

ON ETHICS AND CHRISTIANITY: KIERKEGAARD AND LEVINAS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Comparing the thought of Soren Kierkegaard and Emmanuel Levinas is no easy task. Both thinkers clearly reject totalizing systems, and prize the uniqueness of individuals. Beyond that, any comparison of these two thinkers is complicated by the fact that their purposes, goals, and methods differ wildly. Yet, despite their vast differences, even a casual reader senses a deep commonality between Kierkegaard and Levinas. This essay will explore the similarities and differences between these two thinkers by analyzing three Levinasian critiques of Kierkegaard: First, Levinas argues that the Kierkegaardian subject is isolated, ‘immodest’, and ultimately unconcerned with the ethical and social dimensions of life. It will be shown, on the contrary, that Kierkegaardian thought is, in fact, very much concerned with ethics. More specifically, it will be claimed, with reference to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript (CUP)*, that subjective isolation is essential to communication and ethical subjectivity. Second, Levinas’s more general critique of reciprocal ethics will be examined vis-à-vis Climacus’s ethical subjectivity. It will be argued that Climacus envisions a *qualitative* transformation of ethics in Religiousness B, such that every Other becomes absolutely paradoxical; reciprocity is thereby proscribed as a foundation for ethical existence.¹ Finally, this essay will consider the ways in which Levinas’s account of subjectivity challenges Climacus’s. It will be shown that Levinas corrects Climacus in an important way by demonstrating that non-immanent ethical interaction can occur without the Absolute Paradox (i.e., the God-man, Christ). One need not be Christian to recognize the Other’s transcendence. Every Other, on Levinas’s reading, is sufficiently enigmatic to force a break with immanence.

II. KIERKEGAARD, THE EXHIBITIONIST: LEVINAS’S FIRST CRITIQUE

Levinas argues that Kierkegaard never totally jettisoned idealism’s focus on the self. The Kierkegaardian subject, much like the Hegelian subject, is ‘tensed over itself’. Indeed, Hegel’s dialectic, according to Levinas, revealed the subject’s essential egocentrism:

The dialectic’s remarkable effort consisted in showing the necessity of the conversion of that egotism into Being and truth, and, in so doing, in revealing a thinking that lay dormant in the subjectivity of the subject. At a certain moment the tension upon itself relaxes to become consciousness of the self, the *I* grasps itself in a totality, under a general law, on the basis of a truth that triumphs – that is, that leads to discourse. Which is, in fact, the passing of subjectivity into philosophy.²

Kierkegaard, for his part, did not reject the egocentrism of Hegel's subject, but took issue with the latter's attempt to thematize or systematize the subject. Kierkegaard discerned in Hegel's discourse,

a distant impossibility of discourse, the shadow of evening in the midday sun . . . [Kierkegaard sensed] – through that philosophy of totality that relaxes subjective egotism (though it be sublime as the thirst for salvation) – the end of philosophy, ending in a political totalitarianism in which human beings are no longer the source of their language, but reflections of the impersonal logos, or roles played by figures.³

Subjectivity, for Kierkegaard, is not reducible to objective truth – or, as Levinas calls it, 'triumphant truth' – which is to say, subjectivity can never be systematized; it cannot be part of a philosophical discourse. Subjective truth must be 'persecuted' rather than 'triumphant', conceptually kenotic rather than philosophically robust. Moreover, the essential kenosis of subjective truth is not, for Kierkegaard, an epistemological defect to be remedied by a fresh approach: 'Suffering and humiliation are not the result of a mishap that befalls truth from without: they are inscribed in its essence of truth and, in a sense, in its divinity itself.'⁴ Accordingly, Levinas argues, the only possible way for the subject to authentically 'go outside itself' involves a solitary tête-à-tête with God, who is 'suffering truth' incarnate: 'faith, the going forth from self, the only possible going forth for subjectivity, is the solitary tête-à-tête with what for Kierkegaard admits of nothing but the tête-à-tête: God.'⁵

