

Essays/Aufsätze

Justin Sands

Hegelians in Heaven, but on Earth ... Westphal's Kierkegaardian Faith

DOI 10.1515/znth-2016-0018

Abstract: Merold Westphal's new publication, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, gives us an opportunity to explore the many ways in which Kierkegaard has influenced Westphal's thinking as a whole. This present contribution seeks to show how Kierkegaard helps Westphal discover a concept of faith which holds no 'reasonable' foundation as it is entirely dependent upon two different aspects of revelation in tension with each other. Moreover, faith is seen as a willing assent by the believer, and thus it becomes a task and not merely a proposition to behold or to which one's life conforms. In addition to explicating this notion of faith within his work, this present contribution seeks to situate this faith within Westphal's philosophy of religion, showing how it is integral to Westphal's entire project.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Merold Westphal, Faith, Post-modernity, Philosophy of Religion, Levinas, Revelation, Onto-Theology

Westphal's most recent text, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, is an astounding text which explores how Kierkegaard develops his notion of faith through three pseudonyms (Johannes Silentio, Johannes Climacus, and Anti-Climacus) and their respective texts. The work itself is scholarly and sticks closely to the texts. While he does show in various places how Kierkegaard's concept of faith relates to contemporary issues in philosophy and theology, such as the critique of onto-theology, Westphal displays great restraint by never furthering these points beyond pointing toward how Kierkegaard's concepts are still relevant. However,

Justin Sands: North-West University, Faculty of Arts, School for Philosophy, Noordbrug Potchefstroom 2520, Internal Box 208 Private Bag x6001, South Africa, E-Mail: Justin.Sands@nwu.ac.za

anyone who has read Westphal's own philosophy of religion knows how integral Kierkegaard's thinking is to Westphal. Therefore his publication of this new, scholastic work gives us an opportunity to further explore Westphal's debt to Kierkegaard. The following seeks to do just that by looking at Westphal's earlier writings on Kierkegaard in order to see how he comes to understand Kierkegaard and appropriates him for his own philosophy.

Throughout Westphal's philosophical career he has sought to explore a prophetic line of philosophy which he finds sorely lacking, particularly through Hegel and in a Husserlian phenomenology which he sees as an attempt to merely replicate Hegel's goal of being purely descriptive and never prescriptive.¹ Westphal's philosophy can be seen as an attempt to push philosophy into the realm of action, of not just arguing distinctions within human reason but moving those arguments toward helping the widow, orphan, and stranger. Through Kierkegaard, Westphal sees a possibility to adapt this preferential option for the poor and outcast into a religious, postmodern framework, where Kierkegaard's work is seen as a Christian response to a society which claims to care for these people, in the name of liberalism and a just society, but often only on a superficial level. This adaptation and development of Kierkegaard's work for a contemporary ideology critique is often seen as Westphal's most significant contribution to Kierkegaardian studies, where Kierkegaard is often presented as either a "kind of postmodernist," a "proto-phenomenologist," or as a critical social theorist whose Christian ideology critique is fashioned as a rejoinder to Marx, Nietzsche, and others whose critique of society often follows a critique of Christianity.² The chief result of Westphal developing Kierkegaardian thought in light of contemporary philosophy has been a dialogue between Kierkegaard and

1 See: Merold Westphal, *Hegel, Freedom, and Modernity*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992, particularly Chapter 9, "Hegel, Hinduism, and Freedom," as well as 85, 135–148. For the most thorough explanation of Westphal's take on Husserl and phenomenology, see: Merold Westphal, "Phenomenologies and Religious Truth." In *Phenomenology of Truth Proper to Religion*, ed. Daniel Guerriere, SUNY series in philosophy. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990, 105–125; and id., "The Second Great Revolution in Phenomenology." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26 (2012): 333–347. Westphal essentially breaks down Levinas' critique against Husserl and he uses this critique throughout in id., *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008; one could say that it is foundational to the text.

2 See, for example: Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard, a Kind-of Postmodernist." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary. Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997, 53–72; id., "Levinas, Kierkegaard, and the Theological Task." *Modern Theology* 8 (1992): 241–261; id., "Kierkegaard and Hegel." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alistair Hannay, Gordon Daniel Marino. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 120; id., *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987, 150–126. In regards to Marx, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard,

Levinas; where their respective critique of the dominant philosophical system of their times (Hegel, for Kierkegaard; Heidegger and, by extension, Husserlian phenomenology, for Levinas) are brought into discussion as a possible way to present Westphal's prophetic line of philosophy as a response to society's superficial regard for the widow, orphan, and stranger. Through this dialogue, Westphal does not wish to rid the world of 'philosophy as rigorous science' completely and forever, and his reading of Levinas opens a possibility for both a scientifically rigorous philosophy to co-exist alongside of his own prophetic philosophy.³ On the contrary, Westphal wishes to carve a space for the philosopher who seeks to explore ways in which philosophy can aid the world; he wants to use the fruits of that 'rigorous science' to nourish the world. Westphal's reception, in both Kierkegaardian and specifically postmodern circles, has been mostly positive, with those who disagree with Westphal's conclusions accepting the fruitful nature of this dialogue between Kierkegaard and Levinas.⁴

Therefore it comes to no surprise that his work repeatedly returns to ethics, specifically to his conviction that saying must mean doing. His notion of ethics always focuses on the love of one's neighbor, with a preference for those living on the margins – the widow, orphan, and stranger. Westphal gains this insight from Søren Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Gospel's Love Commandment (Mark 12:29) in which Jesus proclaims that the greatest commandment is to love God "with all your soul" but also to "love your neighbor as yourself." Later, through Emmanuel Levinas, Westphal will develop this commandment into a phenomenological process of becoming an ethical self; a process which he concludes overcomes the problem of onto-theology. He does this first by showing the surprising connections between Kierkegaard's concept of faith, which originates from the 'hidden inwardness' of faith to an outward expression of love for

and how Westphal situates this discussion in a postmodern context, see his essays "Positive Postmodernism as Radical Hermeneutics" and "Deconstruction and Christian Cultural Theory. An Essay on Appropriation." In id., *Overcoming Onto-Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.

3 Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 138–147.

4 For a broad sample of the reception of Westphal's dialogue between Levinas and Kierkegaard, see: J. Aaron Simmons, David Wood (eds.), *Kierkegaard and Levinas. Ethics, Politics, and Religion*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008; the work is largely a response to Westphal (5–7). While we cannot get into a lengthy discussion of it here, due to its breadth and difficulty, Westphal has developed certain 'postmodern' aspects of Kierkegaard's thought which run alongside of Levinas' ethics as first philosophy; I speak here particularly of Westphal's concept of 'Religiousness C' being Kierkegaard's final stage in his theory of stages. To explore this development and reception, see C. Stephen Evans' contribution to Westphal's *Festschrift. Gazing Through a Prism Darkly. Reflections on Merold Westphal's hermeneutical epistemology*, ed. B. Keith Putt. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009, 35–45.

one's neighbor, and Levinas' ethics as first philosophy in which the face-to-face encounter between the self and an other calls the self to be responsible for the other, thus opening the self to a transcendence within the intersubjective, self-other (and God) relationship. Westphal builds this 'phenomenology of faith' upon the connections discovered within this dialogue to reveal a dual movement of transcendence and self-transcendence in which my faith-bound responsibility toward the other at once de-centers and surpasses me, which opens me to a possible encounter with God.

