The Thought Experimenting Qualities of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*

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Abstract: In this article, I examine the possible thought experimenting qualities of Søren Kierkegaard's novel *Fear and Trembling* and in which way (if any) it can be explanatory. Kierkegaard's preference for pseudonyms, indirect communication, Socratic interrogation, and performativity are identified as features that provide the narrative with its thought experimenting quality. It is also proposed that this literary fiction functions as a Socratic–theological thought experiment due to its influences from both philosophy and theology. In addition, I suggest three functional levels of the fictional narrative that, in different ways, influence its possible explanatory force. As a theoretical background for the investigation, two accounts of literary cognitivism are explored: Noël Carroll's Argument Account and Catherine Elgin's Exemplification Account. In relation to Carroll's proposal, I conclude that *Fear and Trembling* develops a philosophical argumentation that is dependent on the reader's own existential contribution. In relation to Elgin's thought, the relation between truth and explanatory force is acknowledged. At the end of the article, I argue that it is more accurate to see the explanatory force of *Fear and Trembling* in relation to its exploratory function.

Keywords: thought experiments; Søren Kierkegaard; theology; philosophy; faith; Socratic method; explanations; literary cognitivism; Noël Carroll; Catherine Elgin

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine the possible thought experimenting qualities of Søren Kierkegaard's novel *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard 2013). In addition, I intend to explore in what way (if any) this specific kind of thought experimenting can be considered to be explanatory.

The typical philosophical or scientific thought experiment is constituted by a short fictional narrative that provides evidence in favor of or against a theory, illustrates abstract states of affairs or fulfills specific functions within a theory. Very much like scientific models, such minimalist fictions manipulate and constrain the circumstances of an idealized scenario, so that selected patterns and properties stand out. By visualizing a proposed hypothetical scenario, the thought experimenting agent is able to intuitively draw certain conclusions about a particular target area. This activity is, nonetheless, constrained by the theoretical requirements and the underlying background assumptions that each discipline and problem area sets.

In philosophy, one of the most well-known thought experiments is, for example, Hilary Putnam's presentation of a "twin world" that is almost identical to earth, except for lakes and oceans that are filled with XYZ rather than H2O. As a result, when a person living on earth uses the word "water", it means something else than when an inhabitant of the twin world does so. Accordingly, the aim of Putnam's thought experiment is to give support to the theory of semantic externalism, according to which the meaning of words and sentences are influenced by our external environment (Putnam 1973). In science, for instance, we have the thought experiment "Schrödinger's cat", the aim of which is to show that the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics leads to absurdity when applied to

everyday objects. The scenario includes a cat, a flask of poison and a radioactive source that are placed in a sealed box. If an internal monitor detects radioactivity, the flask is shattered, releasing the poison which, in turn, kills the cat. However, the implication of the Copenhagen interpretation is that the cat is simultaneously both dead and alive (Schrödinger 1935). In terms of methodology, philosophical and scientific thought experiments, thus, resemble each other to a great extent (using a fictional narrative to illustrate or provide evidence for/against a theory). They differ, nonetheless, when it comes to the underlying background assumptions and theoretical requirements that constrain the fictional scenario.

As will become evident for the reader, *Fear and Trembling* deviates from the thought experimenting standard by, for example, being of a greater length, presenting a more complex and detailed course of events, and so forth. Consequently, it is often read as a case of literary fiction. In recent years, philosophers such as Carroll (2002) and Elgin (2014) have, however, argued that some literary fictions are analogous to thought experiments in terms of the cognitive work they do. In my analysis of *Fear and Trembling*, the proposals put forward by these writers will serve as a theoretical background.

Carroll's approach towards thought experiments and literary fictions is going to be referred to as "The Argument Account". According to this approach, literary fictions can function like philosophical arguments. Similar to philosophical thought experiments, they mobilize and exploit the reader's antecedent conceptual knowledge so that it is clarified and is brought out in the open. In this way, Carroll argues, literary scenarios can function as extended philosophical thought experiments that instantiate and analyze abstract concepts.

Catherine Z. Elgin's view of thought experiments and literary fiction will be presented as "The Exemplification Account". According to her, both kinds of narratives exemplify properties and patterns of the phenomena they pertain to. By so doing, they give the reader epistemic access to the real-world equivalents of the features displayed in the fictional world. In Elgin's view, thought experiments, literary narratives and scientific models are fictions of a similar kind. Hence, although not being literally true, they are cognitively valuable by enabling us to access features that otherwise would be difficult or impossible to discern.