While Levinas clearly appreciates Kierkegaard's resistance to systems, he argues that the Kierkegaardian subject, tensed on itself in a continual act of kenosis, never truly encounters others: 'the idea of a truth that suffers transforms all seeking after truth – all relation to exteriority – into an inner drama. In the eyes of the outer world it is indiscretion, scandal. Its discourse directed to the outer world is anger and invective. It is ruthless. The truth that suffers does not open man to other men but to God, in solitude.'⁶ In other words, the Kierkegaardian subject is wrapped up in its own inner drama. Ethical interaction with the Other, which would involve genuine concern for the Other, is therefore impossible because the subject is overwhelmingly focused on itself. Thus Levinas claims, 'Kierkegaard rehabilitated subjectivity – the unique, the singular – with incomparable strength. But in protesting against the absorption of subjectivity by Hegel's universality, he bequeathed to the history of philosophy an exhibitionistic, immodest subjectivity.'⁷ The Kierkegaardian subject, it would seem, is stunningly self-important, lacking any ability to look past its own desires to the needs of others.

At first glance, Levinas's critique seems plausible. He is certainly not alone in thinking that Kierkegaard advocates a destructive form of individualism. Mark Taylor, Martin Buber, Stanley Moore, and others have argued that the Kierkegaardian subject is ethically isolated, consumed by self-interest. Moore, for example, states, 'For everyone knows that while SK's profundity in matters concerning philosophy of religion and his probing sensitivity to modern man's spiritual crisis is probably unmatched, he remained a lonely and uncompromising individualist, who was painfully insensitive to social dimensions of human existence.'⁸ Similarly, Mark C. Taylor says, 'This inwardness of faith also implies that fullest self-hood is in isolated individuals rather than in community.'⁹ Indeed, Kierkegaard's pervasive language of 'isolation' and 'singularity' seems to justify this sort of critique: 'to be a single individual . . . is a human being's only true and highest significance.'¹⁰ Also, 'the ethical is the eternal drawing of breath in the midst of solitude.'¹¹ And, 'ethically there is no direct relation between subject and subject.'¹² Such claims

clearly lend credence to criticisms made by Levinas, Taylor, Moore, Buber and others. Yet, one must wonder, to what kind of isolation or inwardness is Climacus referring? Is it an isolation that precludes the social aspects of human existence, as Levinas *et al.* suppose? Does Kierkegaard's subject suffer from some sort of acute xenophobia? In answer, let us consider Kierkegaard's notion of ethical-religious subjectivity in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (which arguably constitutes the fullest treatment of subjectivity in the Kierkegaardian corpus).

Language of 'inwardness' and 'isolation' permeates the *CUP*, but is especially prevalent in Climacus's discussion of communication. According to Climacus, 'the difference between subjective and objective thinking must also manifest itself in the form of communication.'¹³ When thinking objectively, the subject thematizes its experiences according to universal concepts. So, for instance, as I look around, I see a computer, a desk, some books, etc. 'Computer', 'desk' and 'book' are all concepts that I employ to understand and reflect upon *what* I am experiencing; objective thought is always concerned with *what* the subject experiences, with the universalizable elements of experience. Consequently, objective thought can be more-or-less directly communicated: If you ask me *what* I am experiencing, I can tell you: 'a computer, a desk, and some books'.

Subjective thinking, on the other hand, involves what Climacus calls a 'double reflection': 'The reflection of inwardness is the subjective thinker's double reflection. In thinking, he thinks the universal, but, as existing in this thinking, as acquiring this in his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively *isolated*.'¹⁴ All thinking, by necessarily employing concepts, is objective, but as one appropriates those concepts, making them one's own, they take on a subjective dimension that defies objective thought and, hence, direct communication. Subjective 'thinking' is concerned with the subjective dimension of thinking, which has to do not with *what* I experience, but *how* I experience. As Climacus puts it, 'Whereas objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker as existing is essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore the thinking has another kind of reflection, specifically that of inwardness, of possession, whereby it belongs to the subject and to no one else.'¹⁵ Consider, as an example, the experience of love. Suppose I want to communicate to you my experience of love. I could certainly come up with some objective facts to tell you – e.g., love causes endorphins to rush through my brain at odd times. But would it be possible to communicate the most subjective, inward dimensions of love? Could I say something to you about what it is to be me in love so that you would have the subjective experience of being me in love? Supposing I could directly communicate my subjective experience of love, what would that entail? If such communication were possible, it would follow that you could somehow have my subjective experience of love, that you could somehow be me. Yet that is patently absurd. You cannot *be* me in love. Subjective thinking is concerned precisely with that part of my experience that you cannot have, that part of me that is *isolated* in its essential *inwardness*.