Interestingly, by reading this neighborly love commandment through Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, and later through Levinas' phenomenology, Westphal attempts to avoid any systematic explanation of becoming an ethical self in favor of a more personal approach, thus following a path founded in biblical faith as described by both the Hebrew prophets and the Gospels. There are several moments where he mentions various ethical concepts yet these instances are always bound very closely to their contexts and as such they resist both systematization and extrapolation into universal claims.⁵ Westphal's work, therefore, is also attempting to push back against the philosophical and theological tendency of systematizing one's thinking as a way to make it more logical and coherent. This is the heart of why Westphal's hermeneutics of prophecy explicitly attempts to *break open systematic thinking* when it becomes too rigid and ideological. Westphal is constantly aware of historical and literary contexts and fears any construction – philosophical or theological – that may lose sight of the neighborly person and those who live on the margins of society. Following to Westphal's concern that philosophy should be political and prescriptive when it needs to be, he is keenly aware of the way that some philosophical and theological systems can become ideological tools of manipulation. Prescriptive, here, represents not directives or commands for what to do but a process of thinking (through and with a hermeneutics of suspicion) in which critical reflection guides faith or reason towards better ethical (and often political) action. While systematic thinking cannot always be prevented, it needs to be corrected from time to time through a vigilant critique of its ideology. Responding to Westphal's reading of Kierkegaard as a "proto-postmodernist," C. Stephen Evans echoes this concern against any philosophical or theological systemization in regards to Kierkegaard's reception; where Kierkegaard's aesthetics, critique of society, or his other contributions overshadow his primary concern for understanding

⁵ See, for example, the text *Suspicion and Faith*, where Westphal will argue that Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche can help aid the believer toward better understanding and enacting their faith. Merold Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998, 44–54, 115–119, 176 f.

and accepting the Christian faith. Westphal's work, Evans argues, shows how Kierkegaard's genius may have something to say to everybody, yet Evans wishes to re-emphasize the overall importance of faith in Kierkegaard's thinking.⁶ As I intend to argue here, Westphal's concern against systematizing theology and philosophy begins with a Kierkegaardian faith. Furthermore, his development of this faith into what can best be called a paradigm, or framework, of living out this faith is carefully aware of Evans' concern that faith might become overshadowed by subsequent developments and appropriations. For Westphal, faith propels the task of a lifetime and this task, which he perceives as an ethical task, must always relate back to the faith which spurs it on.

Therefore, the task of investigating Westphal's faith bound ethics presents two challenges: teasing out this notion of becoming an ethical self as it appears throughout his writing while at the same time resisting the temptation to systematize it, which would run contrary to Westphal's project. Being mindful of this, Westphal's ethics can be understood through two aspects: First, Westphal's reading of Kierkegaard, particularly how Kierkegaard understands a faith which finds its antithesis in sin and not reason; Second, the way in which he understands phenomenology and the postmodern critique of metaphysics. However, in order to comprehend how Westphal arrives at an ethics which resists systematization but also can be enacted, we must explore how he 'unfounds' all of this upon a Kierkegaardian faith. Consequently, in this present text we only explore in detail this crucial Kierkegaardian unfoundation – or leap, rather, since it resists any foundation which reason may provide for it – which undergirds his entire project. For Westphal, the believing soul's lifetime task is faith and, inversely and correspondingly, it is the task of a lifetime.⁷ Faith is where ethics begin for the believing soul and it is also the unreasonable origin from which reason aids and guides the believing soul towards understanding and discipleship.

It is my argument that Westphal's early texts on Kierkegaard reveal how he begins to fully articulate his philosophy of religion and they are crucial to understanding the underlying impetus of Westphal's thought. It is within Kierkegaard, I seek to show, that Westphal finds his theological voice and thus it requires a deep exploration. Westphal reads Søren Kierkegaard as a prophetic philosopher and Westphal's primary concern against Hegel's thinking is that it does not strive for liberty and justice for all but only proclaims its possibility. In

6 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006, 3 f.

7 Westphal utilizes the term 'believing soul,' a term he takes from Paul Ricoeur. Essentially it represents for him the believing self. Since this term is used throughout his work, we shall use it here.

Kierkegaard, however, he finds a willing ally who has a similar critique against Hegel, who extends this critique to the whole of Christendom, and who builds up a notion of ethical faith that at once places the believer in utter dependence upon God – in fear and trembling – but also places the believer in loving service to the other – in being commanded to always love your neighbor as yourself.

While Westphal draws from several philosophical and theological influences for his understanding of God, his notion of Christian faith in God is primarily derived from Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Westphal cites Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* throughout most of his writings and it is perhaps the one work that he turns to the most frequently in his philosophy; *Works of Love* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* may be close second and thirds but Westphal almost always references those works in relation to the faith found in *Fear and Trembling*. It is the centerpiece to his chapter on faith in *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence* (Chapter 8) and is present throughout *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*. In *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (Chapter 5) and *Overcoming Onto-Theology* (Chapters 1 and 10), Westphal also draws on *Fear and Trembling* to explain Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel (and, simultaneously, to levy his own critique against Hegel). Additionally, Westphal's recent book-length treatise follows this similar framework.⁸ Hence, in order to understand what a 'Westphalian' faith looks like, we must first understand what a Kierkegaardian faith looks like. And so, as Westphal himself would do, we will begin by investigating Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* before we get to Westphal's own thinking on the matter.

It is important to note from the outset that the structure of *Fear and Trembling* reveals just as much about Kierkegaard's concept of faith as the content of the essay itself. Kierkegaard, using the pseudonym Johannes De Silentio, sets out to give a meditation Genesis 22 (often called the *Akedah*), in which Abraham is called by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Silentio, through that meditation, explores a concept of faith that runs contrary to reason. It is a faith founded upon a paradox which holds itself up by a promise in the absurd: that through God all impossible things are possible.

From the beginning, Silentio makes it clear that he cannot go about proclaiming the nature of faith through a series of propositional, linear arguments and instead is compelled to explain his views on faith through various stories

⁸ Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 2014, Chapters 1–6. Accessed via Kindle E-publication (hence location numbers). Each chapter corresponds with an aspect of faith within *Fear and Trembling*, such as faith as a task work, faith as an epistemic command, et cetera.

that he then contrasts with Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.⁹ Structurally, Silentio is attempting to illuminate the difference between faith and reason through his series of interrelated mediations – first through prefaces on the impossible situation of Abraham, then through various, smaller stories that relate back to Abraham, *and then returning to the Akedah itself* – thus preventing Silentio from giving a straight forward argumentation of what faith is since such an argumentation, for him at least, is impossible. The overarching goal with this structure is to understand faith while resisting the temptation of 'systematizing' faith into categorical arguments and justifications, which would negate the entire premise. This breaking of the philosophical tradition of writing in 'logical,' propositional arguments is intentional since faith, for Silentio, is a form of thinking which operates in a different way and with a different structure, eventually ending – as we shall later see – in what he sees as the paradox of faith.

