WHAT ABRAHAM INTENDED: A NOTE ON TRANSLATING PROBLEMA I, WITH A VIEW TOWARD THE PARADOX

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Abstract: Probably no part of *Fear and Trembling* has received more philosophical attention than Problema I, on the teleological suspension of the ethical. It is a dense, potent, and difficult section of argumentation. Unfortunately, beginning in the first paragraph, English translations have suffered from a peculiar difficulty in providing a clear and precise translation of its definitions and so also of the dialectical impetus of the section. In this article, I review existing translations, show the difficulties they introduce into the argument, and suggest a better way of expressing Problema I in English. In conclusion, I show how getting the translation right draws Kierkegaard into the main philosophical debates about action theory alongside figures like Aristotle and Kant, and clarifies the scope of Silentio's "paradox" as a particular challenge for understanding the practical reasoning of religious believers.[1]

Keywords: Action, Anscombe, Aristotle, faith, intention, Kant, practical reason, translation, teleological suspension of the ethical

1. Introduction

Probably no part of *Fear and Trembling* has received more philosophical attention than Problema I, on the teleological suspension of the ethical. It is a dense, potent, and difficult section of philosophical argumentation. Unfortunately, beginning in the first paragraph, English translations have suffered from a peculiar difficulty in providing a clear and precise translation of its definitions and so also of the dialectical impetus of the section. This imprecision and vagueness has made it more difficult to understand and discuss his argument than it ought to be, and it is my view that clarifying Problema I adds significant sharpness to secondary debates over this important section. Thus, in this note, I will set

[1] This paper was the labor of a half dozen years, on and off. It was largely a solitary labor but two individuals provided significant encouragement along the way, whom I will thank here: Karl Ameriks and Megan Fritts.

out the main translation alternatives on offer, demonstrate the confusion they cause about the key question of intentionality, and suggest a set of translation options that better capture Kierkegaard's meaning. Notably, such clarity does not at all erase the paradox; rather, a better translation makes the paradox stand out more sharply and starkly. Thus, this analysis will make interpretation of and debates over Problema I more fruitful wherever English is the primary language in which Kierkegaard is read and discussed.

2. What Abraham Wanted?

Let us begin with the Hongs. Although they were not the first English translators, their achievement in translating Kierkegaard's writings has made them the default for many, and a natural place to begin. Here is how they translate the beginning of Problema I:

> The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times. It rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its τέλος but is itself the τέλος for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has absorbed this into itself, it goes not further. The single individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy, is the individual who has his τέλος in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to express himself in this, to annul his singularity in order to become the universal. As soon as the single individual **asserts himself** in his singularity before the universal, he sins, and only by acknowledging this can he be reconciled again with the universal. Every time the single individual, after having entered the universal, **feels an impulse to assert himself** as the single individual, he is in a spiritual trial, from which he can work himself only by repentantly surrendering as the single individual in the universal.[2]

My focus is on two sentences in which I have applied boldface to the phrase surrounding the main verb. In the Hongs' translation, there is a clear distinction between the two sentences: *sinning* means *asserting* one's individuality in violation of the universal, whereas *temptation* means experiencing a *feeling* that would lead someone to *assert* oneself in such a way.

Three more recent translations, by Alistair Hannay, Sylvia Walsh, and Bruce H. Kirmmse, have each shown dissatisfaction with the Hongs' translation, and render this passage differently.

[2] SKS 4, 148 / FT, 54.

Hannay:

> As soon as the single individual **wants to assert himself** in his particularity, in direct opposition to the universal, he sins . . . Whenever, having entered the universal, the single individual **feels an urge to assert his particularity**, he is in a state of temptation . . .[3]

Walsh:

> As soon as the single individual **wants to assert himself** in his particularity over against the universal, he sins . . . Whenever the single individual **feels an urge to assert himself** as the particular after having entered into the universal, he is in a state of temptation . . .[4]

And Kirmmse:

> Whenever the individual **wants to assert himself** in his particularity vis-à-vis the universal, he sins . . . Whenever the individual, having entered into the universal, **feels an impulse to assert himself** in his particularity, he is in a state of spiritual trial . . .[5]

I have bolded the relevant phrases where these translations differ from the Hongs' translation in each case. Interestingly, despite the differences between these three, all adjusted the translation of these phrases in the same way. Perhaps some readers already see the possible confusion created by their strategy, to which I will return later. For the moment, let us talk about the underlying Danish text to see what the Hongs may have left out that would prompt translators in a new direction. Here it is:

> Saasnart den Enkelte **vil gjøre sig gjeldende** i sin Enkelthed ligeoverfor det Almene, da synder han . . . Hver Gang den Enkelte, efterat have været traadt ind i det Almene, **føler en Tilskyndelse til at gjøre sig gjeldende** som den Enkelte, da er han i Anfægtelse . . .

The phrase *gjøre sig gjeldende* means "to assert oneself," so the Hongs seem to have simply left an entire word out, the short word *vil*. Hannay, Walsh, and Kirmmse add this word back in, translating it as "wants."

Is there something wrong with the Hongs' translation, and does the contemporary emendation of translating *vil* as "wants" correct the error? Let us walk through the condensed passage. Each sentence begins with a condition: "As soon as the individual (*Saasnart den Enkelte*);" "Every time the individual (*Hver Gang den Enkelte*)." The main verb

[3] *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 83.
[4] *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 46.
[5] *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Bruce Kirmmse (New York: Liveright, 2023), p. 148.

of the first sentence's condition is *vil,* infinitive *at ville*. The main verb of the second sentence's condition is *føler*, infinitive *at føle*. The meaning of these words is hinted at by their English cognates: will and feel. *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog*, the most serious attempt to catalogue the history of the Danish language, gives the following as its first definition of *at ville*: "an expression for . . . intention, decision, wish, [or] inclination," and the eighth definition provided is a "willed intention, demand, [or] wish."[6] It is perhaps more due to the extraordinary range of the English word "want" than to the semantic content of *ville* that the latter is so often translated as the former.[7] Now, what is the cost of translating this phrase as the Hongs did, so that Abraham's "intention, decision, wish, or inclination" is submerged? To begin, it is no longer clear whether Abraham actually *did* assert himself against the universal or feel a strong impulse to do so. First, since he did not *actually* murder Isaac, did he *actually* assert himself in the way that Silentio describes? If he didn't *actually* assert himself, then did he *actually* sin, and if not, why speak of him as a sinner? At the same time, he doesn't seem to have had a strong felt *desire* to kill Isaac. Silentio says that "Cain and Abraham are not identical,"[8] meaning that "only in the moment when his deed is in absolute contradiction with his feeling, only then does he sacrifice Isaac."[9] Further, according to Silentio, the "paradox of faith" includes the idea that the knight of faith has already passed through the ethical and acquired the character of a virtuous individual:

> Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal—yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal.[10]

For this reason, it is precisely Abraham's faith that makes the deed "difficult for him,"[11] difficult for him because he is repelled by it. If having faith like Abraham's presupposes having ethical character, then it presupposes that one already has rightly formed desires; and someone with this character does not desire, or want, to sin.