Due to their singularity, subjective elements of existence can only be communicated indirectly. Thus, although I cannot communicate my subjective experience of love directly to you, I can communicate indirectly so that you understand my experience by drawing an analogy with your own experience. As Climacus states, 'the subjective thinker must promptly become aware that the form of communication must artistically possess just as much reflection as he himself, existing in his thinking, possesses.'¹⁶ The subjective thinker must communicate in such a way as to engender a similar inward appropriation of concepts in the Other, but this cannot be direct, as inward appropriation

is never an objective thing. The subjective communicator must therefore be artful and indirect.

Climacus refers to the subjective and objective aspects of thought as the ‘duplexity of thought-existence’. He claims that this duplexity manifests itself in ‘the double-reflection of communication’. When I communicate, I give voice to my experience in universal, linguistic concepts. In doing so, I necessarily detach the content of my communication from my subjective existence (given that universal concepts are, by definition, objective). When the Other receives my communication, he/she must take the universal, linguistic concepts and make them subjectively meaningful once again. The subjective existence of both the communicating subject and the Other remain essentially singular or *isolated*. The subject cannot translate its subjective experience into universal concepts without remainder, nor can the concepts used to communicate dictate the Other’s subjective appropriation of the communication. Climacus calls this ‘the secret of communication’:

When one person states something and another acknowledges the same thing verbatim, they are assumed to be in agreement and to have understood each other. Yet because the one making the statement is unaware of the duplexity of thought-existence, he is also unable to be aware of the double-reflection of communication. Therefore he has no intimation that this kind of agreement can be the greatest misunderstanding and naturally has no intimation that, just as the subjective existing thinker has set himself free by the duplexity, so the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free . . .¹⁷

Communication depends on the ‘duplexity of thought-existence’ – i.e., communication necessarily involves both objective thought and subjective, isolated existence. Accordingly, genuine communication, as opposed to some automatous act of thoughtless repetition, can only occur between two essentially isolated, free subjects.

What then should one make of the objection that the Kierkegaardian subject is ultimately isolated from the ethical dimensions of existence? The subject is surely isolated, as we have seen, but this isolation is more epistemological than social: subjective existence cannot be conceptualized. As soon as one tries to catch it in a speculative net, the subject has already disappeared. Subjective existence is, therefore, isolated and alone as far as human knowledge goes, but this does not imply any sort of ethical-social isolation. In point of fact, Climacus’s discussion of communication shows that subjective isolation, far from negating sociality, is essential for communication between individuals. Furthermore, subjective isolation forms the very basis of ethics: ‘the ethical is the eternal drawing in of breath and in the midst of solitude the reconciling fellowship with every human being.’¹⁸ Put differently, the ethical imperative toward the Other consists in recognizing the uniqueness, the subjective isolation of the Other. The Other *qua* other is never fully accessible; thus, the actuality of the Other can only be a possibility for me:

To ask about this ethical interiority in another individual is already unethical inasmuch as it is a diversion. But if the question is asked nevertheless, then there is the difficulty that I can grasp the other person’s actuality only by thinking it, consequently by translating it into possibility, where the possibility of deception is just as thinkable. – For existing ethically, it is an advantageous preliminary study to learn that the individual human being stands alone.¹⁹

In short, communication, sociality, and ethics are not opposed to subjective isolation; rather, they depend on it.