Carroll and Elgin are, however, not the only—or even the first—philosophers that have emphasized the speculative significance of fiction. One of their predecessors is, for instance, Lardreau (1988), who proposes that works of science fiction are based on postulations of possible worlds. He compares this assumption to Gotthold Wilhelm Leibniz's postulation of distinct universes that exist simultaneously in the divine intellect. According to Lardreau, both philosophical fictions and science fictions, thus, explore the consequences of counterfactual scenarios. Although this article focuses on the accounts of Carroll and Elgin, it should, however, be acknowledged that philosophers such as Lardreau are part of the roots of their findings.

In the scope of this article, I will also take into account the theological kind of thought experimenting that, in recent years, has been discussed by Fehige (2009, 2012, 2014, 2019) in particular. While there are many thought experiments that address religious themes within the constraints of a philosophical framework, it is less common to refer to their theological counterparts. Such theological thought experiments are, according to Fehige, characterized by their employment of "intuitions that depend on revelation" (Fehige 2014, p. 388). On this basis, he argues that the Book of Job can be seen as a thought experiment about divine providence (Fehige 2019), and Revelation 21:1–4 as a thought experiment that supports an apocalyptic model of Christian hope that stands in contrast to the existing alternative eschatological model (Fehige 2012). Fisch (2019) argues, in turn, that Talmudic literature makes use of counterfactual thought experiments as a way to imagine how Jewish laws and normative choices may be criticized outside the boundaries of the halakhic community.

In this article, I am going to argue that *Fear and Trembling* exists somewhere in between philosophy and theology and, by displaying features of both contexts, is to be viewed as a hybrid case of thought experimenting. Furthermore, I will propose that its interdisciplinary character—as well as Kierkegaard's own preference for indirect communication and performativity—exercises great influence on the novel's ability to serve as a "laboratory of the mind".

2. "Experimentation" and "Thought Experimentation"

A number of writers have associated Kierkegaard's works with thought experimenting (for example, Gregersen 2014; Watts 2016). Although Kierkegaard himself generally did not use the exact term, near synonyms such as "experiment" and "experimenting" appear frequently in his pseudonymous works (1843–1846). In what follows, I will give a brief introduction to Kierkegaard's use of these terms and, by so doing, provide a point of departure for my examination of the possible thought experimenting qualities of *Fear and Trembling.*

Even if the term "thought experiment" (or Gedankenexperiment) is often attributed to the Austrian physicist and philosopher Mach (1897), Hans Christian Ørsted already used it in 1811 in his essay *Prolegomenon to the General Theory of Nature* (Ørsted 1920; Witt-Hansen 2003). Ørsted was a Danish chemist and physicist who belonged to the same academic world and cultural elite in Copenhagen as Kierkegaard did. Although there is no indication that they had a close relation to each other, it is clear that the two men met at various occasions. In 1841, when Kierkegaard submitted his master thesis *The Concept of Irony*, Ørsted was, in fact, the rector of Copenhagen University, and his name features occasionally in the notebooks and journals of the author (Troelsen 2009).

Instead of using the term thought experiments, Kierkegaard seems, however, to have been more prone to characterize his own writings as "experiments" or cases of "experimenting." More precisely, they should—according to Tang (2006)—be understood as *psychological experiments* "referring to a scheme or plot constructed for the purpose of producing certain knowledge about the mind" (Tang 2006, p. 172). The subtitle to *Repetitions* (Kierkegaard 1983), published the same year as *Fear and Trembling*, is, thus, "A Venture in Experimental Psychology" ("Et forsøg i den experimenterande psychologi*e*") and in *Stages on Life's Way* (Kierkegaard [1845] 1988), the section Guilty/Not Guilty is simply referred to as "A Psychological Experiment." The aim of such operations was, according to Kierkegaard, to construct imaginary scenarios that generated insights into the human psyche that were unattainable by direct empirical observation. Even if these experiments took the form of novels, Tang argues, they were not—in contrast to most literature of this period—characterized by psychological realism. In his view, Kierkegaard's concept of experimentation points to the culture of psychological experimentation that was developed in the 19th century. Due to epistemological and ethical difficulties, the direct study of the mind was, however, soon replaced by a physiologically oriented experimental psychology. As a response, Tang argues, Kierkegaard created an existential method of experimental psychology. By so doing, the Danish author switched "from the perspective of the experimenter to that of the experimental subject" (Tang 2006, p. 177).