[6] "Som udtryk for (især en persons) forsæt, beslutning, ønske, tilbøjelighed . . ."; ". . . en viljebestemt hensigt, et krav, et ønske. . . ." Verner Dahlerup, ed., *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog*, vol. 26 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1982).
[7] One can see this tendency especially if one examines the Gyldendal *Dansk-Engelsk Ordbog*, which includes a large number of idioms in which it instructs the reader to translate *vil* as "want."
[8] SKS 4, 165 / FT, 74.
[9] SKS 4, 166 / FT, 74.
[10] SKS 4, 149 / FT, 55.
[11] SKS 4, 126 / FT, 30.

So Silentio rules out the idea that Abraham harbors murderous feelings toward Isaac; but since Abraham also doesn't actually kill Isaac, does Abraham actually violate either condition, on the Hongs' rendering of the argument? Letting *vil* slip away produces confusion, and one needs a way to show that Silentio's definition of sin does involve "intention, decision, wish, or inclination."

Thus, we come to the more recent translators, who have brought *vil* back in, as "wants." *Prima facie*, this may seem appealing, but it presents problems when we look more closely. It may even leave us in an even worse position than before. Silentio's definition of temptation describes the situation in which someone "feels an urge" or "feels an impulse" to perform the wrong action, described as a "spiritual trial" in the Hongs and Kirmmse or a "temptation" in Hannay and Walsh.[12] It presupposes that the individual has not yet chosen whether to act upon the impulse or to deny it. The danger of translating *vil* as "wants" is that it makes it unclear to the reader whether the two sentences describe the same condition in two different ways or two different conditions. One of the main meanings of this word in English is precisely to experience an inclination or strong feeling directed at having or doing something. This annihilates the distinction between sin and temptation, as now each seems to mean experiencing a feeling aimed at asserting one's individuality against the universal. Equally bad, Silentio's Abraham doesn't have a felt desire to kill Isaac (as we just saw), and we *still* have the Hongs' problem that Abraham is perhaps exempt from violating either condition. Readers could be forgiven for thinking that Kierkegaard himself is a rather vague, impressionistic author.[13]

3. What Abraham Wished?

A few readers may be tempted to call out, "Wait! Is not 'wish' available as an alternative here?" And a particularly skeptical, or merely stubborn, reader might even add, "And isn't

[12] *Anfægtelse* has given translators so much trouble that the first translators of Kierkegaard just used the German cognate *Anfechtung*. Following the Hongs, most translators have opted now for "spiritual trial," but I prefer the translation "spiritual agon," since it best captures both the etymology of the term (a kind of trial by combat) and what Johannes Climacus describes as the special meaning of this term in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (SKS 7, 416ff / CUP1, 457ff), as well as the implication that whereas one ought to take care to avoid temptations when possible, and that it is often best to flee rather than fight them, one must fight through an *Anfægtelse* instead. Yet it is admittedly rather awkward and not very idiomatic.

[13] If one will forgive me for the expressing the matter thus, one could say it leaves the reader wanting a new definition for "want," to avoid this impasse, but the semantic domain of "wants" wants any obvious recourse; a different word is wanted.

the semantic range of 'want' actually 'desire or wish,'" meaning, of course, that even if "want" created the potential for confusion, it was serviceable enough, if only we keep the second disjunct in mind.

Perhaps no such stubborn readers exist; but still, what about "wish"? Would "as soon as the single individual *wishes* to assert himself in his particularity" be preferable? Certainly, this at least distinguishes sin from temptation. And those familiar with action theory, or with Aristotle's ethics, will also remember that Aristotle too distinguished wish (βούλησις) from both appetite (ἐπιθυμία) and spirit or anger (θυμός),[14] and assigned to wishing a distinct role in his action theory: it was wish, rather than desire, that was "for the [person's] end"[15] or for things constituting or seeming to supply that end, or what a person takes to constitute that end, whether these things are possible or impossible, whether up to us or outside our power, so that Aristotle includes wishing for health, to be immortal, or that an actor or athlete would win a particular award or prize all as valid expressions of "wish" as opposed to desire or anger.[16] So, someone might be tempted to adapt this distinction here and say that temptation involves desire or anger, but sin involves wrong wishing.

Yet the reader who knows enough Aristotle to suggest this may already sense a problem—or, rather, several problems. If Abraham is presupposed to be virtuous, then Aristotle will want to say that his wish must be directed at the genuine good, and so he won't wish to do what is wrong, let alone what he knows to be wrong.[17] Besides, the concept Aristotle would wish to deploy here would not be "wish" but "deliberate choice" (προαίρεσις); and this is really to the point, since Silentio has already given "wish" (*Ønske*) a definite and distinct meaning in the text, a meaning that largely corresponds to Aristotle's, and is concerned in some way with a person's end. Kierkegaard and Silentio are particularly interested not in particular wishes, but in those wishes in which a person envisions their temporal happiness, later stating that "the wish" is essentially related to "a happier temporality" (whereas faith and hope are "the relation to the eternal").[18] Here we see that Abraham "was still young enough to wish to be a father" and "faith had

[14] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2014), 1111b2 and following.
[15] Ibid., 1113a15.
[16] Ibid., 1111b21-24.
[17] Ibid., 1113b24-29.
[18] SKS 8, 203 / UDVS, 99.