Ethical objections to Kierkegaard based on notions of subjective isolation are, in the end, fundamentally misguided. Isolation has more to do with the epistemological status of subjectivity, than with any sort of social or ethical egotism. Indeed, Climacus clearly

gestures toward an ethic where individuals *must* recognize and respect the uniqueness of others: 'The ethical requires itself of every human being, and when it judges, it judges in turn every single individual.'²⁰

III. CLIMACUS'S RECIPROCAL ETHIC: A SECOND LEVINASIAN CRITIQUE

In considering the 'isolation' of Kierkegaard's subject, we have restricted our focus to ethical-religious subjectivity, showing that sociality is indeed possible on Climacus's view of the ethical. Yet one may argue on Levinas's behalf that ethical interaction, as envisioned by Climacus, does not constitute a true engagement with the Other. For a truly ethical encounter with the Other can never be reciprocal:

An orientation which goes *freely* from the Same to the Other is a Work . . . Now *the Work conceived radically is a movement of the Same toward the Other which never returns to the Same*. The Work thought through all the way requires a radical generosity of the movement which in the same goes toward the Other. It consequently requires an *ingratitude* of the Other; gratitude would be the *return* of the movement to its origin.²¹

The Other, Levinas claims, is never *for me* in any way; rather, if I am to be ethical, I must be totally oriented toward the Other, with no expectation of gratitude or return. For gratitude – or any sort of reciprocity, for that matter – constitutes an economic relationship in which an orientation toward the Other leads back to the self. Reciprocity, Levinas argues, is ultimately self relating to itself, never truly encountering the Other:

a departure with no return . . . would lose its absolute orientation if it sought recompense in the immediacy of its triumph, if it awaited the triumph of its cause impatiently. The one-way movement of 'unique sense' would be reversed and become a reciprocity. Confronting its beginning and its end, the Agent would reabsorb the work in calculations of deficits and compensations, in bookkeeping operations. It would be subordinated to thought.²²

Accordingly, for Levinas, the ethical relation must be a one-way street; the self must be totally oriented toward the Other. In other words, the self, in a truly ethical relationship, is passive, completely hostage to the Other. It follows that consciousness can never effect an encounter with the Other; for in the very act of effecting, the self imposes conditions on how the Other becomes manifest. The truly ethical relationship thereby degenerates into an economic reciprocity, in which the Other is no longer other but exists *for me* as a function of my own intentions. Hence, Levinas claims that the Other can only be encountered as an epiphany, as a break with immanence. It cannot be thematized or expected in any way; it always interrupts the subject's intentional gaze:

The Other resists my attempt at investiture, not because of the extent and obscurity of the theme that it offers to my consideration but because of the refusal to enter into a theme, to submit to a regard, through the eminence of its epiphany. The Other thus presents itself as human Other; it shows a face and opens the dimensions of *height*, that is to say, it *infinitely* overflows the bounds of knowledge.²³

Ethical interaction, as this passage shows clearly, can only occur when the Other is encountered as an epiphany, as a break with immanence. Levinas takes this conception of ethics to be contrary to the reciprocity seemingly present in Kierkegaard's ethics. Admittedly, many parts of the *CUP* seem to advocate a reciprocal ethic. Ethical-religious existence is, for Climacus, completely within immanence, which is to say that the ethical is

integrally connected to the subject: ‘we must understand ourselves ethically before we can reconcile with others.’²⁴ Similarly, Climacus states, ‘the ethical is . . . in the midst of solitude the reconciling fellowship with every human being.’²⁵ The very notion that ethical subjectivity is within immanence implies reciprocity. For, if every ethical interaction with others is immanently connected to the subject, then every ethical relationship ultimately leads back to the subject.