Silentio sets faith dramatically apart from reason at the beginning of the work by stating that, contrary to the arguments and proofs found within philosophical reasoning, "even if someone were able to transpose the content of faith into conceptual form, it does not follow that he has comprehended faith, comprehended how he entered into it or how it entered into him."¹⁰ Through the *Akedah*, Silentio argues that the claims of faith are independent of and incommensurable with the claims of universal reason. He further underscores this point of breaking out of the typical philosophical structure by proclaiming, in a satirical fashion, that he himself is not a philosopher and cannot even begin to understand their system(s), which attempts to do in a book what faith requires a lifetime to achieve.¹¹

Westphal expounds upon Silentio's notion that faith cannot be a science, and therefore cannot be an epistemology, by unpacking the not-so-subtle jabs that Silentio is already making towards Hegel and Plato. He begins by remarking that Silentio's rejection of faith as an element of epistemology is a reference to Plato's theory of knowledge. Silentio wants to overturn the notion that faith is somehow subordinate to reason, as found within "Plato's divided line," because the call to faith comes from outside the self, from God, as opposed to some form of acquired knowledge.¹² Summarizing his point, Westphal states that "like Plato's belief (*pistis*) and opinion (*doxa*) and Hegel's representations (*Vorstellungen*) and understanding (*Verstand*), [De] Silentio's faith is not knowledge in the

⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*. trans. and ed. Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, 6–8.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 7.

¹¹ Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004, 203.

¹² Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 203.

sense to which speculative philosophy aspires (*noesis, episteme, Wissenschaft*, system), or, to say the same thing in biblical language, faith is not sight.”¹³ If faith were sight, according to Westphal, then it would be caught in “the pure and total presence that is philosophy’s pride” and, moreover, an ‘objective’ faith would fail to retain the “mystery and subject (agent and subject matter) of revelation;” in both cases faith simply becomes merely a weaker form of reasoning or, rather, a form of wish fulfillment.

Westphal then makes the reference to Hegel through Plato’s theory of knowledge more explicit by stating that Silentio’s main goal throughout the work is to “rescue” faith from “its longstanding captivity to the model of Plato’s divided line.”¹⁴ Westphal notes that Silentio is effectively challenging the model in two fashions:

“First, that the highest task is knowledge as pure insight and full presence, the untrammelled gaze at truth in the full daylight outside the cave, and second, that mere belief (*pistis*) is what you have to settle for when you’re not good enough to raise yourself to such lofty heights. Thus Hegel, *the current form of the Platonic model for Silentio*, will say, ‘religion is for everyone. It is not philosophy, which is not for everyone.’”¹⁵

In Westphal’s view, Silentio is trying to shatter the concept that reason is higher than faith by further separating faith from reason, by making faith an almost separate matter altogether.¹⁶ Silentio makes this case by developing three interlocking concepts throughout his mediations on Abraham: the knight of infinite resignation, the knight of faith, and belief in the paradoxical or absurd. For Silentio, the knight of infinite resignation comes close to the knight of faith in that she too, like Abraham, boldly resigns herself to the task at hand and does so with the finite, totalizing, concepts of daily living but, unlike Abraham, cannot attain the possibilities found in the infinite absurdity of faith. The desire for grounding her thinking has led her up to the edge of infinity – to the point where she can accept her task at hand – but prevents her from passing into infinity, which is the only place where her paradoxical task can be fulfilled.

13 Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 203.

14 Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 203. This is further explored in Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, Chapter 1, L. 499–599, 785–809. In *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith* Westphal essentially connects pieces of his prior arguments relating to *Fear and Trembling* critique of Hegel into one, cohesive argument.

15 Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 203. Emphasis is mine. Westphal is quoting Hegel from *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984–1987, I, 180. Cf. III, 283.

16 It is this moment in Kierkegaard that leads many to perceive him as an irrationalist, as did Westphal once upon a time, but, as we shall cover below, this is not necessarily the case.

The knight of infinite resignation is tied too securely to her ground and her everyday patterns of thought to believe that her actions will be fulfilled through the absurdity of God.

Silentio gives an example of such a knight in his fictional story of a man who is in love with a princess but, for various reasons, cannot enter into a romantic relationship with her.¹⁷ Surpassing the “slaves of the finite,” as Silentio calls them, this man “assures himself that [this love] is the substance of his life” and he continues to love her, albeit at a distance.¹⁸ He passionately loves her but becomes reconciled to the fact that this existence – that of loving her from afar – is all that is possible.¹⁹ In doing so, Silentio claims that he paradoxically renounces his pursuit of the princess for the sake of his love:

“He has grasped the deep secret that even in loving another person one ought to be sufficient to oneself. He is no longer finitely concerned about what the princess does, and precisely this proves that he has made the movement infinitely. [...] The knight [of infinite resignation] does not cancel his resignation, he keeps his love just as young as it was in the first moment; he never loses it simply because he has made the movement infinitely.”²⁰

The knight of faith, however, performs the same movement of resignation while also performing the (seemingly impossible) movement of faith. The knight of faith believes that he will have his princess, “by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible.”²¹ This, for Silentio, is belief in the absurd – that the man will find his princess and that Abraham will get Isaac back – founded in the faith that God will make the impossible, possible. As Silentio states it:

“Nevertheless, to the understanding this having [of faith] is no absurdity, for the understanding continues to be right in maintaining that in the finite world where it dominates this having was and continues to be an impossibility. The knight of faith realizes this just as clearly; consequently, he can be saved only by the absurd, and this he grasps by faith.”²²

Within this grasping by faith lies the ultimate paradox of thinking: that through faith God will make the (seemingly) impossible happen. Abraham will get Isaac back. The lover will have his princess. For Abraham, the paradox cannot be expressed in ethical terms since any explanation of his action would defy logic

17 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 41–47.

18 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 41 f.

19 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 43.

20 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 44. See also Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, Chapter 2, L. 862.

21 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 46, Silentio is paraphrasing Matthew 19,26; Mark 10,27, 14,36 and Luke 8,27.

22 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 47.

and ‘common’ behavior. Silentio argues that the knight of faith, through this impossible paradox, must teleologically suspend the ethical in order to act out his faith; Abraham must be fully prepared to sacrifice Isaac and not resort to reasonable justifications since there are none.

Explicating his point, Silentio compares Abraham to three other fathers who have murdered their sons: Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus.²³ Each of these men, in varying ways, had to slay their sons and yet their actions can be explained through a (Hegelian) ethical relationship and their actions can be judged, and perhaps even rationalized as necessary and/or just.²⁴ Abraham’s actions are not afforded such privileges since there is no ethical justification for them; thus leaving Abraham completely alone with nothing – no justifications or rationalizations for his actions – to mollify him on his journey to Mount Moriah, burdened with the task he must carry out. Therefore, he takes to this *task in silence, telling no one*, not even Isaac, what will happen when he draws his knife on the mountain.

Abraham’s actions cannot be mediated – i. e. rationalized – and therefore he cannot speak of them since speaking of them requires words which hold interrelated meanings governed by a socialized ethic. He is completely alone and speaking of what he must do, as commanded by God, will break his faith in the absurd since, through language (mediation), he can only speak of his actions as murderous or madness.²⁵ At this point, it is important note that Silentio’s notion of the ethical here is mediated through culture and community (and thus language), leading Westphal to argue that the ethical which Abraham must teleologically suspend is the Hegelian notion of *Sittlichkeit* in which the laws and customs of one’s culture dictate what are ‘just’ and ‘proper’ actions.²⁶ The suspension of any mediation *in tandem with the ethical* leads Westphal to believe Silentio sees them as intertwined concepts, as seen in Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit*. This suspension of *Sittlichkeit* (both the ethical and the mediation which comprises the ethical) separates Abraham as a knight of faith from the tragic heroes. While they can speak of their actions and mourn the loss of their sons with their countrymen, Abraham cannot since no one will understand him.