While Tang distinguishes between psychological experiments (a plot that aims at producing knowledge about the mind) and regular thought experiments ("hypothetical argumentation"), other commentators do not. Watts (2016) refers, for instance, to Kierkegaard's essay *Philosophical Fragments* (Kierkegaard [1844] 1985) as a thought experiment that explores whether the essential truth of Christianity lies beyond the limits of human understanding. He proposes that, here, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between two kinds of thinking: aesthetic–intellectual and ethico–religious thinking. While the former is characterized by abstraction, the latter is distinguished by a way of thinking that involves the reader's "own individual existence *in concreto*" as well as her "ethical actuality" (Watts 2016, p. 19). Climacus, the pseudonymous author of the essay, claims—according to Watts—that it is only through the ethico–religious mode that we are able to think about what is essentially human. What lies beyond the limits of the aesthetic intellectual is, consequently, not beyond the limits of thought but, rather, another *type* of thought. At the same time, Watts acknowledges that Climacus's notion of "double reflection" points to the involvement of both abstract and concrete thinking in the ethico–religious mode:

> ... we must be clear that Climacus in no way denies that ethico–religious thinking *also* involves reflection and abstract inquiry. On the contrary, the notion of 'double reflection'—one

of his few terms of art—is plainly intended to encapsulate the idea that what we need is a kind of thinking that is *both* abstract and concrete.

(Watts 2016, p. 19)

Tang's and Watt's accounts serve as theoretical backgrounds for my exploration of *Fear and Trembling*. In Section 4 of this article, as I discuss its possible thought experimenting qualities, I will return to their notions of "experiments" and "thought experiments", respectively.

3. An Overview of *Fear and Trembling*

In what follows, an overview of *Fear and Trembling* will be presented, combined with comments and reflections on the specific characteristic traits of the narrative.

3.1. Pseudonymity and Indirect Communication

At the center of *Fear and Trembling*, we find the biblical story about how Abraham's faith is tested by God and how he is ordered to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen.22:1–18). The novel is written under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio (John of Silence). Similar to many of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, he becomes the personification of ideas and perspectives, rather than a three-dimensional character. Since it was commonly known in 1840s Copenhagen that Søren Kierkegaard was the actual writer of the book, the pseudonym is not intended to obscure the identity of the author. Rather, its function is to communicate indirectly to the readers and confront them with "an 'unresolved' existential problem" (Boven 2018, p. 116). That is, instead of presenting clear solutions to the problem, Kierkegaard creates a situation where the readers themselves have to choose between multiple viewpoints. Or, as he described it himself: "Since I am incompetent and extremely undependable in men's eyes, I speak the truth and thereby place them in the contradiction from which they can be extricated only by appropriating the truth themselves" (Kierkegaard [1967] 1978, JP.V: 5646; Kierkegaard [1909] 1948, Pap. IV A 87). Pseudonymous authorship is, consequently, a technique that Kierkegaard uses to reach his target audience through indirect communication. In contrast to a mere objective transference of information, it is characterized by subjectivity and an existential orientation.

Johannes de Silentio refers to his work as a case of "dialectical lyric." While the term "dialectical" is generally used to describe "a method of philosophical argument that involves some sort of contradictory process between opposing sides" (Maybee 2016), it has, throughout the years, been given various interpretations. The Hegelian version postulates that logic and history—primarily the realms of ideas and spirit—follow a dialectical pattern. Through this process, a gradual development takes place: earlier and less developed stages are absorbed by later and more advanced ones. Hegel's theory may have influenced Johannes de Silentio's depiction of the dialectical movement of resignation and faith. In spite of this, it is likely that the label "dialectic lyric" also (and perhaps to an even greater extent) refers to the Socratic version of the dialectical method.

Kierkegaard was deeply influenced by Socrates and his method of interrogation. Since he considered his own writings to be continuous with the Greek philosopher's legacy, he stated on one occasion: "The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian" (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 341). Kierkegaard, thus, envisions himself to have a maieutic role (gr. maieutikos, one who acts as a midwife) in the existential development of the readers, assisting them to give birth to themselves as authentic individuals. By asking questions (without providing any answer), the aim is to evoke the reader's subjective and existential response. According to Boven (2018), Kierkegaard's method is therefore to be characterized as a "theater of ideas", where philosophical and existential problems are performed rather than represented.