I would argue, however, that Climacus is not unequivocally committed to ethical reciprocity. More specifically, the reciprocity present in the ethical sphere and in Religiousness A (which is a quantitative deepening of ethical subjectivity) is radically transformed in Religiousness B. Religiousness A is, according to Climacus, a ‘pathos-filled . . . dialectic of inward deepening.’²⁶ Pathos-filled because the subject orients itself, through suffering and resignation, toward an absolute τέλος; it seeks eternal happiness (even as it remains finite), and it becomes guilty inasmuch as it fails to treat absolute τέλοι absolutely and relative τέλοι relatively. Pathos thus engenders a process of subjective deepening in which the individual attempts to resign ‘every finitude’ in order to ‘find God’ within him or herself:

[In Religiousness A] the upbuilding is quite properly distinguishable by the negative, by the self-annihilation that finds the relationship with God within itself, that suffering-through sinks into the relationship with God, finds its ground in it, because God is in the ground only when everything that is in the way is cleared out, every finitude, and first and foremost the individual himself in his finitude, in his caviling against God.²⁷

Put differently, Religiousness A, and the ethical-religious sphere in general, involves a paradoxical relationship between the finite subject and the eternal, wherein the subject seeks the eternal within itself through a process of subjective deepening. Much as Socrates sought to conform himself to the Good, the ethical-religious subject, through its pathos-filled existence, tries to properly orient itself to the eternal. The paradoxicality of Religiousness A consists in the oddity of a finite subject relating immanently to the eternal.

Religiousness B, which requires Religiousness A as a jumping-off point, is a Christian transformation and qualitative intensification of the latter. In B, the subjective individual relates not to the eternal within himself, but God in time:

In Religiousness B, the upbuilding is something outside the individual; the individual does not find the upbuilding by finding the relationship with God within himself, but relates himself to something outside himself in order to find the upbuilding . . . The paradoxical upbuilding therefore corresponds to the category of God in time as an individual human being, because, if that is the case, the individual relates himself to something outside himself.²⁸

In as much as the subject relates itself to something outside, Religiousness B constitutes a break with immanence. No longer is there an immanental connection between the subject and the eternal: ‘The *paradoxical-religious* breaks with immanence and makes existing the absolute contradiction – not within immanence, but in opposition to immanence. There is no immanental underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal has entered into time and wants to establish kinship there.’²⁹ Religiousness B is therefore doubly paradoxical: not only is it paradoxical for a finite subject to relate to the eternal, but the notion of God-in-time, a temporal-eternal, a God-man is itself paradoxical. Religiousness B is thus a paradoxical relationship to a paradox.

Religiousness B, or the *paradoxical-religious*, is non-immanental; the subjective individual confronts the absolute paradox – or, what is the same, the wholly Other in

the form of the god-man – *in time*, as a reality outside himself. The break with immanence that occurs in B opens the way for what is essentially a Levinasian encounter with the Other. Climacus says that, ‘To ask esthetically and intellectually about actuality is a misunderstanding; to ask ethically about another person’s actuality is a misunderstanding, since one ought to ask only about one’s own.’³⁰ This passage echoes a familiar refrain: the actuality of another subject is only available to me as a possibility. Yet, in regard to the actuality of others, Climacus distinguishes between esthetic and ethical existence, on the one hand, and faith, on the other: ‘Faith’s analogy to the ethical is the infinite interestedness by which the believer is absolutely different from an esthete and a thinker, but in turn is different from the ethicist by being infinitely interested in the actuality of another (for example, that God actually has existed).’³¹ Clearly, the ‘actuality of another’, in which faith is infinitely interested, refers primarily to the absolute paradox, God in time – the wholly Other – but there is also an extended sense in which the actuality of the wholly Other extends to every Other. In ‘The Olivet Discourse’, Jesus says, ‘Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are my brothers, you did it to me’ (Matt. 25:40). This passage indicates that being Christian involves recognizing the presence of Christ in one’s neighbors – or, to put it in Kierkegaardian terms, being properly oriented to the absolute paradox requires that one relate to every Other as an extension of the absolute paradox. Every Other must become, for the person of faith, wholly Other. Consequently, a Levinasian ethical interaction between the self and the Other is indeed possible for Kierkegaard, though it occurs only in Religiousness B.