preserved" this wish.[19] Knights of both faith and resignation are partially defined by their possession of "one single wish" in which they have concentrated their "whole life's content and the meaning of actuality."[20] The significance of Abraham's wish is that it is contrary to his deed. On the other hand, for the tragic hero, "wish and duty [are] opposite each other," so that he "gives up his wish in order to fulfill his duty," for Abraham, the knight of faith, "wish and duty are identical" and "what is required is that he give up both parts."[21] Silentio defines Abraham's wish in terms of Isaac, of having offspring through Isaac, of living with Isaac in the land. *Isaac* is Abraham's wish, his "happier temporality," what he wishes for *in time*. He describes the pain of resignation in terms of the pain of giving up the wish in obedience to the divine command and the superior greatness of faith in terms of holding fast to the wish one has given up.[22] If we use "wish" here, to translate sin as "wishing" to assert oneself in one's individuality against the universal, then we will again lose Abraham, and make him exempt from the whole dialectic, since by Silentio's definition he does not *wish* to do what he does any more than he *desires* to do it. Instead of losing the distinction between sin and temptation, we will lose the ability to describe resignation, and be relegated to speaking nonsense, to saying *Abraham wished to give up his wish*. That is, we will have to say that Abraham was double-minded, which is not the situation Silentio wishes to examine; and, even if such mental infirmity constitutes a "paradox," it is not one worth so much fanfare.

4. What Abraham Was Willing to Do?

Consider another usage of *ville* in *Fear and Trembling*, this time, in its past tense as *vilde*:

> Det ethiske Udtryk for hvad Abraham gjorde er, at **han vilde myrde Isaak**, det religieuse er, at **han vilde offre Isaak** . . .[23]

Here, especially, we see the problems with translating *ville* either as *want* or as *wish*. For this passage would make no sense if we rendered this as:

[19] SKS 4, 115 / FT, 18.
[20] SKS 4, 137 / FT, 43.
[21] SKS 4, 170 / FT, 78.
[22] SKS 4, 114–115 / FT, 18.
[23] SKS 4, 165 / FT, 30.

> The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that **he wanted to murder Isaac**, the religious is that **he wanted to sacrifice Isaac**.

Neither could we render it as:

> The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that **he wished to murder Isaac**, the religious is that **he wished to sacrifice Isaac**.

The four modern translators translate this in three different ways:

> he meant to murder . . . he meant to sacrifice (Hongs, 30)

> he was willing to murder . . . he was willing to sacrifice (Hannay, 58; Kirmmse, 36)

> he intended to murder . . . he intended to sacrifice (Walsh, 24)

None of the more recent translators are willing to translate *vilde* in a manner parallel to their translation of *vil* above, as *wanted*. The oldest English translation, by Walter Lowrie, on the other hand, translates each the same way:[24]

> he **would** murder . . . he **would** sacrifice (Lowrie, 66)

> As soon as the individual **would** assert himself in his particularity he sins (Lowrie, 107)

This rendering now seems rather old-fashioned, but before commenting on it, let us examine the option adopted by both Hannay and Kirmmse: "was willing to."

This may seem promising. "Being willing to" involves a state of voluntariness that is distinct from both performing an action *and* from a felt desire to perform it. Thus, it could be the third thing that would draw Abraham into the dialectic of Problema I, as intended. But there are at least two significant problems with using this translation here or back at the beginning of Problema I. First, if we translate *vilde myrde* as "was willing to murder," then we are saying that the situation of Abraham is like that of someone who "was willing to go for coffee." Being willing to go for coffee does not entail that the person did go for coffee; instead, it seems to describe a kind of disposition or condition in which the person *would* agree to go for coffee *if* asked to do so, or *if* they became aware that their friends wanted them to, or *if* something similar. Yet this person might not even be thinking of going for coffee or making plans to do so, and this does not describe Abraham going to

[24] *Fear and Trembling; and, The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

Mount Moriah. Being willing to murder another person is a bad or wicked state, but it is compatible with the would-be murderer living on the other side of the world from the would-be victim and not even sparing a thought for the would-be victim. It means only that, under some possible circumstances, the would-be murderer would, or maybe merely could, choose to do it. This is not a particularly apt or precise way of describing what Abraham did when he went to Mount Moriah; we mean not that there are conditions in which he would kill Isaac; we mean that the condition was *activated*.

So "being willing to murder" would say too little. But it might also say too much. The standard definitions of this term in English place it firmly in the camp of what Aristotle described as a condition of voluntariness in *Ethics* III.1, as what someone would do either with enthusiasm or under duress. But "enthusiasm" seems to once again ask us to imagine Abraham either wanting or wishing to commit the deed—which he doesn't—or being in the situation of someone who is threatened by "a tyrant with control over your parents or children"[25] and is ordered to commit a shameful act. The first, we have ruled out; the second might mitigate the blame placed on Abraham, except no parent or child is threatened, unless we count Isaac, and it is Abraham who threatens him.

Abraham has slipped away again. The associated connotations of this phrase make it confusing to use, and regardless, it is unsuitable for the precise meaning needed by the definition.

5. Would, Meant to, Willed to, Intended to Murder Isaac?

"Would murder," the translation chosen by Lowrie for his much older translation, has a different problem. He uses it both in the second passage and the first, in the definition of sin: "As soon as the individual would assert himself in his particularity, he sins." Thus, he faithfully preserves the consistency of Kierkegaard's own prose, and he does it by using the English cognate for *vil/vilde*, which, other things equal, seems desirable; and, "would" can be used to express a mere intention to do something, which the other options surveyed cannot do—therefore, it might seem worthwhile to just return to this older translation of *Fear and Trembling*. I agree it is worth honoring Lowrie's translation more than we are accustomed to, but time has made this usage of "would" less common and less intuitive to contemporary readers. It has become much invested with the conditional mood and has so become inapt for expressing the indicative statement that someone *is*

[25] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a3-4.

doing something; instead, it is likely to be read as implying, more strongly than "was willing to," that there are circumstances which, if given, would entail that the individual murdered the victim; or perhaps that there are circumstances in which he would be happy to do this, or merely accept the necessity of doing so, given some other intention or other of his which he will not give up; but it does not, under this construal, imply that the individual *did* do anything in relation to the would-be victim, or even that the individual was thinking of doing anything. The phrase, used today, would be not much better than "was willing to" for the purposes of understanding Problema I.

