

KIERKEGAARD'S ACCOUNT OF FAITH AS 'THE NEW IMMEDIACY'

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The paper discusses Kierkegaard's account of faith as 'the new immediacy'. After considering the term 'immediacy' with respect both to its ambiguity and to the different ways in which it can be used, i.e. as an *epistemological* assumption and as an *ontological* assumption, I will argue that this very distinction can provide a hermeneutic key for an understanding of Kierkegaard's account of faith.

Keywords: Immediacy – Reflection – Faith – Paradox – G. W. F. Hegel

Kierkegaard's account of faith as 'the new immediacy' may be regarded as part of a general effort in the philosophy of his time: the (re-)establishment of certain immediacies as impervious to mediation. This came in reaction to Hegel's dialectic, which had implemented the continuous mediation of all immediacies. Hegel held that inasmuch as philosophy mediates the indeterminate immediacy of pure being at and *as* the beginning of logic, it reveals that there can be "nothing in heaven or nature or spirit or anywhere else that does not contain just as much immediacy as mediation, so that both these determinations prove to be *unseparated* and *inseparable* and the opposition between them nothing real."¹ If, however, there can exist neither pure, unmediated immediacy nor pure, immediacy-free mediation – inasmuch as both immediacy and mediation are merely *abstract* dimensions of something that is always already both immediate and mediated – then every immediacy necessarily has only the *appearance* of immediacy, and so must be convicted [*überführt*], so to speak, of mediacy. The dialectic of negativity as the procedural principle

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 46; see also Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. Theodore F. Geraets, Wallis Arthur Suchting, Henry Sifton Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 36 (§ 12, Addition). On Hegel's account of 'immediacy,' see Andreas Arndt, *Dialektik und Reflexion. Zur Rekonstruktion des Vernunftbegriffs* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994), 161-167 and 189-194; Karl L with, "Vermittlung und Unmittelbarkeit bei Hegel, Marx und Feuerbach," in Löwith, *Vorträge und Abhandlungen. Zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung* (Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1966), 198-227, as well as Gerhard Schreiber, "The Real Targets of Kierkegaard's Critique of Characterizing Faith as 'the Immediate'," *Kierkegaard: East and West (Acta Kierkegaardiana, vol. 5)*, ed. Roman Králik et al. (Šaľa: Kierkegaard Society of Slovakia, and Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, University of Toronto, 2011), 137-167, here 139-142 and 151-153.

of *determinate* negation (i.e., negation conceived as *real*)² and of the negation of negation does not stop, however, with this mediation of immediacy, since mediation must then *itself* be carried over into an immediacy.³ In this mediated or reflected immediacy – as the (ever) relative result of this cycle⁴ of immediacy and mediation – the supposedly unmediated immediacy is *restored* as a mediated immediacy, which now in turn, as the basis for the appearance of immediacy, forms the basis for further mediation.

During the *Vormärz* period (1815 – 1848), numerous philosophers of various persuasions united “under the banner of immediacy”⁵ to plead, against Hegel’s conception of the continuous mediation of immediacy, for the unmediated and allegedly unmediatable status of certain immediacies (understood as inconceivable and intangible). Schelling, for instance, wrote of an “innate and inborn” or “immediate content”⁶ prior to all real cognition, posited by the very essence of reason – a content which, as Schelling expressly states, is “not an object, that is, already a being, but is rather only the infinite potency of being.”⁷ Another example is Feuerbach, who spoke of “*sensuous* – i.e., *real things*” to which philosophy and science need to turn “towards” rather than “away from.”⁸ A third case, arguably, is Kierkegaard’s account of faith as ‘the new immediacy.’ The present essay will examine the extent to which this is so.

In Section I, I will consider the term ‘immediacy’ with respect both to its ambiguity and to the different ways in which it can be used. In interpreting Kierkegaard, it will prove crucial to distinguish between his use of ‘immediacy’ as an *epistemological as-*

² See Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 33 and *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 128 (§ 81).

³ See, e.g., Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 420-423; *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 173 (§ 111) and 224-225 (§ 149) as well as *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142f. (§ 413, Addition) and 152 (§ 423, Addition).

⁴ See, e.g., Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 49 as well as Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26 (§ 2, Addition).

⁵ Andreas Arndt, *Unmittelbarkeit* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2004), 16. Cf. Arndt, “‘Neue Unmittelbarkeit’. Zur Aktualisierung eines Konzepts in der Philosophie des Vormärz,” *Philosophie und Literatur im Vormärz. Der Streit um die Romantik (1820-1854)*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995), 207-233.

⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, “Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung oder Begründung der positiven Philosophie,” *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling, vols. 1-14 (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1856-1861), vol. 13, 1858, 1-174, here 65 (Lecture 4) [quoted from the partial translation by Bruce Matthews in *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy. The Berlin Lectures*, ed. Bruce Matthews (Albany NY: State University of New York, 2007), 91-212, here 133]; compare also 62-67 [*The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, 131-135].

⁷ Schelling, “Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung,” 74 (Lecture 5) [*The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, 141].

⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (Zurich and Winterthur: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1843), 69 (§ 44) [quoted from the partial translation by Zawar Hanfi in *German Socialist Philosophy*, ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher (New York: Continuum, 1997), 60-78, here 67 (§ 43)]; compare also 64 (§ 39): “something is *true* only when it is no longer mediated; that is, when it is immediate.” [*German Socialist Philosophy*, 64 (§ 38)].

sumption, following everyday usage, on the one hand, and his use of the term as an *ontological* assumption, following the technical usage that came into vogue at the start of the nineteenth century. In Sections II and III, I will argue that it is precisely the different possible ways of employing the term ‘immediacy’ that can provide a hermeneutic key for an understanding of Kierkegaard’s account of faith.

I. In everyday language, ‘immediate’⁹ (Greek ἄμεσος; Latin *immediatus*; German *unmittelbar*; Danish *umiddelbar*) denotes a *direct* relationship, one that emerges without further ado and without the mediation of a third party. Immediacy in this sense refers to a spatiotemporal presence that is unaltered and unadulterated by anything else. On the other hand, ‘immediate’ can also mean ‘inaccessible,’ as when something is inaccessible to us *precisely because* we have no medium through which to access it. Something that is immediate in this sense remains self-sufficient and self-identical, like an opaque surface that we can touch but cannot penetrate.

Both of these senses of ‘immediacy,’ along with the assumptions about *relations* that they bear, have left their marks on the usage of the term in *epistemology*. On the one hand, we can speak of an immediate *relationship* to an object of knowledge – as when it makes sense to us by itself, i.e., is evident to us. On the other hand, the *object of knowledge* can itself stand for something immediate, can be immediacy *in and for itself*¹⁰ – namely, when it represents something that is understandable only to itself, something that is neither susceptible to proof nor in need of it, something for which no further reasons can be given, as is the case with an axiomatic principle.

The latter understanding of immediacy, rooted in the thought of Aristotle,¹¹ became vitally important in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the term ‘immediacy’ was employed in the search for a systematic foundation for philosophical knowledge. Here ‘immediate,’ understood as an explicitly *philosophical* concept, gained the meaning of an absolute principle irretrievable by reflection, and immediately anterior, *qua* principle, to philosophy. This usage presupposes a dichotomy between immediacy and reflection, which emerged most prominently in Jacobi’s critique of Kant’s transcendental philosophy. According to Jacobi, truth is grounded in two realms inaccessible to science, namely, “faith” and “revelation” (here understood *not* in a dogmatic-Christian sense).¹²

When regarded as a self-identical relation, as immediacy *in and for itself*, the *im-*

⁹ See Arndt, *Unmittelbarkeit*, 6-18.

¹⁰ See Arndt, *Unmittelbarkeit*, 8.

¹¹ See, e.g., Aristotle, *Analytica posteriora*, Book II, Chapter 2, 71b 21-23; 72a 7-8.14-17; Chapter 3, 72b 18-25 as well as Book II, Chapter 9, 93b 21-23.

¹² See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn” (1785), *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 173-251, especially 230f.; “David Hume on Faith” (1787), *ibid.*, 253-338, especially 264-267, 273 and 275; “Preface and also Introduction to the Author’s Collected Philosophical Works” (1815), *ibid.*, 537-590, especially 538 and 541; see also Arndt, *Dialektik und Reflexion*, 97-101.

mediate simultaneously presents us with something *un*-mediated and *un*-mediatable. The immediate cannot be dissolved in mediation – that is, it cannot be conceptualized by us – without thereby losing its status as immediate. Yet this in no way implies that the immediate must elude every form of communication or relation. For all its impenetrability, even the opaque surface mentioned above can still be touched, that is, *described* in outline, giving us a *de facto relationship* to the immediate.¹³

In the context of Kierkegaard's use of 'immediate,' it is also worth noting that, from the start of the 19th century onward, the term was also employed – alongside its epistemological usage – as a "reified category" in ontology "that asserts something about the internal constitution of beings or of Being itself."¹⁴ Usage of this kind is evident, for example, when Hegel writes: "Immediacy means being in general; being, or this abstract relation to self, is immediate to the extent that we remove relationship."¹⁵ Thus in interpreting Kierkegaard's understanding of 'immediacy,' and the extent to which he understood faith as 'immediacy,' we will need to reflect not only on the term's own ambiguity, but also on the different possible ways of employing the term.