The communication has a meaningful content, but this content is neither fixed nor predefined. It emerges only after it has been actualized by the reader. This usually involves a decision that discloses the view of the reader rather than that of the communicator (Boven 2018, p. 117).

Pons (2004) argues, in turn, that the works of the Danish author contain neither a description nor a prescription of reality but, rather, "a possibility of reality" that only the reader him/herself can actualize. The possibility in question thereby serves as a dialectic horizon "which keeps different moments of reality in tension" and demands a conscious exercise of freedom on the reader's part (Pons 2004, p. 69).

Another technique that Kierkegaard frequently utilizes is irony: presenting events or characters whose appearance on the surface differs radically from what is actually the case. One example, for instance, is the fact that a narrator, whose name is "silence" gives lengthy speeches about a spiritual capacity he admires but does not possess himself: "Socrates says with a wink, '*I know nothing!*' (yet speaks on); Johannes *de silentio* says with a wink, '*I am silent!*' (yet writes on)" (Mooney 2013, p. 206). An additional characteristic trait of Johannes de Silentio's recount is his emphasis on being a dialectician and a poet, rather than a philosopher. Some commentators argue, nonetheless, that a dialectician, in this context, is synonymous with a philosopher. Mooney suggests, for instance, that "dialectical lyric" means "philosophical lyric" and claims—on the basis of this translation—that *Fear and Trembling* enables us to reassess the antithetical relation between philosophy and poetry, dialectics and art (Mooney 1991, p. 139). That is, instead of having opposing functions, they merge with one another. Other writers, such as Humpál (2001), develop a view that, on the contrary, emphasizes that "[t]his dialectic of faith has more in common with the poetic and the ironic than with the philosophical" (Humpál 2001, p. 500). By poetically evoking the "fear and trembling" that is experienced by someone who approaches the paradox of faith, Humpál argues, the aim of Johannes de Silentio's narration is, thus, to exceed the limits of reason. Therefore, what irony, dialectics and poetics have in common, in his view, is that they provide the readers with an intuitive insight into what the paradoxical sphere of faith entails (but without giving them absolute knowledge of it). At this initial stage of the article, I am not going to take a clear stand on the exact relation between "philosophy" and "dialectics." The underlying assumption of my argumentation is, however, that it is the lyrical character of Johannes de Silentio's dialectics that creates its possible thought experimenting qualities. The exact character of this thought experiment—and in what way (if any) it can be explanatory—will be further discussed in Section 4.

3.2. Four Alternative Versions of Abraham's Response to God

The initial passage, "Prelude" starts with a fairytale opening, "Once upon a time." We hear about a man who recalls how he, as a child, heard the story of how Abraham, although he was tempted by God, "endured temptation, kept the faith, and a second time received again a son contrary to expectation" (Kierkegaard 2013, p. 37). While the man admires Abraham, he is unable to understand why he did as he did. Therefore, in an attempt to increase his appreciation of the story, the man reflects on four alternative versions. Although Abraham, in all of them, acts on the divine demand (to sacrifice Isaac), his obedience is accompanied with an attitude that turns out to be deficient. In order to emphasize and problematize the narrated events, Johannes de Silentio uses repetition. The function of the alternative interpretations of Genesis 22 is, accordingly, to make the reader aware of the difficulty and complexity of faith. However, while being induced with the experience of horror and anguish at the event at Mount Moriah, we are also reminded of the faithfulness of real Abraham.

In the remainder of the book, more than a dozen other interpretations of the biblical story are presented. According to Mooney (1991), the multiplicity of versions serves as a reminder of the fact that Johannes de Silentio's ambition is not to formulate a set of simple declarative propositions or to give a systematic portrait of faith.

Rather, by considering skewed variations, [Johannes] circles from the outside, as it were, isolating the narrative symbolic space within which an effective interpretation will fall. This narrows the margin of error. Judging from the number of versions that miss the target, whatever sense is finally *retrieved* from that space is not likely to be transparent, or immediately obvious or capturable in a rule or a slogan (Mooney 1991, p. 29).