This leads us to translating these passages around the main verbs "means to" / "meant to" or "intends to" / "intended to," respectively. One could also add the very literal—and sometimes the most literal one-for-one translation can be clarifying—translation of "wills to" / "willed to" as an option.[26] The very literal option would seem to finally fulfill what Hannay recommends to translators: avoiding both the temptation "to ease the passage of a translated author's text into the new language by amending the original in ways that make it more immediately intelligible" while also avoiding the temptation "to provide renderings that conform with—and may then be taken to confirm—a preferred reading."[27] But the very literal translation also comes across as very technical, while the original Danish does not. The other renderings—using "means" or "intends"—are less ambiguous than the Danish, but come across as natural English, and they avoid the whole host of problems listed above. These renderings assert that the individual had a purpose in

[26] In some languages, this is a more natural phrasing, and one can find it in German and Italian translations from the very beginning. For example, Emanuel Hirsch's German translation has "Sobald der Einzelne dem Allgemeinen gegenüber sich in seiner Einzelnheit geltend machen **will** . . ." *Furcht und Zittern*, second revised edition (Düsseldorf: E. Diederichs, 1950), p. 57, and Cornelio Fabro's Italian translation has "Appena il Singolo **vuol** farsi valere nella sua singolarità di fronte all'universale . . ." *Timore e Tremore; Aut-Aut (Diapsalmata)* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1972), p. 79. The German translations in general follow this pattern. However, the French translation of Paul-Henri Tisseau errs in the way that the Hongs do ("Dès que l'Individu **revendique** son individualité vis-à-vis du général, il pèche," or "as soon as the individual asserts [perhaps "lays claim to"] his individuality against the universal, he sins." *Crainte et Tremblement* (Paris: Fernand Aubier, 1935), p. 82. The Catalan translation of Begonya Sáez Tajafuerce takes a similar approach, rendering the passage as "Tan bon punt l'individu singular **pretén tenir vigència** en la seva singularitat per sobre del general," or "as soon as the individual claims to have validity in his singularity over against the universal." *Temor i Tremolor* (Barcelona: Marbot, 2012), p. 69. Thus my remarks in this paper may also aid those translating *Fear and Trembling* into French, Catalan, and other languages that cannot imitate the structure of the Danish as closely as the German and Italian translations do.

[27] Alastair Hannay, "Translating Kierkegaard," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013, rev. 2014), pp. 393–394.

mind and directed themselves toward this purpose without implying that the individual felt anything in particular about this action—whether attraction or aversion, whether he did it wholeheartedly or begrudgingly, without implying that he viewed it as an end or as constituting part of his end. "Means," "intends," and "wills" clear the room, in other words, of precisely those elements that Silentio means to exclude from Abraham's psychology, and allow us to focus—as perhaps Silentio intended us to—on precisely one thing, the idea that Abraham, regardless of his wishes or feelings, was engaged in an intentional action when he went to Mount Moriah.

Between "means," "wills," and "intends," I find "intends" to be the clearest and sharpest word available. I will therefore follow Walsh's instinct here, but now apply the result to the beginning of Problema I:

> As soon as the individual **intends to assert himself** in his particularity over and against the universal, he sins . . .

This allows us to establish the dialectic of Problema I in the following way: The ethical is defined as the universal, i.e., it applies to every individual and at every moment. Sin is defined as an individual's intention (whether outwardly achieved or not) to perform an action that would leave the universal and assert their particularity or, perhaps, singularity. Temptation is defined as a feeling (whether that takes the form of desire, fear, anger, etc.) that urges someone to commit such an act. Such felt urges are a consequence of our "immediacy" being as it is: our given desires, aversions, and other feelings do not, of themselves, necessarily cohere with the ethical; the individual must consciously intend the ethical in such a way as to transform these feelings so that they conform with the universal, whereas the sinner accepts them and intends what the felt desire suggests in contradiction to what the universal demands.

6. Kierkegaard as Ethicist and Action Theorist: Comparisons with Aristotle and Kant

The universal, as Silentio construes it, attaches specific tasks and duties to specific roles. What the ethical says to fathers is: the father shall love the son. The duty of the father is to love the son more than himself. This duty imposes both the task of forming loving character and the duty of acting in certain ways toward the son. Because Abraham does not live within a larger ethical community of some kind—he has no *polis*, is subject to no

king, does not belong to any modern state—Silentio concludes "there is no higher expression for the ethical in Abraham's life than this, that the father shall love the son."[28]

The question, given all this, is how Abraham could have gone to Mount Moriah. If we define his character and intentional states as Silentio does, then it seems he has no comprehensible motive: he doesn't want to, he doesn't wish to, he doesn't regard it as good, he has no ethical duty to do it—that is, unless there is some form of intentionality distinct from those normally provided by philosophers. In Aristotelian terms, he obtains no pleasure and avoids no pain by performing the act; he does not fulfill any wish he has or achieve any aspect of his end—quite the contrary! What could lead him to act? In Kantian terms, he can have no inclination to perform the act, but the ethical, which acts by causing the will to shudder in respect at the moral law, will surely not press him forward to violating it. The statement that "the father shall love the son" genuinely summarizes the whole situation: Abraham *does* love his son more than himself and he *ought* to love his son more than himself. Nonetheless, Abraham, feeling no desire to do so, aware of the contradiction between what he intends and his own happiness and blessedness, between the ethical requirements of a father and his intended deed, still went to Moriah—and he raised the knife.

The consequence of making the translation of Problema I clear in this way is that it shows us that the paradox is not, as it is all too easy to assume, merely a statement that Abraham, a culturally admired figure, violated an important ethical norm, or came in between two conflicting norms. Translating the dialectic precisely and correctly makes it possible to see that Kierkegaard, like the other major figures in ethics, had a depth and clarity to his understanding of action theory on a par with his grasp of the ethical dimension of life, and capable of structuring and underwriting it. Hence, the "new category"[29] Silentio says that faith requires involves reconceptualizing how we think about practical reason, from the religious perspective, as much as it involves rethinking ethics.

The kind of practical reasoning Silentio assigns to Abraham has much in common with a famous example from the next century, Anscombe's unintelligible agent in search of a camera:

[28] SKS 4, 153 / FT, 59.
[29] SKS 4, 153 / FT, 60.