Westphal’s argument that Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* is the ‘ethical’ suspended by Silentio is one of Westphal’s more significant contributions to Kierkegaard-

23 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, see “Problema I.”

24 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 60–64, 66, 68, 70.

25 In regards to madness, it should be noted that Silentio refers back to the Platonic notion of divine madness throughout the text. This is noteworthy since it goes back to Silentio’s desire to overthrow the perspective that faith is subordinate to reason as *Pistis* is to *Doxa*.

26 Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 207.

dian research.²⁷ It is also the lynch pin to how he is able to place Levinas and Kierkegaard into dialogue with one another. Because of this, it is important for us to see how Westphal develops and defends this reading of Kierkegaard before moving forward. In “Kierkegaard and Hegel,” Westphal argues that Kierkegaard is not so much an antagonistic anti-Hegelian – as he’s widely caricatured to be – but that his relationship to Hegel is, ironically, an *Aufhebung*; “There is appropriation,” Westphal remarks, “as well as negation, and Kierkegaard is never simply anti-Hegelian.”²⁸ While Kierkegaard does often satirize Hegelian philosophy, Westphal notes that he also pays it tacit compliments throughout. An object has to be worthy of such a sustained satirizing, after all. A key example of this can be found in Kierkegaard’s analogy about the dancer (representing Hegel) who leapt so high he thought he could fly. Kierkegaard accepts that this dancer can leap higher than any other dancer, and, analogously, Hegel leaps higher than any other philosopher, however the dancer only dances and never flies. In this regard, Hegel’s philosophy is “is more comprehensive and more systematic than [any other] [...] It is that he spoils his magnificent achievement by making an absurd claim about finality and completeness.”²⁹

Westphal continues detailing the early complexities of Kierkegaard’s relation to Hegel by noting that Kierkegaard’s doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, is quite Hegelian in nature. Here, one finds deep convergences (and later divergences) in both Kierkegaard and Hegel’s appreciation of Platonic thinking (particularly in regards to Romanticism and how this movement interpreted Plato) which eventually gives rise to Kierkegaard’s concept of irony as the primary

27 Evans, *Gazing Through a Prism Darkly*, 35–39. Some scholars, such as Henry B. Piper and Jack Mulder Jr., have responded to Westphal by arguing that Westphal’s reading of Kierkegaard is either too Hegelian (Piper) or that it unnecessarily stretches Kierkegaard’s theory of stages to include a Religiousness C which is already present in Religiousness B (Mulder). Westphal has responded to both of these critiques by reiterating and defending the Hegelian nature of much of Kierkegaard’s works. C. Stephen Evans, for his part, does not completely agree with Westphal’s assessment of a Religiousness C after the stage of Religiousness B, but he does accept Westphal’s Hegelian reading of Kierkegaard, at least in part. See: Henry B. Piper, “Kierkegaard’s Non-Dialectical Dialectic or that Kierkegaard is not Hegelian.” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 497–518; Jack Mulder Jr., “Re-Radicalizing Kierkegaard: An alternative to Religiousness C in light of an investigation of the teleological suspension of the ethical.” *Continental Philosophy Review* 38 (2002): 303–334; Merold Westphal, “Kierkegaard’s Religiousness C. A Defense.” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 535–548.

28 Merold Westphal, “Kierkegaard and Hegel.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay, Gordon D. Marino. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 101 f. Kierkegaard’s analogy of the dancer comes from: Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 105.

29 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 102.

wedge between the two thinkers. Referring to Robert L. Perkins for summary, Westphal quotes that both thinkers make “the move beyond irony [...] but, according to Kierkegaard, within the new human actuality of ethical existence there remains irony. Human existence is not simply rounded off in the sphere of the ethical as defined by the ethics of Hegel. The infinite still calls.”³⁰

With regards to sifting out the relation between *Sittlichkeit* and the teleological suspension of the ethical, Westphal first begins with *Either/Or* and Judge William, another one of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, whose ‘journal entry,’ entitled “The Esthetic Validity of Marriage,” begins the second volume of *Either/Or*. Westphal designates Judge William as a Hegelian, “whether he knows it or not.”³¹ Westphal stakes this claim, in large part, on Judge William’s belief that marriage is the pinnacle of socialization and thus is the key to the ethical sphere. He advances this assertion by remarking that Hegel, as an Aristotelian, “repudiates the Platonic, Thomistic, and Kantian models in favor of an ethics in which the self has no immediate relation to the Good but only one mediated through the laws and customs of one’s people. *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life) signifies the social institutions that mediate the Good to the individual.” This is why the concluding sermon of *Either/Or*, entitled “The Upbuilding that lies in the thought that in relation to God we are always wrong,” is so effective: “It is we,” Westphal writes, “I and my *Sittlichkeit*, the laws and customs, institutions and practices of my society, that are always in the wrong once God is on the scene.”³² For God is the infinite and eternal while we are finite and sinful.” Just as in *The Concept of Irony*, the infinite still calls and no socialization (mediation) can adequately express my relationship to that call.³³

For Westphal, Kierkegaard’s ‘use’ of *Sittlichkeit* carries over to *Fear and Trembling*. Westphal accepts that most people regard this as an anti-Hegelian text, but he insists that many people gloss over the major critique that Kierkegaard is making: Hegelian philosophy is so incompatible to biblical faith that its “system is the abolition rather than the perfection of Christian faith.”³⁴ This, he argues, is where many people get the concept that Kierkegaard is an ‘irrationalist’ in that most people assume Silentio’s teleological suspension of the ethical signifies “the Moral Law in something like Platonic, Thomistic, or Kantian senses mentioned above. Kierkegaard is then said to hold that religious faith is absurd and paradoxical because it is at odds with Moral Law” or that my duties toward

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 107.

³¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 106.

³² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 106 f.

³³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 107.

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 108.

the neighbor are “distinguished from the religious, my duties to God.” These faulty notions, he concludes, are “imported into the text by the reader” and thus result in a misreading of the text.³⁵

Westphal's Hegelian reading of Kierkegaard has spurred a debate on Kierkegaard's critique of Christendom and his own reception of Hegel. Jon Stewart's text, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, is perhaps the most important result of this discussion. The text itself was a product of Stewart's dissertation and doctoral studies, of which Merold Westphal served as one of his jurors.³⁶ Stewart's text argues that the misunderstanding of Kierkegaard as anti-Hegelian ignores Kierkegaard's appreciation of Hegel himself while also obscuring Kierkegaard's primary target: Danish Hegelians and their Christendom. While Stewart develops his own thesis concerning the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel, for our present purposes, it is important to note that Westphal's thinking follows along a similar line of reasoning: Westphal's thought focuses on how Kierkegaard will often take certain ideas from Hegel (such as *Sittlichkeit*, *Aufhebung*, or the dialectic) and subvert their original usage, thereby fashioning these ideas as critiques of Christendom produced from Danish Hegelianism.

