS 4, 251–252 / PF, 46–47), that one cannot know her sinfulness unless God reveals it (SKS 11, 207–208 / SUD, 95–96), and that there is a qualitative difference between a genius and an apostle (SKS 11, 98–101 / BA, 174–177).

⁹⁸ Emil Brunner, *God and Man: Four Essays on the Nature of Personality*, trans. David Cairns (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1936), pp. 53–54.

⁹⁹ SKS 16, 11 / PV, 23.