> . . . [The] future state of affairs [of an intention] . . . must be such that we can understand the agent's thinking it will or may be brought about by the action about which he is being questioned. Consider the question "Why are you going upstairs?" answered by "To get my camera." . . . [If] someone says "But your camera is in the cellar," and I say "I know, but I am still going upstairs to get it" my saying so becomes mysterious; at least, there is a gap to fill up. . . . But if I say: "No, I quite agree, there is no way for a person at the top of the house to get the camera; but still I am going upstairs to get it" I begin to be unintelligible.[30]

If one transposes the conversation and inserts Abraham into this exchange, and we ask him, "Why are you sacrificing Isaac?" then the answer he makes will be: "To live with Isaac in the land where he will have descendants as numerous as the stars." It is constantly tempting to think that Abraham, in raising the knife, believes he is going to kill Isaac. However, the situation is, as Anscombe's example shows, not so easy to understand or describe. What *does* Abraham believe?

What Silentio says is that "Abraham believed precisely for this life that he should grow old in the land, honored among the people, blessed by posterity, remembered forever in Isaac"[31] and that Abraham "believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he was, however, willing to sacrifice him when it was required."[32] Silentio's paradox therefore seems to include the absurdity of intending to do something one does not believe will occur. Even if we nibble around the edges by distinguishing different senses of "believed" (*troede*), since *troede* can mean "trust" (in someone or something) or "believe" (that something is true), we could try to pry these into two different kinds of claims: perhaps Abraham *trusts* that God will fulfill his promise, yet he either believes a proposition akin to "I am going to kill Isaac" *or* does not mentally assent to any particular proposition at all (perhaps he thinks "I have no idea how this will turn out, I do not know what I believe; but I do trust the Lord!"). It does not seem correct to me to translate Silentio's "*Abraham troede . . . at han skulde . . .*" as "Abraham *trusted* that he would. . ." rather than as "Abraham *believed* that he would," but even if we do interpret the text this way, the fact that Abraham trusts that his intended action—which is wholly within his own power to bring off, just as it is within the power of Anscombe's example to go upstairs—will not come to pass, while intending it nonetheless (he is not intending to *try*

[30] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 35–36.
[31] SKS 4, 116 / FT, 20. The SKS has: Men Abraham troede netop for dette Liv, at han skulde blive gammel i Landet, hædret i Folket, velsignet i Slægten, uforglemmelig i Isaak . . .
[32] SKS 4, 131 / FT, 36. The SKS has: I al den Tid troede han; han troede, at Gud ikke vilde fordre Isaak af ham, medens han dog var villig til at offre ham, naar det forlangtes.

to do it) is, and remains, paradoxical and difficult to comprehend. This is why it is no wonder that Silentio concludes that attempting to understand Abraham's intentional state leaves thought "paralyzed."[33] It is infinitely easier to conclude that Abraham is either mad or actually does intend to kill Isaac.

What is at issue in this point is the fact that, as described by Silentio, Problema I grabs hold of a feature common to all theories of action since Aristotle: the axiom or assumption that it is essential to practical reason that it concerns identifying what is "up to us and achievable by action."[34] If Aristotle were to analyze Silentio's problem, he would have to conclude that the knight of faith was a type of person who was confused about the relationship between luck and action, and who proceeded as if one can incorporate luck into practical reasoning, like planning one's retirement upon the basis of winning the lottery or finding some sort of treasure, an unlucky marriage of reason and fantasy that cannot be consummated.[35] What else could Aristotle say when Abraham seems to have abandoned the requirement that action involves what is "up to us and achievable by action" to pursue things that "could never come about through ourselves"?[36]

The situation remains intractable for practical reason even if we shift forward to a modern giant like Kant, whose conception of practical reasoning includes an explicit discussion of miracles. It is well known that in his *Religion*, Kant stated, without naming Abraham, that a father should not obey a voice that tells him to kill his innocent son:

> Among miracles, however, the demonic are the ones most irreconcilable with the employment of our reason. For, as regards the theistic miracles, reason can at least have a negative criterion at its disposal, namely, if something is represented as commanded by God in a direct manifestation of him yet is directly in conflict with morality, it cannot be a divine miracle despite every appearance of being one (e.g. if a father were ordered to kill his son who, so far as he knows, is totally innocent) . . .[37]

[33] SKS 4, 128 / FT, 33.
[34] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111b23.
[35] In view of this, perhaps Brand Blanshard had *some* excuse for his explosive response to *Fear and Trembling*, insofar as it centers on the idea that Abraham's reasoning is depicted as "non-teleological" and thus (automatically, for Blanshard) as "irrational" ("Kierkegaard on Faith," *The Personalist* 49 (1968): pp. 5–23).
[36] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111b23; 1112a29–35.
[37] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 124 (6:87). Later, in a different context—discussing the right of authorities to execute someone due to a divine revelation—Kant mentions Abraham explicitly as having been commanded "to slaughter his own son like a sheep," and Kant reaches a similar conclusion, that it is "unconscientious to act upon [such a command]," p. 203 (6:187).

What Kant had said about miracles is the following:

> Regarding theistic miracles, we can of course form a concept of the laws governing the actions of their cause (as an omnipotent etc. and hence moral being), but only a general concept, so far as we can think of him as the creator and ruler of the world, according to the order of nature as well as the moral order, for we can obtain immediate and independent cognition of the laws of these orders, and reason can then employ them for its own use.[38]

Kant says that we can analyze a miracle as an event caused by the action of an omnipotent and moral being using its unlimited power to effect some good end. However, this "general concept" does not help us when we reason about the future or about action; the idea of God as "the creator and ruler of the world" is linked to "the order of nature as well as the moral order," and we can learn and cognize the laws of these orders—but while the miracle would be in keeping with the idea of the moral order, it would not follow the laws we use to cognize the natural order, which laws we use in framing our understanding of nature, an understanding we presuppose and utilize in our practical reasoning. Thus, Kant infers:

> Should we, however, accept that from time to time, and in special cases, God allows nature to deviate from such laws, then we do not have the least conception, nor can we ever hope to attain one, of the law according to which God promotes any such occurrence (apart from the general moral law that whatever God does will all be good, in virtue of which, however, nothing precise is established with respect to the particular event).[39]

Kant reasons that while we can know that whatever God does will be good, we do not know, cannot know, the law according to which he deviates from the general laws he has established for the order of nature.[40]

[38] Ibid., p. 124 (6:86). Kant delivers a much more explicit condemnation of Abraham in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 115: "For if God should really speak to man, man could still never *know* that it was God speaking," making the same proviso as before regarding when we "must consider it an illusion," and then adding, in a note, "Abraham should have replied . . . 'That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God—of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.'"

[39] Kant, *Religion*, p. 124 (6:86).