When we consider the various passages in which Kierkegaard employs the term 'immediacy' when discussing Christianity and Christian faith,¹⁶ we may observe the following pattern. 'Immediacy' is used in its *epistemological* sense primarily when Kierkegaard characterizes faith as "the new immediacy"¹⁷ or "an immediacy that follows reflection."¹⁸ Kierkegaard aimed to differentiate this understanding of faith as clearly as possible from an understanding of faith as "the immediate," or, as he writes elsewhere, as "the (first) immediacy."¹⁹ By contrast, 'immediacy' is used in an *ontological* sense – or, more

¹³ A useful visualization of this ambiguity can be found in "The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic" in the first part of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1843), where 'A' describes the relation of music (immediacy) to language (reflection) as the relation between two adjoining realms that abut without penetrating one another. See SKS 2, 64 / *EOI*, 56f. and SKS 2, 71-73 / *EOI*, 64-67.

¹⁴ Arndt, *Unmittelbarkeit*, 8.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. One-Volume Edition. The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter Crafts Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158. See also Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 47.

¹⁶ See Gerhard Schreiber, "Glaube und 'Unmittelbarkeit' bei Kierkegaard," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2010*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and K. Brian Söderquist (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 391-426, here 402-405.

¹⁷ See, e.g., SKS 7, 318 / *CUP1*, 347 (note); *Pap. X 6 B 78 / JP 1*, 9; see also SKS 18, 204, JJ:201 / *KJN 2*, 188; SKS 18, 205, JJ:203 / *KJN 2*, 189; SKS 18, 217, JJ:237 / *KJN 2*, 199; SKS 19, 185, Not5:23 / *KJN 3*, 181.

¹⁸ See, e.g., SKS 20, 363, NB4:159 / *KJN 4*, 363 (*JP 2*, 1123: "immediacy after reflection") and SKS 20, 364, NB4:159 / *KJN 4*, 364 (*JP 5*, 6135: "spontaneity after reflection"); SKS 18, 211, JJ:221 / *KJN 2*, 194; see also SKS 4, 172 / *FT*, 82 ("Faith is...a later immediacy"); SKS 6, 157 / *SLW*, 169 ("the higher immediacy of the religious") and SKS 6, 370 / *SLW*, 399.

¹⁹ See, e.g., SKS 4, 161 / *FT*, 69; SKS 4, 172 / *FT*, 82; SKS 4, 188 / *FT*, 99; SKS 4, 318 / *CA*, 10; SKS 6, 271 / *SLW*, 292; SKS 7, 238 / *CUP1*, 262; SKS 7, 265 / *CUP1*, 291; SKS 7, 317f. / *CUP1*, 347; SKS 7, 453 / *CUP1*, 500; SKS 12, 144 / *PC*, 141; SKS 18, 203, JJ:196 / *KJN 2*, 187; SKS 19, 185, Not5:23 / *KJN 3*, 181; SKS 27, 112, *Papir 92 / JP 2*, 1096; SKS 27, 282, *Papir 289 / JP 2*, 1101; SKS 20,

precisely, an *ontological-existential* sense – when Kierkegaard speaks of “losing” or “dying to” immediacy, or conversely of a “recovering” or “returning” to, or of, immediacy.²⁰ In these contexts, ‘immediacy’ is used less in an epistemological sense than in an *existential* sense, a sense concerned with existence itself, inasmuch as the term is used to say something about the *mode* of existing. This will be demonstrated in the section that follows.

II. For Kierkegaard, Christian faith is an immediacy that necessarily presupposes reflection: “Once reflection is totally exhausted, **faith** begins.”²¹ Epistemologically considered, reflection precedes faith, but faith does not emerge from reflection – not through mediation, at least, and not without a leap. In a polemic against the use of the “probability proof” to establish the truth of Christianity, which he characterized as an illusory attempt to use the method of approximation to “quantify oneself into”²² the *quality* of faith, Johannes Climacus argues in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) that from the “probability proof” there “is no direct transition²³ to faith, since...faith is by no means partial to probability – to say that about faith would be slander. If that fact [i.e., that God became man] came into the world as the absolute paradox, all that comes later would be of no help, because this remains for all eternity the consequences of a paradox and thus just as definitively improbable as the paradox.”²⁴

According to Kierkegaard, this object of faith, the “absolute paradox” of God’s becoming man, is “humanly speaking,...the most absurd of all absurdities.”²⁵ When faced with it, the understanding inevitably fails. As Kierkegaard had made clear during his dis-

59, NB:70 / *KJN* 4, 58. On the nature and targets of Kierkegaard’s critique, see Schreiber, “The Real Targets of Kierkegaard’s Critique of Characterizing Faith as ‘the Immediate’,” 138f. and 147-167.