Looking at the text itself, it is clear that Silentio, like Judge William, assumes a Hegelian construction of the ethical. I believe that Westphal is correct in this interpretation of Kierkegaard and his pseudonym's motives within *Fear and Trembling*. For evidence, Westphal states two key examples of this assumption: First, Silentio outright states “for if the ethical – that is social morality [...]” (*Fear and Trembling*, 55); Second, when Abraham is distinguished from the tragic heroes Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus. Concerning the tragic hero, Westphal notes that the aforementioned justifications and comforts awarded to these three are *Sittlichkeit* which is derived from the laws and customs “not only of their people but also by their people and above all for their people. Its highest requirements are the needs of the nation, the state, and society; and these needs prevail over the otherwise protected needs of the family.”³⁷ Abraham, without an appeal to such laws, is left to suspend/subordinate those laws in order to serve

35 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 109.

36 Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Stewart cites Westphal in the latter sections of the text (312, 621) and includes several of Westphal's articles within the bibliography. Obviously, Stewart's text, which is well over 650 pages, is not solely based upon Westphal's reading of Kierkegaard; I am highlighting it here to show how Westphal's work played a part in the reconsideration of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel and to contextualize Westphal's work in light of his peers.

37 Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 109. Westphal also makes this claim throughout in *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, see for example: Chapter 3, L. 1075.

a higher law from God. Silentio, Westphal states, is not making an argument that religious faith is against Moral Law but that “to be seriously religious is to have a higher allegiance than to my people and their conception of the Good. What is at issue is the ultimate source of the Moral Law, including my duties to God, neighbor, and self. Is it society or God?”³⁸

In regards to this question, Silentio argues that the individual’s absolute, infinite relation to God is always over and above that of society. “Thus,” Westphal concludes, “when [Silentio] writes that for faith ‘the ethical is reduced to the relative’ (*Fear and Trembling*, 70) he means that the believing soul never identifies the law of the land with the law of God but gives absolute allegiance to the latter and only relative allegiance to the former.”³⁹ That the believing soul always holds God over and above every human law (*Sittlichkeit*) is why Hegel’s philosophy is incompatible with biblical faith. Silentio has shown how “Hegel has collapsed the difference between society and God, making the former absolute and the latter otiose. This is why each of the three ‘Problemas’ begins with the claim that if Hegel is right, Abraham is lost and can only be considered a murderer.”⁴⁰

Setting the issue of interpreting Kierkegaard aside, let us pivot back to our original discussion of a ‘Westphalian’ faith and an exploration of Westphal’s reading of *Fear and Trembling*. Silentio’s distinction between society and God reveals that the discussion of faith and the teleological suspension of the ethical is not merely a discussion of ethics but also of mediation and revelation. The fact that Abraham must remain silent proves that mediation – speaking about his task (either to others or himself) – fails him and provides him with no comfort or justification; “none of the ‘already saids,” Westphal proclaims, “available to him will do the job” and “for Abraham the immediacy of revelation overflows the norms contained within these linguistic dikes, leaving him not alone [...] but, as with Levinas, alone before the traumatic alterity of divine revelation.”⁴¹ In this sense, Abraham, since he is outside of ‘the ethical universal’ and thus beyond/outside mediation, cannot rely on it for comfort but how does he know it is God who was testing him?

The answer, for Westphal, is through revelation. Therefore, in order to finalize our exploration of Westphal’s faith through Kierkegaard, in what follows

38 Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 110.

39 Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 110. Westphal also defends this thesis in “Johannes and Johannes, Kierkegaard in Difference”, 19.

40 Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 39.

41 Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 39. See also: id., *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, Chapter 5, L. 2187-2188.

we will explore the notion of revelation and its relationship to the immediate encounter with God. This will move us from *Fear and Trembling* to *Philosophical Fragments*, a work in which Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, augments his concept of faith by delving deeper into the relationship between mediation, immediacy, and revelation. From here we can gain insight into how revelation plays a deeply abiding role in faith, for both Kierkegaard and Westphal, and how their concept of revelation discloses at once a particular interpretation of truth as subjectivity and culminates in the command to love one's neighbor.

According to Westphal, the immediacy of revelation cuts through everything in its path within *Fear and Trembling*, where the immediacy of Abraham's encounter with God compels him to act in a way that can only be understood through the discourse of faith. His encounter comes by way of a command and voice – directly from God, as Silentio sees it – and that voice breaches all forms of mediation between Abraham and the world. Westphal explains:

“What is distinctive about this account is the immediacy [Silentio] attributes to it. God expresses the divine will καθ'αυτό, and the message cuts through all of Abraham's defenses. No version of the *a priori*, the ‘already said’ [...] enables Abraham to be the condition for the possibility of the authority of this command. So Silentio describes the whole situation as paradoxical, absurd, and sheer madness. It is ‘unreasonable,’ not in and of itself, but ‘humanly speaking’ relative to ‘worldly understanding’ and ‘human calculation.’”⁴²

Silentio shows that Abraham must accept this commanded revelation through a faith which has teleologically suspended the ethical, by which he means a suspension of *Sittlichkeit*. What this explains to us is that Silentio's examination of Abraham's ordeal exposes this as a matter of epistemic revelation, and not an account of motive, even if he does not (or cannot) explain how. The actions resulting from this epistemic revelation do not account for any direct motive in that they cannot be reasonably justified within an ethical system. Moving from the ‘what’ of this epistemic revelation to the ‘how’ – namely, how revelation works in the world – Westphal explores Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, a text penned under the name Johannes Climacus which was published a mere eight months after *Fear and Trembling*.⁴³

⁴² Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 37. He is quoting from Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 17, 35 f., 46.

⁴³ This may provoke the question of the how does revelation occur without mediation? Westphal addresses this through ‘second immediacy’ in “Kierkegaard and the Role of Reflection in Second Immediacy.” In *Immediacy and Reflection in Kierkegaard's Thought*, ed. Paul Cruysberghs, Johan Taels, Karl Verstrynge. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2003, 159–180.

Through Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard explores the relationship between recollection and revelation by highlighting Socrates' account of knowledge as recollection in the *Meno*.⁴⁴ Recounting the story where Socrates aids in the slave boy's discovery of the Pythagorean Theorem, Climacus shows us that Socrates performs the function of providing the occasion for the discovery. Socrates, Climacus assures us, insists that this discovery is a recollection made by the boy and not something which is implanted into him, thus separating Socrates himself from the source of knowledge and making him incidental to the slave boy's discovery; Socrates has merely presented the boy with the occasion, or opportunity, to discover this theorem.⁴⁵ However, if the opposite were true, if the teacher was the source of knowledge and essential to the learning process, then this would be called revelation. In that case, the knowledge gained comes from the outside, from the boy's encounter with Socrates, but he must have the ability to recognize and accept this knowledge. Revelation, as Westphal reads it within Climacus, is not just a presentation of ideas from the teacher to the student. There must be a "condition for recognizing it as truth. Only when the teacher gives the truth in this double sense does the relation to the teacher become essential."⁴⁶

This shows that revelation needs to be independent of the self and an *a priori* knowledge that the self relies upon within the world. Furthermore, the self needs to be able to recognize, and to be open to receiving, this event of revelation. Recognition and reception (for Kierkegaard's Climacus at least) are essential to revelation which can be expressed through the ability to be open to possibilities, and to accept the infinity found within the other. This other not only holds the possibility of revelation, it also holds the authority of revelation in that the self must accept that, since revelation is immediate and cuts through the self's conditions of understanding, the self has no control over the message; it must

⁴⁴ Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 39–41; Merold Westphal, "Johannes and Johannes. Kierkegaard and Difference." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, ed. Robert Perkins. Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1994, 13–15. In both texts, Westphal refers to Plato's *Meno* both as Platonic (Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 39) and Socratic (Johannes and Johannes, 13). His reference to either often depends on how Kierkegaard referenced it but, for clarity's sake, I will simply refer to it as Platonic throughout the present text. Additionally, see id, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, Chapter 5, L. 2394–2435, Chapter 6 essentially details Climacus' argument that faith is a reception of divine revelation, he explains the Platonic theory on L. 3132–3184, 3219, L. 3254 details the anti-Hegelianism within this model.