[40] Leibniz had begun to conceptualize the miraculous along these lines in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*; see Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), pp. 40, 48–49.

> Here reason is as paralyzed, for it is held back in its affairs according to recognized laws while not being instructed in a new one; and neither can it ever hope to be thus instructed in the world.[41]

Because reason cognizes according to laws, it loses its grasp when the miraculous appears, for this event *ex hypothesi* lies outside the scope of such laws, save the rule that God only performs good acts, a rule too vague for us to give it concrete application. Reason cannot apply the ordinary law and cannot obtain a new law; it therefore halts, unable to find a rule, unable to apply one, to the event in question. It is in this context that Kant makes his remark about Abraham. For, Kant reasons, while we cannot predict when God will perform a miracle, we can rule out a miracle that appears to sanction a violation of morality. Since the miraculously appearing voice—which speaks to Abraham in a way that cannot be explained by the laws governing the natural order—commands him to violate the moral order, we must conclude, says Kant, that the voice is demonic instead.

This leads Kant to say that in "practical affairs, therefore, we cannot possibly count on miracles, or in any way take them into consideration in the employment of our reason."[42] Kant adds a footnote in which he explains that this "is the same thing as saying: He does not incorporate faith in miracles in his maxims (either of theoretical or practical reason), without however contesting their possibility or actuality."[43] Kant defines a maxim as "the subjective principle of volition"[44] or "the subjective principle for action."[45] This principle "contains the practical rule that reason determines according to the conditions of the subject"[46]—that is, it is the principle under which an agent does, in fact, act. Following Henry Allison's commentary in *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, such maxims dictate "the pursuit of a specific end in a determinate manner and under certain conditions,"[47] and can be represented in a schema as follows:

[41] Kant, *Religion*, p. 124 (6:87).
[42] Ibid., p. 125 (6:88).
[43] Ibid.
[44] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 56 (4:402).
[45] Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 73 (4:422).
[46] Ibid.
[47] Henry Allison, *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 95–106. I quote here from p. 97.

When in S-type situations, perform A-type actions in order to attain end E.[48]

Silentio's argument is therefore easily expressed in Kant's terms; he can be interpreted to say that fathers should adopt the following maxim:

With regard to my son, perform those actions that conform with loving him more than myself.

"Loving the son more than himself" could then be taken to entail (at least) placing higher priority upon the son's welfare and well-being than upon his own. Maxims are themselves tied together by an agent's overall character or orientation of the will, their *Denkungsart*; this general orientation of the will can stipulate the relationships among different maxims.[49] So this maxim might also involve the possibility of the father acting in a manner that either ignores the son's well-being or even harms the son when demanded by other ethical principles, for example, if the son committed treason and endangered a newborn republic, as Brutus' sons did. So some (but not all) of Silentio's tragic heroes would or could be justified in Kantian terms. But what Silentio always maintains is that in Abraham's situation, there is nothing that could ground such a "higher" maxim—the relationship between father and son represented the highest ethical claim upon Abraham.

Then what does Kant's claim that a rational being should not or cannot incorporate faith in the miraculous into his maxims amount to? Suppose we attempt to frame such a maxim. It would need to have the following form, where "M" is a situation defined by expectation of a miracle:

In situation M, do A for the sake of E.

However, the schema requires a discernible link between the three terms; for example, if Kant were asked to describe the maxim utilized by Silentio's "thralls of misery," he would need to describe it as something like, "When marrying, marry for the sake of the social and material advantages obtained thereby," and it is rational to expect that marrying the rich brewer's widow would provide such benefits. If asked why one should do this, perhaps the person would have no answer, but likely anyone giving this advice thinks that a person's earthly happiness consists in possessing such advantages—and as for heavenly blessedness, well, that's a matter for the minister.

[48] Allison, *Kant's Groundwork*, p. 97
[49] Ibid., p. 98.

On the other hand, imagine that someone said, "Why don't you marry the poor girl from Jutland? I believe then you will become wealthy indeed!" One of the "thralls" might ask, "How do you mean? Is she expecting an inheritance?" And if the answer were, "No, she has mean expectations indeed," but then went on to say, "I believe God will miraculously provide whomever she marries with great wealth," and could provide no general explanatory principle to support this, one would not know how to frame the maxim. For there is no basis for asserting "marrying a poor girl from Jutland will make one wealthy," which is what one would need to support the maxim

> When marrying, marry a poor girl from Jutland to obtain great wealth.

If someone, perhaps the speaker himself, added, "But for God all things are possible," that is, that it is *possible* for a good, omnipotent being to bestow wealth upon the person who marries this particular girl—it *is* possible, but it cannot be made into a rational law, and so a rational being cannot incorporate it into its set of maxims. It is possible that when throwing oneself from a tower God will intervene to miraculously save one, but testing this possibility by throwing oneself from the tower is what is called "tempting God," assuming that God will act on one's behalf, or trying to force him to do so. Hence, Kant's conclusion that without knowledge of some kind of law governing when God will perform a miracle, maxims cannot be based on the assumption that God will do anything out of the ordinary, and this is knowledge we do not possess.

Kant's view is that it is not enough to identify a good end to know that God will intervene. Otherwise, every maxim could take the following form:

> When in any situation, do anything, and, by virtue of the fact that for God—who is both all-powerful and perfectly good—all things are possible, some good end will result.

Reason is "paralyzed" in such situations because it has no resources to draw upon for eventualities that, by their very nature, do not have a law-like character or display any kind of predictable relationship to actions or events that the agent might perform or bring about.

Let us return to Abraham. When he hears the voice commanding him to go to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac, he cannot find any maxim that reason would endorse that would support him obeying. For, on the one hand, killing Isaac would violate his duty as a father; and on the other hand, reason cannot endorse any general principle saying that God will

intervene to stop him, since God's goodness and omnipotence support only the possibility, not the necessity or probability, of that. Probabilistic reasoning supports the opposite conclusion, that God usually does *not* stop agents from committing evil. If Abraham nonetheless acts, it cannot be because of a rationally endorsed maxim. How can one escape the conclusion that Abraham must have been tempted by some inclination, a temptation he has sinfully converted into a maxim of action; and if this is impossible, because Silentio's presuppositions rule this out, then it is hard to know what to say except that perhaps Abraham is mad, or lying.