This aspect should be viewed in contrast to the Hegelian system of thought that, at the time, had become increasingly popular at the theological faculty in Copenhagen. According to Hegel, the whole of reality could be explained by a dialectical analysis of history. Christianity was, for example, explained as a part of the rational unfolding and development of human understanding and the natural world. Kierkegaard considered this to be a distortion of the Christian message and an overemphasis on rational thinking as a way to understand the doctrines of Christianity. At the center of *Fear and Trembling*, we, thus, find the juxtaposition of Hegel against Abraham's behavior. It can, in particular, be seen in the distinction between the religious and the ethical. In Hegel's view, the ethical is based on the "Absolute Mind" which is the universal, common good of all people that transcends the personal. Religious faith—according to Kierkegaard—works, on the contrary, on an individual level, in the direct relationship with God. The story of Abraham, consequently, functions as an example of a situation that cannot be justified by ethical arguments. From a purely ethical and universal perspective, what Abraham attempted cannot be viewed as anything other than murder. However, by suspending his obligation to the ethical, he dares to make a leap of faith in order to fulfill a higher duty to God.

3.3. The Existential Contribution of the Reader

In the next section of the text, "A Panegyric upon Abraham", the story of Abraham and Isaac is repeated but, now, in a more intensified way. By recapitulating the patriarch's earlier life (the migration from his homeland, the delay of the promised son Isaac), the narrator highlights his greatness and faithfulness to God. The aim of this section of the book is not only to introduce the concerns that will be addressed in the philosophical parts of the book but also to evoke the horror of the biblical narrative and confront the reader with the difficulty of faith.

This section of the novel, thus, starts by recounting how Abraham, in spite of various kinds of challenges and tests, never doubts God's promise. In a similar way, when God commands him to sacrifice Isaac, he simply says "Here I am" and embarks, without saying a word to anyone, on his journey to Mount Moriah. Interestingly, Johannes de Silentio's insistence on Abraham's silence deviates from the actual bible story, where a fragmented form of dialogue, in fact, is included. This is an intentional strategy of the narrator in order to emphasize the close relation between faith and concealment that he will return to later on in the novel. In spite of Abraham's inability to speak about his ordeals, binding Isaac nonetheless exposes Abraham's faithfulness to God. This event should therefore, according to Freidman (1987), be viewed in relation to the traditional Jewish concept of binding (Akedah): "In binding Isaac, Abraham chooses to bind himself to God but this choice may only express the acceptance of a prior condition of Abraham's existence, namely, that he is already bound to God" (Freidman 1987, p. 261).

Even if the narrator stresses the incomprehensibility of Abraham's faith, he almost obsessively repeats the story of the sacrifice. Just like the man in the Prelude, he, thus, returns to the event and creates alternative versions of it. In these recounts, the distinctly human elements of Abraham's trial are illuminated. Hence, we hear about how the protagonist experiences "anxiety and distress" as he traveled to Mount Moriah. In the words of Conway (2017): "Abraham was great, Johannes avers, not simply because he offered his 'best' to his God, but also because he suffered deeply in the process of doing so" (Conway 2017, p. 135).

Another salient feature of this section is the strong element of undecidability. The multiple and often incompatible versions of Isaac's sacrifice give the story an ambiguous and intentionally vague character. At the critical moment when Abraham draws his knife, the narrative is suspended, disrupted and then repeated again. This combination of repetition and interruption serves, according to Kjaeldgaard (2002), as a way to "block the narrative road to cathartic relief, to absolute knowledge and certainty, by way of one single pregnant moment that keeps us forever in the middle of the narrative under the spell of indecision" (Kjaeldgaard 2002, p. 321). In this way, the story becomes open-ended: giving free reign to the reader's own imagination and response to the ethical question

raised. A similar point is raised by Mooney, who refers to this aspect as Kierkegaard's "existential contribution" that only the reader's own subjectivity can complete:

His contribution is to offer me an existential space distinct from social space. If I accept this offer, I accept the open space where existential possibilities are vividly acknowledged and then I *close* that radical openness through decisive resolution and action. Kierkegaard cannot complete the process he initiates. He can offer possibilities but he cannot determine which of these will become mine (Mooney 2018, p. 63).

3.4. The Knight of Faith and the Tragic Hero

In what follows, Johannes de Silentio develops three figures that become the embodiment of the ethical and the religious attitudes: the tragic hero, the knight of infinite resignation, and the knight of faith. The acts committed by the tragic hero are always related to a universal ethical code. Consequently, when facing moral conflicts, he resolves them by yielding to generality. The knight of infinite resignation belongs to the ethical sphere as well. He is an individual who gives up what he holds dearest and experiences the pain of loss. While the movement of infinite resignation includes many sacrifices, Johannes de Silentio tells us, the pain is communicable and can be understood by others. The same movement is also made by the knight of faith. However, in contrast to the other knight, he also moves beyond this point, transcends the ethical, and makes a leap of faith. Abraham is, consequently, the ultimate knight of faith. Also, in contrast to the tragic hero and the knight of infinite resignation, who are universally admired and wept for, no one can understand him.