²⁰ See, e.g., *SKS* 20, 358, NB4:154 / *KJN* 4, 358; *SKS* 21, 229, NB9:50 / *KJN* 5, 238; *SKS* 22, 40, NB11:62 / *JP* 1, 972; *SKS* 22, 198, NB12:102 / *JP* 4, 4637; *SKS* 6, 444f. / *SLW*, 483f.; *SKS* 7, 318 / *CUP1*, 347 (note); *SKS* 7, 418-421 / *CUP1*, 460-463; *SKS* 7, 438f. / *CUP1*, 483f.; *SKS* 27, 487f., *Papir* 409:1 / *JP* 1, 67.

²¹ *SKS* 18, 211, JJ:221 / *KJN* 2, 194.

²² *SKS* 7, 21 / *CUP1*, 11; see also *SKS* 7, 24 / *CUP1*, 15; *SKS* 7, 35 / *CUP1*, 28 and *SKS* 7, 94 / *CUP1*, 95.

²³ With regard to the ‘leap’ as a ‘qualitative’ or ‘pathos-laden transition’ (*to* or *into* faith) – i.e., a transition that is *not* continuous or gradual, but *discontinuous* or radical—as opposed to a ‘direct’ or ‘dialectical transition’—see *SKS* 19, 375, Not12:4 / *KJN* 3, 373; *SKS* 19, 386, Not13:8.a / *KJN* 3, 384; *SKS* 19, 386, Not13:8.c / *KJN* 3, 384; *SKS* 27, 275-277, *Papir* 283:1-2 / *JP* 3, 2345-2351; *SKS* 18, 241, JJ:318 / *KJN* 2, 221; *Pap.* VI B 13 / *JP* 5, 5787; *SKS* 7, 21-24 / *CUP1*, 11-14; *SKS* 7, 92-103 / *CUP1*, 93-106; *SKS* 27, 399, *Papir* 365:24 / *JP* 1, 649,34; *SKS* 27, 408, *Papir* 368:2.b / *JP* 1, 653,5; *SKS* 20, 73, NB:87 / *JP* 3, 2820; *SKS* 21, 326f., NB10:138 / *JP* 1, 762. See also my two articles on “Leap” and “Transition” (forthcoming 2013) in *Kierkegaard’s Concepts (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 15), ed. Steven Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart, Tome IV and Tome VI (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate).

²⁴ *SKS* 4, 291f. / *PF*, 94f.; see also *SKS* 18, 158f., JJ:58 / *KJN* 2, 147; *SKS* 18, 162f., JJ:73 / *KJN* 2, 150f.; *SKS* 18, 176, JJ:111 / *KJN* 2, 163; *SKS* 19, 390f., Not13:23 / *KJN* 3, 388; *SKS* 19, 418, Not13:53 / *KJN* 3, 416; *SKS* 7, 54 / *CUP1*, 48; *SKS* 27, 275, *Papir* 283:1 / *JP* 3, 2345.

²⁵ *SKS* 21, 35, NB6:45 / *KJN* 5, 33 (translation slightly modified).

pute with the Icelandic theologian Magnús Eiríksson, whose 1850 book *Is Faith a Paradox and "By Virtue of the Absurd"?*²⁶ had harshly criticized the Kierkegaardian account of faith in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and the Climacus writings (1844/46), the absurd functions as a *boundary-concept* for reason, a concept that *demarcates negatively*, as “a sphere by itself,”²⁷ the domain of faith from the realm of human intellection. It thereby wards off confusion of the two spheres: “The absurd is the negative criterion of that which is higher than human understanding and knowledge.”²⁸ When it comes to *presentations* of faith, therefore, one should ensure “that this immediacy of which he [viz., the one presenting faith appropriately] speaks is the new immediacy, and precisely this is assured by the negative sign.”²⁹