⁴⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. and ed. Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, 12. The abbreviation *PF* for *Philosophical Fragments* will be used hereafter.

⁴⁶ Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 42.

accept it through faith. Therefore, revelation, as the authoritative voice from outside the self, is the origin point of faith and of religion (which is considered in this context as faith lived in the world).

It is this key aspect of revelation which connects Levinas to Kierkegaard, for Westphal, and it is from this concept of revelation which Westphal will eventually turn to one's encounter with the other – through and commanded by revelation – which creates a self-transcendence. Kierkegaard's two accounts of revelation, as we shall soon see, allows for a tension between the self, who is receiving (and enacting) revelation, and the other, who is the infinite ends of revelation. We will save how Levinas enters the picture for later exploration, what matters for our present purpose here is that Westphal, through these two synonyms of Kierkegaard, has found an expression of revelation which at once recognizes the need for reception within the self and the need for God to give that revelation; making the concept at once *the reception* of the content of revelation (God's commandment to the believing soul) and *content itself* which is necessary for faith (that you are commanded by God to love the other as you love yourself, or, in Abraham's situation, to bind Isaac on Mt. Moriah).

Going back to the point of our inquiry, which is how revelation enters into faith, it must be noted that in *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus argues that having faith – which he describes as a “leap” (PF, 43) – is a necessary condition for receiving and recognizing revelation. What is important here is that this condition of faith runs contrary to the immediacy of revelation within *Fear and Trembling*. Climacus' concept of revelation implies that the self needs faith in some kind of God in order to receive revelation from God, or at least must be able to accept revelation – to leap – on account of faith and not reasonable knowledge. In other words, the self must accept revelation on God's terms, which requires a trust that this revelation comes from God, and not accept revelation on the self's terms, which would require too much reliance upon a reasonable justification for belief. In short, it would turn into recollection.

Interestingly, this condition for faith is not addressed or mentioned by Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* and somewhat contradicts the claim being made by Silentio within that work; if Abraham is called upon by God, through revelation, to sacrifice Isaac – an act which can only be legitimately performed if he places God's command over any reasonable justification for his actions (i. e. the teleological suspension of the ethical, or *Sittlichkeit*) – then Abraham's faith is either directly functional as an epistemic command or it is indirectly functional as a motive for an ethical action based upon the occasion of revelation itself. In summation, Westphal's thesis becomes problematic in that in his first argument – that revelation comes as an epistemic command from God as found in *Fear and Trembling* – and his second argument – that recognition and reception of

revelation within the self are essential as found in *Philosophical Fragments* – rely on two separate functions of revelation: the former, which is telling you what to do from a position of radical alterity (from an infinite God calling to you, a finite and mortal human, thus surpassing all human – especially ethical – understanding); the other which tells you that you already know what to do, you just need to recognize its truth. The latter form draws you, the finite and mortal human, much closer, and much less radically opposed, to an infinite God. This is the tension I just mentioned above: Can revelation be two things at once? It seems as if Westphal’s reading of Kierkegaard is tangled in contradiction. However, for Westphal at least, this is not so much a contradictory reading but an opening to discuss the tension within revelation, to allow a space for the self to be open to possibilities. In order to make this argument plain, we will further explore how he utilizes these tandem concepts for a broader reading of revelation.

One could object that these separate functions, while not completely contradictory, are further problematized by the pseudonymous authorship of both works and the issue of trying to make Kierkegaard’s philosophy a collective, systematic whole. As such, this contradiction problematizes the concept of revelation throughout Kierkegaard’s work and how said revelation can be utilized as a foundation for a faith that emphasizes the godly commandment to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Not only is Abraham lost, as *Silentio* likes to say, but so is Westphal’s understanding of Kierkegaard.

In response, one could almost hear Westphal proclaim, ‘Wait until I’m finished! This tension between authors and revelation is part of the point!’ In “Johannes and Johannes: Kierkegaard and Difference,” Westphal contests that Kierkegaard is clearly aware of these two seemingly contradictory stances on revelation and he believes that Kierkegaard is trying to prove an essential point through this tension. For Westphal, he is *not* giving a novel reading of revelation within Kierkegaard’s work but is, rather, exploring a tension Kierkegaard consciously placed within his pseudonymous authorship. Kierkegaard’s authors, in short, are dialoguing with each other (which is not a novel concept within Kierkegaard scholarship) and within that dialogue there are unresolved discussions which are meant to highlight certain aspects but not to resolve them to a definition. Westphal explains that Kierkegaard’s aim is precisely to highlight a tension “where the present age sees harmony, to juxtapose antithesis to its synthesis.”⁴⁷ Rather than just pointing out that they are different, Kierkegaard

⁴⁷ Westphal, “Johannes and Johannes”, 18. In *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, L. 3500, Westphal also addresses this question.

presses further to express how many reduce these two opposing accounts to a simple identity of 'revelation' and move on.

More pointedly, what Kierkegaard is offering us through these two authors is a critique of modernity's metaphysics which has the tendency to reduce what is other to the same. This critique attempts to 'overcome' or subvert metaphysics, according to Westphal, "by the desire to confront modernity (and very possibly postmodernity as well) with its other, to make philosophical reflection and social practice vulnerable to both God and neighbor in ways they have tended to foreclose."⁴⁸ In the following, we will explore this attempt to subvert and overcome metaphysics, which holds crucial influence on Westphal's thinking, and after we have explored this we will then return to a consideration of how Westphal sees this as part of Kierkegaard's overall design and that these authors do not, in fact, contradict each other but that they are in dialogue with each other.

Interestingly, Westphal takes this supposed contradiction of revelation in Kierkegaard and stakes the claim that, not only is Kierkegaard trying to appeal to difference but, in doing so, he is trying to develop a process of 'becoming' an ethical self through a faith-based, critical social theory.⁴⁹ This process is at once dependent upon an inward faith – part of the hidden inwardness of faith that we mentioned at the beginning – and an outward expression of that faith as seen in the neighborly Love Commandment.

Westphal explains that Kierkegaard's first step toward developing this is through *Silentio's Fear and Trembling*; showing that the teleological suspension of the ethical functions as a critique of ideology (Christendom) in that the ethical is seen as the "celebration and sanctification of some social status quo" and not a truly inspired desire for a moral and just concept of The Good.⁵⁰ Abraham's faith, as a form of religiously inspired critique, places this so-called 'status quo' on trial before God and shows that it is found wanting. Thus, Christendom has been judged as merely legitimating its own interest rather than working humbly in service of loving God or the neighbor. It finds that the ethical fails because it implies some final, teleological end where, if everyone were to follow the ethical in all its rules and processes, then society could find perfection and complete harmony in its social order. "Another way to put this point," Westphal wryly

⁴⁸ Westphal, "Johannes and Johannes", 18. The terms "A" and "B" above stand for each Johannes' perspective arguments in regards to revelation and faith; it is also a sly nod toward Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*.