In order to illustrate the difference between the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith, the narrator tells a story of a young boy who falls in love with a princess, "and the whole content of his life consists in this love, and yet the situation is such that it is impossible for it to be realized, impossible for it to be translated from ideality into reality" (Kierkegaard 2013, p. 85). Even if the knight of infinite resignation gives up the idea of its realization in the mundane world, this does not mean that his desire for the princess is given up all together. By recollecting his hurt-filled memories of her, the knight of infinite resignation, on the contrary, transforms the princess into an idealized and static object for his unfulfilled desires. This act brings him a certain reconciliation with life, since "[h]is love for that princess became for him the expression for an eternal love . . . which no reality can take from him" (Kierkegaard 2013, p. 89). In a similar way, the knight of faith renounces his love for the princess and experiences pain. However, in contrast to the other knight, his strategy is repetition rather than recollection. That is, he makes a leap of faith and trusts that he will get the princess back by virtue of the absurd, since "with God all things are possible" (Kierkegaard 2013, p. 94).

3.5. Faith as Silent Inwardness

The contrast between the religious and the ethical, as well as the tragic hero and the two knights, is further elaborated on in the three problems around which the remainder of the book centers: (1) Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical? (2) Is there an Absolute Duty to God? (3) Was it Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Undertaking from Sarah, Eliezer, and Isaac? Each of them concerns an ethical question that, from a Hegelian perspective, could be given a definite answer. However, by drawing out the dialectical consequences inherent in the story of Abraham, Johannes de Silentio shows that it cannot be understood in terms of the universal. He proposes instead that the actions of the patriarch should be viewed as a teleological suspension of the ethical by omission to a God-given absolute duty. This is not an obliteration of ethics, but, rather, a transformation of it into a new higher form (based on the relationship with God rather than on universal norms).

In the third problem, which is given most attention, the author returns to the fact that Abraham did not disclose his undertaking to anyone. He was silent about his ordeal since nobody would understand him, we are told. As Johannes de Silentio explains, this stands in contrast to the ethical and universal sphere that requires disclosure and rejects hiddenness. From a Hegelian perspective, individuals should be able to speak about their experiences by utilizing the universal resources of language.

Furthermore, since language is a public phenomenon, it should only be used to express experiences that many individuals share. The narrator, thus, writes "The relief of speech is that it translates me into the universal." (Kierkegaard 2013, p. 204). For him, faith is, on the contrary, associated with inwardness, silence, and unspeakable messages. By acting as a single individual—relating to the Absolute in a subjective manner—Abraham is isolated from the universal and unable to explain his actions. As an illustration of the distinction of the disclosed (the ethical) and the hidden (the religious), Johannes de Silentio presents us with a number of scenarios. One of them is modeled on a story in Aristoteles' *Poetics*, where a bridegroom consults the oracle in Delphi and is told that he will suffer a misfortune brought about by his marriage. The man has three options: He could remain silent and get married away, be silent but chose not to get married, or—on the contrary—speak out. The proper response depends, according to Johannes de Silentio, "upon how this man stands related to the utterance of the augurs which is in one way or another decisive for his life" (Kierkegaard 2013, p. 170). If the life-changing announcement takes place in the public domain, it is intelligible to all people and not a result of a subjective relation to the divine. In Abraham's case, however, the situation is, in contrast, determined by a private and incommunicable relation to God about which he is unable to speak.

4. Analysis of Fear and Trembling

In this part of the article, I intend to focus on three questions:

(1)   In what way (if any) does *Fear and Trembling* display thought experimenting qualities?
(2)   If Kierkegaard's narrative, in fact, can be said to have such qualities, then to what category of thought experiments does it belong?

Based on my response to these questions, a suggestion will be given on *Fear and Trembling*'s thought experimenting status and categorization. Then, as a follow up, I will turn to the possible explanatory functions that thought experiments in general—and *Fear and Trembling* in particular—may have. The concrete question being:

(3)   In what ways (if any) does the thought experimentation of *Fear and Trembling* have an explanatory function?