According to Kierkegaard, Eiríksson not only failed to appreciate that the absurd, *qua* boundary-concept, was inextricably interlinked with faith,³⁰ but also failed to take into account the particular *perspective* set forth by each of the two pseudonyms, which Kierkegaard used to illuminate faith from an unbeliever’s standpoint³¹ – namely, *negatively*: by virtue of the absurd. “To a third person the believer relates himself by virtue of the absurd; so must a third person judge, for the third person does not have the passion of faith.”³² The believer himself, however, has a *different view* of things, as the absurd is in no way absurd *to him*. Only in the “autopsy of faith”³³ – as Kierkegaard elsewhere calls the believer’s peculiar mode of perception, which itself bears a *qualitative* difference to natural perception and marks a break with the imagination – does a *transformation* of the absurd take place: “When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd – faith transforms it, but in every weak moment it is again more or less absurd to him. The passion of faith is the only thing that masters the absurd – if not, then faith is not faith in the strictest sense, but a kind of knowledge.”³⁴

Between faith’s immediacy and the realm of intellectual activity lies a *fault line*. “Regarded historically and existentially, this fault line is called ‘absurd.’”³⁵ There can

²⁶ Magnús Eiríksson [Theophilus Nicolaus], *Er Troen et Paradox og "i Kraft af det Absurde"?* (Copenhagen: Chr. Steen & Søn, 1850). On this dispute between Kierkegaard and Eiríksson, see Gerhard Schreiber, “Magnús Eiríksson: An Opponent of Martensen and an Unwelcome Ally of Kierkegaard,” *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology* (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 7), ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 49-94, especially 75-86.

²⁷ *Pap.* X 6 B 79, p. 85 / *JP* 1, 10.

²⁸ *Pap.* X 6 B 80, p. 87 / *JP*, 1, 11; see also *SKS* 23, 24, NB15:25 / *JP* 1, 7.

²⁹ *Pap.* X 6 B 78, p. 84 / *JP* 1, 9.

³⁰ See, e.g., *Pap.* X 6 B 79, p. 86 / *JP* 1, 10.

³¹ See, e.g., *Pap.* X 6 B 79, p. 85 / *JP* 1, 10; *Pap.* X 6 B 82, p. 88 / *JP* 6, 6601; *SKS* 23, 182f., NB17:28 / *JP* 6, 6597.

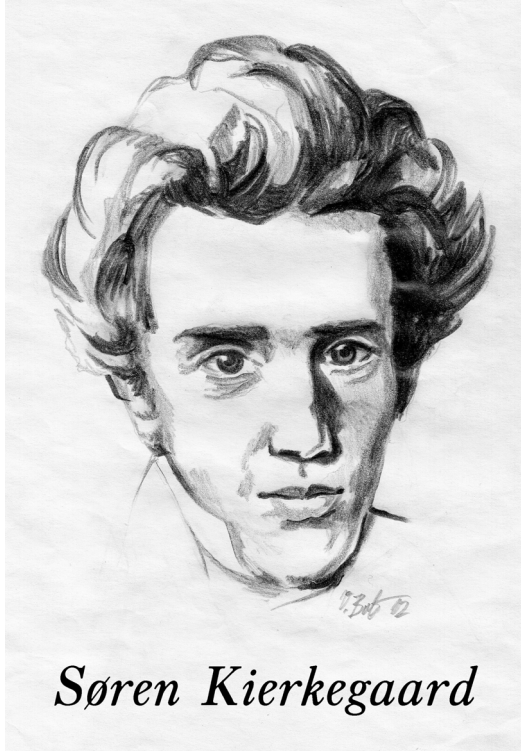
³² *Pap.* X 6 B 79, p. 85 / *JP* 1, 10; see also *SKS* 23, 176f., NB17:19 / *JP* 1, 8.

³³ See, e.g., *SKS* 4, 270f. / *PF*, 70; *SKS* 4, 299 / *PF*, 102; *Pap.* V B 6,8 / *PF*, Supplement, 198; *Pap.* V B 6,17 / *PF*, Supplement, 215; *SKS* 27, 297-311, *Papir* 306 / *JP* 4, 3916.

³⁴ *Pap.* X 6 B 79, p. 85 / *JP* 1, 10.