⁴⁹ Westphal, "Johannes and Johannes", 18.

⁵⁰ Westphal, "Johannes and Johannes", 20.

summarizes, “is that we will all be Hegelians in heaven. But on earth. [...] that is the question Kierkegaard wants us to ponder.”⁵¹

Pondering this point on behalf of Kierkegaard, Westphal muses that perhaps Kierkegaard’s challenge to critical social theorists, particularly those that follow a Marxian analysis of society, is to consider whether or not modernity’s most fundamental error is its tendency to deify itself “as history’s *telos*” and thus become immune to critique.⁵² Everything gets swallowed in its self-fulfillment and all minor narratives get assumed in its grand, master narrative. The critical theorists who only look towards capitalism, or material and social constructs – and neglect the spiritual dimension of society – do so at their own peril. “But what if,” Westphal asks, “material injustice and oppression have their roots in spiritual pride?”⁵³ Going back to his critique of Hegel, we can definitely see Westphal’s spiritual litmus test emerging here; although the question, ‘what kind of social order does this religion legitimize?’ now can be expressed in the inverse: ‘what does your politics say about your spirituality?’ Or, more exactly, ‘What does your politics uphold for the sake of all others?’⁵⁴

Moreover, this also coincides with his argument that Athens needs Jerusalem, and vice versa. Looking at the case study of Amos and Marx in *Suspicion and Faith*, Westphal proclaims that we cannot simply utilize Amos for our critique of ideology because “Marx is about us in a way that Amos is not.” Perhaps we can now see that Amos is about us in a way that Marx is not; Amos knows our spiritual perspective in a way that Marx cannot fathom just like Marx knows our Christian, political, capitalist faults in a particular way that Amos cannot fathom.⁵⁵ Both are essential for a complete critique of the self. In other words, *Westphal is showing us how he believes that the political and the spiritual are intertwined – again wedding his biblical faith to politics – and we need to address both in tandem for a more complete understanding of ourselves.* Echoing his perspective that ‘Athens needs Jerusalem’ and vice versa, perhaps our spiritual concerns are just as pertinent to our political and social life as our material concerns. Athens needs Jerusalem, and Jerusalem needs Athens, because they are about us in different ways and each judges us with different measures.

Returning to our present concern of two competing revelations, Westphal gathers the critical social theory described above from the fact that he sees not two *competing* concepts but two *dialoguing* concepts of revelation. *Silentio*

51 Westphal, “Johannes and Johannes”, 20. The ellipses are Westphal’s own.

52 Westphal, “Johannes and Johannes”, 20.

53 Westphal, “Johannes and Johannes”, 21.

54 Westphal, *Hegel, Freedom, and Modernity*, 147 .

55 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 213.

and Climacus are not presenting two different revelations that are mutually exclusive. Rather, they reveal an aspect of the other through a dialogue which resists reducing both to an identity of the same and, in doing so, this dialogue presents a strong critique against society. Arguing this, Westphal finds *Fear and Trembling* to be an exercise in which Silentio teases out the paradox of faith as something beyond reason and as the task of a lifetime. *As a task of a lifetime*, it challenges our often entrenched social-political worldviews – it becomes critical social theory – and compels us first to hold our faith in God as absolute and everything else a distant second. Therefore, Westphal argues, the chief task of *Philosophical Fragments* is to explore the “epistemological ramifications” of Silentio’s thesis. Thus, the two works are in dialogue with each other with Johannes Climacus, in *Philosophical Fragments*, asking Johannes De Silentio “how does the dichotomy between recollection and revelation map onto that between the ethical and the religious?”⁵⁶

Westphal is quick to reply on Silentio’s behalf: “Not directly.”⁵⁷ Explicating this tension further, Westphal appeals to two pivotal figures behind both works, Socrates and Lessing. Socrates – for Kierkegaard at least – reveals simultaneously a knowledge which is accessible only through recollection, and a strident rebuke of “Athenian *Sittlichkeit*,” which Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms are quick to adapt and reflect upon.⁵⁸ Note well, however, that Climacus did not adopt Socrates’ notion of recollection wholesale but instead offered a higher form of recollection in divine revelation. Running parallel to this, Westphal argues that, despite Climacus’ appreciation of Lessing (in *Philosophical Fragments*), he still levies a critique against Lessing’s claim that human reason contains an *a priori* knowledge of God which supersedes all historical accounts of God’s revelation.⁵⁹ Westphal claims that Climacus would see this concept as a nice way to box God up, a way to make God a necessary part of our lives but only as a singular, fixed part. Therefore, in Climacus’ writings on the epistemic implications of revelation, he simultaneously presents an alternative to both Socrates and Lessing, thus giving a primary alternative “*to the whole Enlightenment project of which [Lessing’s argument] is a classic expression.*”⁶⁰ In short, Westphal is arguing that Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* not only

56 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 21.

57 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 21.

58 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 21.

59 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 23. In summarizing Lessing’s claim, Westphal states thus: “Kierkegaard would not be happy with [Lessing’s] idea that human reason contains an *a priori* knowledge of God that is so ultimate and definitive that nothing that God could possibly do in history could affect it.”

60 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 23.

criticize Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* but also a certain concept of God – which found its traction within Enlightenment thinking – which locks God “out of a world preinterpreted in our own image,” thus making God merely a cog in the wheel of our own human reasoning.⁶¹ Presaging the critique of onto-theology, Westphal is concerned about humanity’s desire for autonomy through naming what God is (and what God is not), which effectively puts humanity in charge of its own destiny. By leaving the tension between *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* intact, at least as far as recollection and revelation are concerned, Kierkegaard is able to explore the ‘concept’ of revelation without reducing it to something which can be confined within human reason.⁶² This tension allows for possibilities of difference and resists giving revelation a static identity, while at the same time giving us a moment to reflect upon what it is, how it works, and why we need it.

The irony, however, is that Kierkegaard utilized *both* Socrates and Lessing for his reflections and for his criticisms. Again, there is somewhat of an *Aufhebung* going on in Kierkegaard’s work: he is negating their thought while also sublimating it into his own, for his own purposes. Here that purpose is to address a critique against Christendom. According to Westphal, Kierkegaard’s work is utilizing the juxtaposition of “faith as essentially linked to a teleological suspension of the ethical” (for Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*) and faith “as the opponent of a Reason that makes such a suspension possible” and, therefore, Silentio’s critical social theory possible. Yet, in making this claim, Kierkegaard utilizes both theories of recollection, eventually superseding them (via sublation or *Aufhebung*) with his own concept of revelation, while also keeping the spirit of their theories intact. In other words, both Socrates’ and Lessing’s theories of recollection are utilized and surpassed by Kierkegaard’s own theory of revelation, and the faith required for said revelation, but those theories of recollection are still present and germane in Kierkegaard’s theory of revelation. As Westphal

61 Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 23. See also id., *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, Chapter 10 in which Westphal covers Climacus’ concept of faith as a leap, which he derives partially from Lessing. The Chapter itself delves into the ways in which Kierkegaard appropriates Lessing to develop his own idea of the leap of faith.