7. Conclusion

It may seem that making a slight change in how we translate Problema I should not have significant implications for how we understand *Fear and Trembling* and Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole. However, the matter of practical reason is so thoroughly interwoven into how Kierkegaard understands the paradoxical relationship between the ethical and the religious that greater clarity on the paradox can affect many different topics.

First, it means we cannot solve the paradox merely at the ethical level, in terms of "pagan" or "Greek" and "Christian" ethics. While it may well be true to say that for Kierkegaard, "Judeo-Christian ethics is not suspended; only pagan ('first') ethics or some variant of it is suspended,"[50] as Fremstedal argues, or to say that the knight of faith "relativizes" the norms belonging to social morality in favor of an "absolute relation to the absolute,"[51] as Westphal argues, we must *also* be clear that the "dialectic" that applies to Abraham involves him acting under the condition of having lost ordinary means-end rationality with respect to his most important goals and obligations; the knight of faith's actions and expected outcomes do not align according to human possibility. Silentio's paradox does involve ethics, but the breakdown of ordinary practical reasoning is essential to how "first" ethics is suspended and relativized. The paradox leaves us with the task of reconfiguring intentionality and practical reason so that Abraham's response to the Anscombian question is no longer nonsensical. If we cannot do this, then it would be better to accept what Kierkegaard said in his journal: "Let us rather say it openly, along

[50] Roe Fremstedal, *Kierkegaard on Self, Ethics, and Religion: Purity or Despair* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 112.
[51] Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2014), p. 94.

with honest Kant, who declared the relation to God to be a sort of madness, a hallucination."[52]

Similarly, we can recognize that this breakdown of ordinary practical reason is rarely mentioned in accounts commentators give of Problema I, yet is often deeply implicated in what they describe. For example, Mooney may be right that Kierkegaard means to show us that someone entering the Religious sphere, or making significant progress within that sphere, will experience a deeply disturbing "crisis" or "transition" achieving "a more complex ethicoreligious orientation" and "perspective."[53] But if the argument of this paper is correct, then it is mistaken to ascribe this crisis to a "*terrible deadlock* where inescapable requirements clash," in which the real problem is "a commonplace morality that absolutizes the claims of community, communication, and reason."[54] The "deadlock" is due less to a conflict of requirements than to the prior failure of practical reason to find a humanly possible path of reconciliation.

To shed light on this question, one can compare the example constructed by Elizabeth M. in *The Hurricane Notebook: Three Dialogues on the Human Condition*, near the end of the first dialogue. Elizabeth M. distinguishes Abraham's situation from that of a doctor who, to perform a medical procedure that will save a child's life, must first induce clinical death, causing the cessation of blood circulation and breathing, before reviving him. No matter how risky the situation is, she argues that the doctor is not an analogue for Abraham, because the links in the practical reasoning are based on scientific knowledge and the probabilities that a given course of action will produce a given outcome. The doctor does not find a way to break a deadlock between two requirements ("Do no harm"/"Save the child") but rather, through medically informed practical reasoning, he or she identifies a way whereby what would ordinarily be regarded as harm is now one of the means in a causal chain that leads to saving the child.[55] Abraham had no such scientific or probabilistic knowledge by which he could create a rational link between sacrificing Isaac and numbering his descendants through him; but Abraham believed. Hence, the paradox of practical reason is more fundamental than the deadlock, which is merely an outcome of

[52] SKS 20, 229; NB2:235 / KJN 4, 229.
[53] Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 80.
[54] Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, p. 80.
[55] See Elizabeth M., *The Hurricane Notebook: Three Dialogues on the Human Condition*, ed. Alexander Jech (Wilmington, NC: Wisdom/Works, 2019), p. 53.

practical reason's becoming "paralyzed," due to its presupposition that action must involve "what is up to us" and the terror of leaving the outcome up to God.[56]

What I mean can be brought to light by going back to Westphal: he is completely right to insist on the centrality of divine commands and promises to faith, and it is these that underlie both Abraham's situation and ours, as potential forgiven sinners and knights of faith in our own right. A person who lives and acts in such a way as to expect God to fulfill his promises always looks like Abraham and Mary, not only in receiving rewards and sufferings that their actions do not seem to merit, but in how the practical reasoning of the believer proceeds. This "believing" mode of practical reasoning—or rather, something approaching it—does seems to be what Kierkegaard recommends in discourses written under his own name, such as "What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air" in *Upbuilding Spirits in Various Spirits*, when he says,

> But if the heavenly Father feeds him, then he, of course, is free from worry about making a living . . . This means: to be contented with being a human being, with being the humble one, the created being who can no more support himself than create himself. But if a human being wants to forget God and support himself, then we have worry about making a living.[57]

Normally when we hear someone speak this way, we think it is only a pious nicety. We of course "know" that we have to worry about making a living; the command isn't meant "literally," by which we seem to mean, it is not meant *seriously*. When we do see someone take it seriously, like the abolitionist minister John Ames in Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*, we find it unsettling. When Ames was a young man in Maine in the 1830s, he had vision in which the Lord appeared to him in chains, which prompted him to devote himself to the cause of abolition.[58] This is comfortable to us, since here the vision leads someone to pursue an ethical end. Thus far, he is no Abraham. But his ready obedience to that vision was reflected in other ways that those around him found difficult and unsettling. His grandson (the protagonist of the novel, also a minister, and also named John Ames), recollects:

[56] Similarly, I think that the knight of faith's loss of ordinary practical reason is the common factor not mentioned in Lippitt's summary of four aspects of the teleological suspension of the ethical (see John Lippitt, *Routledge Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling* [New York: Routledge, 2003], p. 106), but I regrettably lack the space to spell this out in the present paper.

[57] SKS 8, 276 / UD, 177.

[58] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), p. 49.

> My grandfather never kept anything that was worth giving away, or let us keep it, either, so my mother said. He would take laundry right off the line. She said he was worse than any thief, worse than a house fire. . . . He really would give anything away. My father would go looking for a saw or a box of nails and it would be gone. . . . Times were hard . . . and he would actually give away the blankets off his bed. [59]

The grandson concludes,

> I believe he was a saint of some kind. . . . But he did make things difficult. It was an innocence in him. He lacked patience for anything but the plainest interpretations of the starkest commandments.[60]

It is unsettling to see someone live in strict obedience to divine commands and in strict dependence upon the mercy of Providence in this way, but I think that Silentio would say that this is what it looks like to live not only with "Christian ethics" (that is, obedience to divine commands, principally loving one's neighbor as oneself) but also "Christian practical reasoning"—living as if every need will be supplied by Providence and therefore living free from material worry. If we are unsettled, then it is because the practical reasoning of John Ames is closer to that of Abraham and Mary than to our own.