4.1. The Possible Thought Experimenting Quality of Fear and Trembling

As a point of departure for my analysis, I acknowledge that Kierkegaard's book spans over a philosophical as well as a theological discourse. In the first case, the development of a narrative where characters and events embody critical arguments against certain aspects of Hegel's philosophy. However, while criticizing some elements of the German philosopher's account, the narrator's own argumentation frequently borrows from the Hegelian framework as well. The depiction of the two movements of resignation and faith depends, for example, on a dialectic that is much like the one employed by Hegel. Consequently, instead of an absolute opposition, Kierkegaard's writings display a combination of Hegelian as well as anti-Hegelian views. Hence, if we consider *Fear and Trembling* to be a philosophical thought experiment, we end up with quite an intriguing situation. More specifically, a thought experiment that provides evidence against some elements of Hegel's philosophy, while other parts of his philosophical system belong to its underlying background assumptions. In addition, there are also other philosophical traditions that impinge on the thought experimenting processes. One of the more decisive of these is, I argue, the Socratic mode of open-ended interrogation. Instead of bringing purely theoretical content to the thought experimenting situation, this account exercises influence on the basis of its specific method of inquiry.

Accordingly, while both Hegel's and Socrates' legacy affect the narrative, they do so in different ways and in relation to distinct aspects of the epistemic process. In the following, I will, however, argue that, of these two, it is the Socratic tradition that exercises most influence on the thought experimenting character of *Fear and Trembling*. By combining a narrative scenario (in which different characters embody various philosophical and theological concepts) with a Socratic maieutic technique and a

performative invitation to the reader, Kierkegaard's novel, thus, becomes an imaginative "laboratory of the mind" or, as Robinson puts it, a "funhouse of existential activity" that, at every turn, provides opportunities for self-exploration and self-assessment (Robinson 2018, p. 75):

　　Such a funhouse is not a simple matter of fun and games but more like a fairy tale that uses the comic, the charming, the seductive, or the magical in order to draw the reader into the anxiety, the suffering, the terror, and the death that dog human existence (Robinson 2018, p. 75).

　　Consequently, even though Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel constitutes one level of the narrative, a perhaps even more salient level is the one the author leaves open for the reader's own existential exploration and self-searching. On the basis of these characteristics, I therefore argue that *Fear and Trembling* can be labeled a Socratic kind of thought experimenting.

　　My proposal is accordingly, and in contrast to (Tang (2006)—see Section 2)), that many of Kierkegaard's writings, in fact, can be seen as cases of thought experimenting. This position is, however, founded on a certain assumption about the particular character of the thought experimenting activity that Kierkegaard's existential perspective prescribes. That is, it does not invite us to an entirely "hypothetical argumentation" but depends on our own personal investment and "existential contribution" to the presented scenario. As Watts (2016) suggests, this is not an activity that is beyond thought but, rather, involves another *type* of thinking than what the abstract, aesthetic–logical mode is able to represent. Although Watt's argumentation primarily concerns *Philosophical Fragments*, here, it is taken to be valid for *Fear and Trembling* as well. That is, in my view, this essay can be conceived of as a thought experiment that involves both abstract and concrete thinking (earlier referred to as "double reflection"). Furthermore, I argue that the boundary between the aesthetic–logical and the ethico–religious modes (proposed by Watts) should be conceived of as fluid rather than static. As a consequence, the Socratic character of *Fear and Trembling* influences and has a decisive impact on both kinds of thinking. In the following, although I will not be using the terms "ethico–religious" and "aesthetic–logical," the interrelation between the philosophical and the theological aspects of Kierkegaard's novel is, nonetheless, going to be emphasized.

　　Before we continue, it is, for this reason, necessary to question whether *Fear and Trembling*, in fact, should be referred to as a purely *philosophical* thought experiment. While religious matters may very well be the object for philosophical thought experimenting (employing philosophical background assumptions and strategies for justification), they could also be dealt with by theological equivalents. Such theological thought experiments are, according to Fehige, characterized by their employment of "intuitions that depend on revelation" (Fehige 2014, p. 388). Fehige suggests that this type of thought experimenting, for example, can be found in relation to the problem of theodicy: . . . the well-known problem of theodicy can be conceived of as a thought experiment of revealed theology and not only as a philosophical argument to support atheism. Given the undeniable existence of god and of evil in the creation, the problem arises how the creator of everything can be good and omnipotent (Fehige 2009, p. 265).