³⁵ Hermann Deuser, “‘In kraft des Absurden’. Die Verborgenheit des Glaubens bei Søren Kierke-

thus be no seamless ‘dialectical transition’ to the sphere of faith, for as Climacus emphasizes in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), the sphere of faith can only be reached in “the qualitative transition of the leap from unbeliever to believer.”³⁶ Nevertheless, the efforts of the understanding should not simply be ignored: “The task is not to comprehend Christianity, but to comprehend that one cannot comprehend it. This is faith’s holy cause, and therefore reflection is sanctified by being used in this manner.”³⁷



If Kierkegaard characterizes faith as ‘the new immediacy’ or ‘an immediacy that follows reflection,’ then an immediacy is ascribed to faith “that can only be attained by wrenching oneself free of mediation”³⁸ – by the *leap* into faith. Through its essential relationship to the absolute paradox of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ, faith is referred to a particular historical fact as its ground; and this radically dissociates faith not only from any historical categorization, but also from “the very notion of mediation.”³⁹ The absurd marks the *fault line* between the immediacy of faith and the realm of intellectual activity, a realm from which no ‘dialectical transition’ to faith is possible, but only a leap in the sense of a ‘qualitative’ or ‘pathetic transition.’

The ‘new immediacy’ peculiar to faith can be understood as immediacy *in and for itself*: immediacy that does not vanish in mediation, and which we cannot

penetrate conceptually without it *eo ipso* losing the status of *this* immediacy, the *differentia specifica* by which true Christian faith is distinguished from all other forms of

gaard” (1987), in Deuser, *Was ist Wahrheit anderes als ein Leben für eine Idee?*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappeleorn and Markus Kleinert (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 61-72, here 63; compare 65f.

³⁶ *SKS* 7, 21 / *CUP1*, 12; see note 23.

³⁷ *SKS* 21, 68, NB6:93 / *KJN* 5, 70 (translation slightly altered); see also *Pap.* X 6 B 80, p. 87 / *JP* 1, 11.

³⁸ Arndt, “Neue Unmittelbarkeit,” 210.

³⁹ *SKS* 18, 125, HH:2 / *KJN* 2, 117. On the contrast between ‘mediation,’ as “the watchword of modern philosophy” (ibid.) and ‘[absolute] paradox,’ see, e.g., *SKS* 19, 211, Not7:22 / *KJN* 3, 207; *SKS* 19, 390, Not13:23 / *KJN* 3, 388; *SKS* 19, 418, Not13:53 / *KJN* 3, 416; *SKS* 7, 103 / *CUP1*, 105f.; *SKS* 7, 345 / *CUP1*, 379; *SKS* 20, 46f., NB:47 / *KJN* 4, 45f. (see *SKS* 15, 162); *SKS* 22, 219, NB12:129; *SKS* 15, 275 / *BA*, 120.

immediacy. “Kierkegaard holds that every (sc. religious) faith is a form of immediacy, but not every – but only the post- or transreflexive – form of immediacy is faith.”⁴⁰ In other words, faith’s immediacy as ‘a sphere by itself’ refers not only to the immediacy of something *unmediated* that did not itself emerge from some previous mediation, but rather to the immediacy of something *unmediatable* that itself precludes mediation. This is evident in the claim made in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) to the effect that the paradox of faith cannot be *communicated to another* (and in that sense *mediated*⁴¹) – a claim made by the pseudonym Johannes *de silentio* (!), when describing Abraham’s situation after receiving the divine command to sacrifice Isaac: his paradoxical situation “cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak.”⁴² As immediacy *in and for itself*, however, the immediacy of faith does not preclude *every* form of communication or relation to it. Though faith cannot be penetrated conceptually, it can nonetheless be *described* and *presented*. Yet here it is vital to attend to the specific perspective of the one presenting faith. As Kierkegaard made clear in his response to Eiríksson, any presentation of faith from the standpoint of an unbeliever is not positive or determinative, but is negative or regulative: it proceeds by virtue of the ‘absurd.’

III. ‘Immediacy’ is used in the *ontological-existential* sense, on the other hand, primarily when Kierkegaard speaks of a ‘losing’ or ‘dying to’ immediacy, or conversely of a “recovering” or “returning” to, or of, immediacy with reference to Christianity and Christian faith.⁴³ This usage plays a prominent role in the account of the diverse modes of existing that emerges from Kierkegaard’s well-known differentiation of various “stages” or “spheres”⁴⁴ of existence as possible ways in which a person can relate to himself *qua* existing human being. In this systematic account of existential possibilities, which is characterized by the three central concepts ‘aesthetic,’ ‘ethical,’ and ‘religious,’ immediacy is clearly associated with the aesthetic: “the esthetic in a person is that by which he spontaneously and immediately is what he is.”⁴⁵

This attribution of immediacy to the aesthetic realm should not be understood as exclusive, however. As “the reality of one’s own worldly experience,” immediacy belongs “to the constitutive characteristics of *every* self-relation, thus not simply an aesthetic self-

⁴⁰ Heiko Schulz, “The Volatilization of Christian Doctrine: Søren Kierkegaard and Philipp Marheineke,” in Schulz, *Aneignung und Reflexion*, vol. 1, *Studien zur Rezeption Søren Kierkegaards* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 323-348, here 346 (note 58).