The foregoing reasoning, if correct, also has an effect on how we should view what some call "the figural interpretation" of *Fear and Trembling* associated with Louis Mackey, Ronald Green, and Stephen Mulhall.[61] Clare Carlisle at times also approaches this view.[62] This reading is based on the traditional medieval hermeneutics in which commentators identified both a "literal" and a "spiritual" sense of scripture, further dividing the "spiritual" senses into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical meanings of a given text.[63] In the story of Abraham and Isaac, there is a literal level of meaning conveyed by the story, and the other meanings are built from it. Mackey, Green, and Mulhall do not agree on all

[59] Robinson, *Gilead*, pp. 31–32.
[60] Ibid., p. 31.
[61] See Louis Mackey, "The View from Pisgah: A Reading of *Fear and Trembling*," in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Josiah Thompson (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972): pp. 394–428, Ronald M. Green, "Enough is enough! *Fear and Trembling* is *not* about ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21 (1993): pp. 191–209; Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 354–388.
[62] See Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010); for the most part, Carlisle dwells closely upon the text, but the analysis provided on pp. 111–118 adopts an interpretive strategy similar to that of the others.
[63] Mackey, "The View from Pisgah," p. 422.

specifics, but all agree that in some sense we are meant to view the Abrahamic story as a figure pointing to a Christian understanding of sin, faith, and forgiveness. Mackey's conclusion is that "whatever Johannes says about Abraham is to be understood obliquely of the Christian believer."[64] Surely this view is basically on to something true—Johannes does say, "If there is any question of an analogy, it must be the paradox of sin"[65]—but there is a danger inherent in this interpretation, a danger which I hope that my treatment of the paradox will ward against: the danger that in transposing Abraham's situation into the sinners, we forget the knife raised over the beloved, that is, we lose the fear and trembling. The Merman-seducer of Problema III, should he repent, will be burdened not only with the guilty conscience but with the fear that despite seeking forgiveness he will not after all change, that he will tire of Agnes and return to his old ways. Humanly speaking, it is easier to understand the remorseful Merman who disappears into the monastery, because he lacks the capacity for ethical married life, for which he depends on divine grace.[66]

To conclude, then, when we translate Problema I carefully, we see that in *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard is no less involved in thinking through the questions of practical reason and action than he is in thinking through questions of ethics. As in Aristotle or Kant, practical reason and ethical thinking intertwine in countless ways and cannot always be easily separated or distinguished. Especially since so much of the debate in contemporary action theory has taken place in English, part of what we have lost is an awareness of Kierkegaard's connections with these debates and his possible role in influencing them.[67] His thinking in this area is precise and more clear than supposed, and connects

[64] Ibid., p. 421.
[65] SKS 4, 200 / FT, 112.
[66] Jeffrey Hanson provides an account that partially overlaps with and complements what I have argued above. He emphasizes how "the teleological suspension of the ethical dispenses with the intelligible correlation between what has been done and how the deed is to be rewarded" and places welcome focus on the "hard sayings" of Jesus and the suffering Mary experiences as a knight of faith. Whereas I have focused on how the knight of faith can't depend upon the type of causal links that practical reason normally depends upon to connect means with ends, Hanson emphasizes the breakdown that occurs on the ethical level, so that practical reason cannot depend upon evaluating an action according to ordinary ethical criteria, either. See Jeffrey Hanson, *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith : the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious in Fear and trembling* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017).
[67] It is possible that he *did* influence Anscombe, which may make her example of the unintelligible camera-fetcher intriguing for the reader of Kierkegaard. Not only did her mentor Ludwig Wittgenstein and younger friend and contemporary Iris Murdoch admire Kierkegaard, but (according to hearsay) she herself read and appreciated him, although she did not know how to teach him without "ruining" him. She also mentioned

in subtle but straightforward ways with the thinking of predecessors like Aristotle and Kant who discussed practical reason, and even with that of philosophers of action like Anscombe who wrote much later; she too defined practical reasoning in terms of "future matters which our action can affect"[68] and described someone engaged in it as "trying . . . to find a truth condition which he can effect [or] make true"[69] to achieve some end. But not only must Abraham not expect his act to make it true that Isaac flourishes in the land and has many descendants—rather, his act must be expected to make that end false. Perhaps Abraham as described by Silentio must conflict with *any* "sensible" theory of action.

It is natural to draw a distinction between the perspectives developed within the *Discourses* on the one hand and *Fear and Trembling* on the other, but reading the text this way demonstrates their continuities as well. The difference is that knights of faith like Abraham and Mary present the same form of reasoning, but, as Problema II highlights, they follow a particular, not general, divine command. Even the practical reasoning of the *Discourses*, as evidenced by "What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air," however, displays what the kind of person whom Kierkegaard terms the "sagacious" individual must regard as a troubling insouciance toward the relationship between actions and outcomes. We see this elsewhere in examples like the imagined objection in "Patience in Expectancy," the objection that "the person who prays and fasts accomplishes nothing, since prayer is idle talk on earth, even though it 'works in heaven,' and fasting consumes earthly energy and gives no strength to endure in expectancy."[70] Thus, to restate my conclusion, although the difference between the one who follows the road to Mount Moriah and the one who contemplates the lilies and the birds is noteworthy, what they have in common—the believing mode of practical reasoning—contrasts in interesting and significant ways with the practical reasoning of Aristotle, Kant, and the main tradition of action theory in Western philosophy. Translating Problema I more accurately allows Kierkegaard to enter these debates as an important contributor to how

him obliquely in her debate with R. M. Hare and others over the honorary degree awarded to Truman by Oxford University. Anscombe quoted, without explicit attribution, a statement from his journals, stating that "the 'law' administered to oneself by oneself is much like Sancho Panza's whacks on his own bottom." See her letter to the editor, *The Listener,* April 4, 1957, p. 564; cf. SKS 23, 45; NB15:66 / KJN 7, 42.

[68] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Practical Inference," in *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2005), p. 131.

[69] Anscombe, "Practical Inference," p. 124.

[70] SKS 5, 222 / EUD, 223.

we think about the forms of action typical of religious believers and the believing mode of practical reason.