IV. CHALLENGING KIERKEGAARD’S NOTION OF SUBJECTIVITY: A THIRD LEVINASIAN OBJECTION

Although Levinasian ethical interaction is possible for Climacus, the fact that it can only occur in Religiousness B reveals that Levinas’s notion of subjectivity does not neatly correspond to Climacus’s. For Levinas, ethical subjectivity always involves a break with immanence. In ‘Transcendence and Height,’ Levinas draws on Platonic notions of *to auton* (the Same) and *to heteron* (the Other) to characterize the individual’s relation to the Other: ‘*to auton*’ refers to the subject’s intentional object-world (which is an extension of the subject), while ‘*to heteron*’ signifies that which is beyond the horizon of knowledge. The knowing I, according to Levinas, attempts to integrate the Other into its object-world, negating the alterity of the Other and reducing it to immanence. In fact, Levinas sees the entire history of Western thought as an attempt make everything the Same: ‘The ontological event accomplished by philosophy consists in suppressing or transmuting the alterity of all that is Other, in universalizing the immanence of the Same . . .’³² Yet, despite its desire to negate alterity, the knowing I is called into question in its encounter with the human (wholly) Other through ‘the nakedness and destitution of his defenseless eyes.’³³ The Other presents itself as enigma, as paradox, and the subject, if it is to be ethical, must preserve the paradoxicality of the Other by employing a mode of thought ‘which is neither assimilation of the Other to the Same nor integration of the Other into the Same, a thinking which does not bring all transcendence back to immanence and does not compromise transcendence in understanding it.’³⁴

For Climacus, on the other hand, ethical-religious subjectivity remains within immanence. The only otherness or paradox encountered by the Climacan ethical subject stems from its own mode of existence. In *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus claims that,

'This then is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.'³⁵ In other words, the thinking subject always wants to go beyond itself; it always wants knowledge *sub specie aeternis* – i.e., knowledge that is not limited by its own finite perspective. Reason, or thought, always seeks to go beyond finite existence, even as it can only take place *within* finite existence. The paradox of human existence, for Climacus, is that the finite individual relates him/herself to eternal truth. Since this paradox arises from the structure of human existence, it is immanently related to the subject. As Merold Westphal puts it, 'In order to achieve knowledge, I need not go outside myself nor need anything to come to me from outside myself.'³⁶ Indeed, Climacus is clear that the paradox of ethical-religious existence does not imply a break with immanence: 'Religiousness A, which is not speculation, but nevertheless is speculative . . . is still within immanence.'³⁷

The break with immanence occurs, for the Climacian subject, only when the individual encounters the Absolute Paradox (the God-man, Christ):

For speculation, existence has vanished and only pure being is; for Religiousness A only the actuality of existence is, and yet the eternal is continually hidden by it and in hiddenness is present. The paradoxical-religious [Religiousness B] established absolutely the contradiction between existence and the eternal, because this, that the eternal is present at a specific moment of time, expresses that existence is abandoned by the hidden immanence of the eternal.³⁸

The eternal in time, the God-man, is a paradox that is totally other, in no way immanently related to the subject. Put differently, a relationship with the God-man is not something that the subject can do on its own; such a relationship forces the subject to come into contact with something wholly other than itself. This break with immanence also has ethical consequences: Religiousness B 'is a totally unique sphere, which, paradoxically . . . from the ethical point of view, accentuates the actuality of another person, not one's own.'³⁹ Hence, Climacus can envision a Levinasian ethical interaction (which, as we have seen, necessarily involves a break with immanence) in Religiousness B. Yet, if Climacus is right, the result is absurd: Levinasian ethical subjectivity would only be possible for Christians.