⁴¹ The German verb *vermitteln* and noun *Vermittlung* derive from the root noun *Mittel*, which originally referred to a ‘part found in between.’ Accordingly, *vermitteln* can mean ‘to mediate’: to be in between two relata, to be the relation through which they are bound to one another. At the same time, however, *vermitteln* and *Vermittlung* can also be used to describe a communicative act. In the latter sense, *vermitteln* means ‘to communicate’: to make something understandable to another, to transmit a message. This ambiguity of *vermitteln* and *Vermittlung* cannot be adequately reproduced in English.

⁴² *SKS* 4, 153 / *FT*, 60; compare *SKS* 4, 172-207 / *FT*, 82-120.

⁴³ See note 20.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *SKS* 6, 439 / *SLW*, 476 and *SKS* 7, 455 / *CUP1*, 501f.

⁴⁵ *SKS* 3, 173 / *EO2*, 178.

relation.”⁴⁶ As *the manner in which* an existing human being *initially* finds himself, “[t]he immediate is his foothold [*Fodfæste*],” which he never can “completely abandon.”⁴⁷ Immediacy thus remains a foundational reference-point in the ethical and religious stages, which distinguish themselves from the aesthetic by their distinct *relations* to immediacy. Whereas in the *ethical* stage the goal is to sublimate – via its *mediation* with the ethical-universal in an aesthetic-ethical “balance”⁴⁸ – what a human being *qua* immediacy always already is, the dialectic of internalization characteristic of the *religious* stage (Religiousness A) relates far more negatively to immediacy, as the essential expression of existential pathos is “suffering as dying to immediacy.”⁴⁹ The ideal task assigned to the (religious) individual in his existence – namely, “simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute *τελος* and relatively to the relative [*τελη*],”⁵⁰ presupposes that the individual renounce all of the relative goals in which immediacy is invariably entangled. As the reversal of this relation, dying to immediacy thus means nothing other than “existentially expressing that the individual is capable of doing nothing himself but is nothing before God.”⁵¹ Yet every effort to realize this goal fails on account of the contradiction between the ideal task and the real conditions of existence. For even when the individual “has surmounted immediacy, with his victory he is nevertheless again in existence and thereby again hindered from absolutely expressing the absolute relation to the absolute *τελος*.”⁵²

The resolution of this paradox is possible only in Christianity (Religiousness B), and thus in an essential relation to the radical break with the immanence of Religiousness A posed by the ‘absolute paradox’ of God becoming man. Like Religiousness A, Christianity also bears a negative relation to immediacy, inasmuch as to the path to Christianity as a process of becoming spirit there corresponds a process of withdrawing oneself out of immediacy, expressed existentially in the human being’s “self-annihilation”⁵³ before God. In contrast to Religiousness A, Christianity demands a *recovery* of immediacy, which presupposes – or, put more precisely, accompanies – such a ‘self-annihilation’ of the human being before God.⁵⁴ This recovering of immediacy in actuality corresponds to the human being’s *rebirth* in faith: “No doubt immediacy can be attained again – but the nonsense of ‘The System’ is the contention that it is attained again without a break. Immediacy is attained again only – ethically; immediacy itself becomes the task – you *shall* attain it...If for a moment I omit all the more specifically dogmatic aspects of the cooperation of

⁴⁶ Andreas Krichbaum, *Kierkegaard und Schleiermacher. Eine historisch-systematische Studie zum Religionsbegriff* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 364; compare 360-371.

⁴⁷ *SKS* 27: 358, *Papir* 340:14 / *JP* 2, 1348.

⁴⁸ *SKS* 3, 153 / *EO2*, 154.

⁴⁹ *SKS* 7, 478 / *CUP1*, 526.

⁵⁰ *SKS* 7, 392 / *CUP1*, 431 (translation slightly altered).

⁵¹ *SKS* 7, 418 / *CUP1*, 461.

⁵² *SKS* 7, 393 / *CUP1*, 432.

⁵³ See, e.g., *SKS* 20, 202, NB2:155 / *KJN* 4, 201; *SKS* 21, 229, NB9:50 / *KJN* 5, 238; *SKS* 22, 198, NB12:102 / *JP* 4, 4637; *SKS* 23, 45, NB15:66 / *JP* 1, 188; *SKS* 11, 17f. / *WA*, 10f.