62 In Chapter 9 of *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, entitled “Faith as the Passionate Appropriation of an Objective Uncertainty,” Westphal teases out this argument within Climacus’ writings, further showing how objective uncertainty relates to truth’s subjectivity, which I argue can be called Kierkegaard’s ungrounding faith. The chapter itself is a scholarly account of Kierkegaard’s argument that “Existence is a system – for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and conclusiveness correspond to each other, but existence is the very opposite” (*Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*, L. 4203, quoted from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1:118).

shows, this is a quintessential example of Kierkegaard's utilization and negation of Hegelian thinking, particularly Hegel's use of *Aufhebung* and/or sublation.

Christendom, and the Hegelianism that Kierkegaard finds supporting it, thus becomes problematic because it fails to see the challenge faith poses to its own structures. Westphal founds the claim that Christendom is in the crosshairs of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms on the fact that both can be read as a critique of the theory of recollection as a form of absolute knowing (presented in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Since Hegel's concept of revelation holds that "the transcendence of the limitations of the religious mode of knowing in absolute knowing is presented as recollection," one must move from revelation to recollection, thus making it the final movement of Spirit in the *Phenomenology*. This becomes the primary target of both of Kierkegaard's works in that, according to Westphal, "not only does Climacus reverse [this] direction in the *Fragments*, but in place of the harmony posited by Hegel he represents a radical otherness that recalls the radical otherness of *Fear and Trembling*."⁶³ In Westphal's concluding section of "Johannes and Johannes," he continues to argue for this claim by detailing Hegel's view of the religious and how it is enacted by the Spirit in history. Westphal argues that Hegel's theory of necessary truth (i. e. ultimate truth or Truth) differs from Lessing and Socrates in that it attempts to integrate historical consciousness, "but this theory," Westphal states, "like theirs, entails that insofar as the truth is necessary truth, it is within us and needs to be recollected. Even if such recollection is history comprehended rather than abandoned, the point about recollection that is essential to Johannes Climacus remains the same."⁶⁴ In making necessary truth a product of historical recollection – and therefore mediated through action, or religion – Hegel becomes the link between Johannes and Johannes. Again, the importance of holding faith in God – and God's revelation to humanity – over and above one's *Sittlichkeit*, comes to the fore. Especially given that this is the only way for one to find the mediation necessary for recollection according to Hegel's theory. Westphal thus states in conclusion:

"In arguing that religious *Vorstellungen* must achieve the form of universality, [Hegel] identifies what he calls the higher truth of Christianity with what Johannes De Silentio presents as the ethical in *Fear and Trembling*; and in seeking to replace religious narrative with (his own very peculiar sort of) conceptual necessity, he identifies his version of religious truth with what Johannes Climacus presents as the Socratic recollection motif in *Philosophical Fragments*. Since they are, in Hegel's text, two sides of the same coin, that text invites us

⁶³ Westphal, "Johannes and Johannes", 26.

⁶⁴ Westphal, "Johannes and Johannes", 28.

to read the works of Johannes and Johannes as two sides of a single attempt to spell out an alternative to an Hegelian understanding of Christianity.”⁶⁵

For Westphal, this gives him ample evidence to believe that *Silentio* and *Climacus* should be read together as a bonded couplet with each illuminating the other and with a common critique against Hegel and Christendom.⁶⁶ This is a remarkable argument for the coherency and unity of Kierkegaard’s authorship, but for our present purposes, “Johannes and Johannes: Kierkegaard and Difference” sheds light upon two aspects of how Westphal understands faith and revelation: First, it shows how this hidden inwardness of faith, as seen in *Fear and Trembling*, becomes a critical social theory, moving toward an outward expression of that faith. Second, it shows how revelation can hold itself in tension through its various forms and functions and thus to reduce it to one of those functions is an attempt to make it ‘manageable’ to human consciousness, which is a failed attempt to make it completely intelligible in service of human projects; revelation needs difference because it is wholly different from human reason. Rather, human reason only enters into the picture once it comes as an aid to a revelation-steeped faith.

In summary, we can now see that Westphal’s Kierkegaardian faith relies on a primary obedience to God over and above all human understanding. This is not to say that faith cannot use reason but, as we have shown through his concepts of recollection and revelation, reason’s role in faith is to be utilized to understand faith and its contents yet in no way should it ever see itself as superior to faith. Faith therefore, becomes an origin point for Westphal, it and its leap are tantamount to the headwaters of life and the source of all a Christian’s actions. As an origin point, however, it holds no particular foundation since faith is a willing assent (leap) toward accepting God’s commanded revelation. This is why I call it an ‘unfounding’ faith: Westphal’s faith is an origin point of thought for the believing soul but, since it is an assent – a task – it holds no typical foundation.

Moreover, unfounding faith works as a critical social theory since it consistently asks of the believing soul if they are truly performing God’s will or their own: have you loved your neighbor as you love yourself today? Have you (mis)placed your needs over God’s and others? This critical reflection is one way in which the hidden inwardness of faith is expressed as a task of a lifetime in that it constantly asks of the believing soul to love one’s neighbor and to keep God’s concerns paramount. Westphal sees his philosophical task as ‘faith

⁶⁵ Westphal, “Johannes and Johannes”, 28.

⁶⁶ He follows this line of thinking throughout *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith*.

seeking understanding,' and bases his entire project upon how philosophical reasoning – particularly from postmodern and atheistic sources – are guides and aids to faith; they are there to direct faith to understanding, as it were. This is how 'atheism for Lent' becomes a useful tool for the believing soul and also why overcoming onto-theology becomes a necessary task: both hold philosophical critiques which aid the believing soul toward understanding. What we have seen above is the apparatus, so to speak, which runs this process of faith seeking understanding.

So how does this task of a lifetime express itself in society and, just as important, how does it work with reason? Westphal has clearly expressed how he thinks Athens needs Jerusalem, but questions remain about how, exactly, Jerusalem needs Athens? This is where Westphal explores Kierkegaard's theory of stages and argues that within Kierkegaard there is a concept of Religiousness C, where Christ becomes not just the Paradox but the Paradigm that the believing soul follows. Time and scope precludes us from delving into that issue here. However, our present inquiry has shown how Westphal reads and adapts Kierkegaard's faith early within his career. These early writings reveal the many fits and struggles that Westphal has had in engaging Kierkegaard, particularly after working at length on Hegel, the subject of his dissertation and first book-length work.

Westphal's new text, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, reveals the fruit of his lifetime's task of understanding a Kierkegaardian faith. The work itself is the most fluid and clear presentation he has ever given of Kierkegaard. However, it is a book which solely focuses on Kierkegaard and not an appropriation of him. Earlier, in *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, Westphal proclaims that the book reveals "only secondarily discoveries *about* Kierkegaard" and that it "primarily [focuses on his] discoveries *through* Kierkegaard, insights gained with his help."⁶⁷ He will later give a book-length exegesis entitled *Becoming a Self*, which explores *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in-depth. Yet this work climaxes with Westphal's discovery of Religiousness C, and I believe that the book itself was a product of Westphal's research to uncover this concept. Within *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, however, Westphal presents Religiousness C and other arguments – such as the tension between the two concepts of revelation – with ease and within a context which shows the inter-related nature of each aspect in relation to faith. Perhaps his new work has him coming full circle: after implementing Kierkegaard's faith as the task of a lifetime within his own life

67 Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987, viii.

and work, he now feels satisfied enough to articulate how this faith is developed, in full, throughout Kierkegaard's pseudonyms.