How, in the end, does Levinas's notion of ethical subjectivity relate to Climacus's? I would argue that Levinasian subjectivity should be seen as an addendum to Climacus's idea of the ethical. Levinas's ethics is not, as Levinas himself seems to think, incompatible with Kierkegaardian (specifically Climacian) subjectivity; rather, Levinas's thought is a corrective to Climacus.⁴⁰ Specifically, Levinas has shown that one does not need the Absolute Paradox (i.e., Christ) to establish ethical relations with others. Every Other, according to Levinas, is enough of an enigma, enough of a paradox, to force a break with immanence – i.e., every Other has the power to force the subject to relate to something outside itself. Seen as a corrective, Levinas's idea of the ethical does not come into direct conflict with either the ethical-religious or Religiousness B. Climacus's notion of Religiousness A (the ethical-religious) is perfectly plausible, with the added Levinasian caution that any mode of existence remaining within immanence cannot be sufficient for a non-immanent, ethical relationship. Additionally, Levinas's ethical correction does not conflict with Religiousness B. One could perfectly well maintain that authentic Christian existence requires a relationship with the absolutely paradoxical God-man, even while holding that the God-man is not necessary (outside of Christianity) for ethical relations with others. In short, Levinas's ethics does not entail a rejection of Climacian subjectivity: Levinas simply describes a type of ethical existence for which Climacus did not account. In

no way does Levinas's ethics indicate any sort of systemic flaw in Climacus's view of the subject.

V. CONCLUSION

According to Levinas, the Kierkegaardian subject is 'immodest' in the sense that its own self-involvement prevents it from engaging others. The subject is, as Kierkegaard repeatedly states, 'isolated'. Levinas infers from this that the Kierkegaardian subject never really encounters others. I have argued, however, that the Climacian subject is not socially isolated. The isolation to which Climacus refers is epistemological, not social or ethical. Subjectivity cannot be communicated directly; it cannot be shared with others in any straightforward way. This does not imply any sort of social or ethical isolation. In fact, Climacus explicitly recognizes interaction between individuals in the ethical-religious sphere. Additionally, Climacus gestures toward a sort of Levinasian interaction with the Other in Religiousness B. In the end, it is clear that Levinas's explicit criticisms of Kierkegaard are not entirely successful. Nonetheless Levinas's ethical thought provides an important corrective to Climacus's view of subjectivity. Levinas has shown that the Absolute Paradox (the God-man, Christ) is not necessary for ethical interaction. Every Other is sufficiently enigmatic to cause a break with immanence, pulling the subject outside itself. Levinas may well have picked up on an important mode of existence that Climacus missed.

Notes

1 Throughout this essay, I have followed Levinas's custom of capitalizing 'Other' whenever it is used as a substantive.

2 Emmanuel Levinas. 'Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics', *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 68.

3 *Ibid.* 68.

4 *Ibid.* 69.

5 *Ibid.* 70.

6 *Ibid.* 70.

7 Emmanuel Levinas. 'A Propos of 'Kierkegaard vivant'', *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 76.

8 Stanley Moore. 'Religion as the True Humanism: Reflections on Kierkegaard's Social Philosophy', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 37, 1 (Mar., 1969): 15.

9 Mark C. Taylor. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 350.

10 Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 149. Hereafter, citations from the *Postscript* will take the form: *CUP*, 149.

11 *CUP*, 152.

12 *CUP*, 321.

13 *CUP*, 73.

14 *CUP*, 73, my italics.

15 *CUP*, 72f.

16 *CUP*, 74.

17 *CUP*, 74.

18 *CUP*, 152.

19 *CUP*, 323.

20 *CUP*, 320.

21 Emmanuel Levinas. 'Meaning and Sense', *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Indianapolis and Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1996), 49.

22 *Ibid.* 49.

23 Emmanuel Levinas. 'Transcendence and Height', *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Indianapolis and Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1996), 12.

24 *CUP*, 6.

25 *CUP*, 152.

26 *CUP*, 556.

27 *CUP*, 560-61fn.

28 *CUP*, 561.

29 *CUP*, 573.

30 *CUP*, 323.

31 *CUP*, 324.

32 Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 11.

33 *Ibid.* 16.

34 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Intelligibility' *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Indianapolis and Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1996), 155.

35 Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 37.

36 Merold Westphal, *Becoming a self: a reading of Kierkegaard's concluding unscientific postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 184.

37 *CUP*, 570.

38 *CUP*, 571.

39 *CUP*, 580.

40 Note: This paper has not directly considered Levinas's objection to *Fear and Trembling*. I would argue however that Levinas's objection to 'the teleological suspension of the ethical' presents essentially the same challenge to Kierkegaardian subjectivity that is described above.