⁵⁴ See *SKS* 20, 358, NB4:154 / *KJN* 4, 358.

the spirit, etc., I can define rebirth in this way: it is immediacy won ethically. Ethics or, better, the ethical, is the turning point and from here the movement is into the dogmatic.”⁵⁵

As was the case with the transition to ‘the new immediacy’ of faith in the epistemological sense, the recovery of immediacy in the ontological-existential sense demanded by Christianity does not proceed ‘without a break.’ As an ethical task, the recovery of immediacy makes only a *relative* fresh start possible, not a total one. For regarded *sub specie christianitatis*, immediacy is, like innocence, “lost from the beginning”⁵⁶ – through the Fall. The ethical is merely ‘the turning point’ toward the dogmatic: the doctrine of sin and the atonement effected by Christ.

Frater Taciturnus’s remarks on the forgiveness of sins in *Stages on Life’s Way* (1845)⁵⁷ make clear that the recovery of immediacy in the Christian sense represents a paradox that can only be believed. Through the repentance that always precedes the forgiveness of sins, the human being discovers that sin is nothing discrete or one-off, but is “radical,” which implies “that immediacy is regarded as something that is not valid.”⁵⁸ The difficulty in the forgiveness of sins, accordingly, is “to become so *transparent* to oneself that one knows that one does not exist at any point by virtue of immediacy, yes, so that one has become another person.”⁵⁹ The one difficulty – that immediacy must be canceled – is linked to another, namely, “that immediacy is even canceled as sin”; and this raises the most difficult questions of all, which are encapsulated in the *single* problem of “how an immediacy can return.”⁶⁰ In any case, as Frater Taciturnus remarks in closing, the problem of the forgiveness of sins overwhelms both his understanding and his capabilities: “once I had understood it myself I would surely find the place and time and the space for exposition.”⁶¹

“To believe the forgiveness of sins is a paradox, the absurd.”⁶² For this reason, the radical *revaluation* of existence made possible by Christianity’s paradoxical external reference “to a given historical fact in time”⁶³ must seem entirely inconceivable to an observer with a standpoint *outside* faith. This applies also to Frater Taciturnus, whose unbeliever’s perspective permeates his representation of “the unity of the comic and the tragic,”⁶⁴ much as a similar perspective pervades the claims of the humorist Johannes Climacus, who in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* takes up the problem formulated by Frater

⁵⁵ SKS 22, 40, NB11:62 / JP 1, 972 (translation slightly altered).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See SKS 6, 437-446 / SLW, 474-485.

⁵⁸ SKS 6, 443 / SLW, 482.

⁵⁹ SKS 6, 444 / SLW, 483 (emphasis mine); compare also SKS 11, 130 / SUD, 14 et passim.

⁶⁰ Ibid. (translation slightly altered); see also SKS 27, 481-483, Papir 402 / JP 2, 1214.

⁶¹ SKS 6, 446 / SLW, 485.

⁶² SKS 27, 481, Papir 402 / JP 2, 1214; see also SKS 7, 204-207 / CUP1, 224-227; SKS 20, 187, NB2:115 / KJN 4, 185.

⁶³ SKS 4, 294 / PF, 96.

⁶⁴ SKS 6, 444 / SLW, 483.

Taciturnus, but progresses no further than he.⁶⁵

The rebirth of the human being in faith should be regarded not as a return to an initial supralapsarian immediacy, but as an infralapsarian retrieval of a non-alienated origin, and thus as a *total*⁶⁶ fresh start: “he is like a new man.”⁶⁷ Kierkegaard’s talk of ‘losing’ and ‘recovering’ immediacy can thus be understood as a relation-ontological (rather than substance-ontological) interpretation of Luke 17:33: “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” For what is it that the human being recovers in faith? Not anyone else, but he himself: he who has become *transparent* to himself as grounded in God. This is he himself in his non-alienated origin – but yet anew: from God’s hands.

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⁶⁵ See *SKS* 7, 317f. / *CUP*1, 347.

⁶⁶ See *SKS* 21, 189, NB8:107 / *KJN* 5, 197; *SKS* 18, 302, JJ:486 / *KJN* 2, 278.

⁶⁷ *SKS* 27, 482, Papir 402 / *JP* 2, 1214; see also *SKS* 27, 487f., Papir 409:1 / *JP* 1, 66; *SKS* 21, 285, NB10:56 / *KJN* 5, 296.