　　Although Kierkegaard was critical of the Hegel-inspired form of Christianity that, in his time, was prevalent in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, I argue that his thought experimenting still fits within Fehige's definition. That is, while rejecting the idea that the paradox of faith can be comprehended objectively, he emphasized faith as subjective truth and inwardness. Rather than seeing *Fear and Trembling* as an entirely Socratic kind of thought experimenting, I, hence, argue that Kierkegaard's narrative needs a hybrid category that covers both its philosophical and theological undertakings. On this basis, I suggest that *Fear and Trembling* may be conceived of as a Socratic–theological thought experiment. Since this novel (because of its existential orientation) is more concerned with the human attitude to God than with God as such, it may be more accurate to characterize it as a case of theological anthropology than of theology proper.

4.2. The Relation between Thought Experimenting and Literary Fictions

In order to make an informed judgment on the thought experimenting qualities of Kierkegaard's narrative, we must also take into account its resemblance to literary fiction. A good way to start is to question whether "literary fiction" in fact is the proper label for *Fear and Trembling*, or whether it is more accurate to see it as a philosophical text concealed in literary clothing. Although the difference between the two alternatives seems to be modest, which one we choose may have implications for how we view the epistemic work it achieves.

As was mentioned in the introduction, Carroll (2002) and Elgin (2014) belong to a group of philosophers that stress the resemblance between thought experiments and some (but not all) literary fictions. Both Carroll and Elgin advocate—although in different ways—*literary cognitivism*, which is the thesis that "literary fiction can be a source of knowledge in a way that depends crucially on its being fictional" (Green 2010, p. 352). Such knowledge claims have, according to Davies, been presented in at least four ways in recent philosophical discussion (Davies 2010, pp. 56–57). One of them is to argue that fictions can contribute with factual information about the world (for example, among a bundle of fictive sentences, there may also be true statements.) Another strategy is to claim that fictive narratives provide their readers with "an understanding of general principles operative in the real world" (Davies 2010, p. 57). By exemplifying these principles (in either an implicit or an explicit way), they generate insights into their real-world equivalents. The third proposed way by which a fictional narrative can serve as a source of knowledge, Davies argues, is to develop the reader's categorical comprehension.

In presenting a fictional world, a narrative may furnish the reader with new categories or kinds whose application to the real world illuminates certain matters of fact. For example, works like *1984* or *The Trial* provide us with conceptual frameworks to critically examine the ways in which socio-political structures can exercise control over the life of the individual. What we can thereby acquire, it is claimed, are new and insightful ways of classifying and categorizing things and situations (Davies 2010, p. 57).

According to the fourth and last of Davies' presented categories, fictions primarily generate affective knowledge and an empathic comprehension of "what it would be like" to be in a particular set of circumstances. In the following, as I examine how Noël Carroll and Catherine Elgin motivate and argue for literary cognitivism, I will consider whether their approaches conform to any of Davies' suggested categories. In order to specify the exact nature of their accounts, I also intend to make use of David Egan's distinction between three ways to characterize the relation between thought experiments and literary fictions (Egan 2016). The *claim of applicability* is, according to Egan, the most moderate one. It simply acknowledges that literary fictions can be applied in thought experimenting—which, for example, is the case when philosophers, instead of creating thought experiments of their own, borrow them from the literature. According to Carroll, this is a method that philosophers frequently use.

Encountering the Socratic doctrine that a person who knows the good cannot choose to do evil, the philosopher may respond by drawing attention to the literary cases of Milton's Satan, who declares, "Evil be thou my good," as well as to Shakespeare's Iago and Melville's Claggart. The reader, using her conception of what is humanly possible, recognizes that such personality types could obtain and then go on to take these literary inventions as counterexamples to the Socratic position (Carroll 2002, p. 9).

In the *claim of cognitivism*, the analogy between the narrative types is much stronger, since it states that "we can defend the cognitive value of thought experiments by drawing analogously on the cognitive value of thought experiments" (Egan 2016, p. 148). The underlying assumption is, consequently, that both kinds of narratives perform the same (or, at least, similar) type of cognitive work. Even more far-reaching, however, is *the identity claim* that, according to Egan's characterization, states that literary fiction, in fact, *is* a specific kind of thought experiment.

In what follows, Carroll's and Elgin's proposals will be presented. The possible insights I gain from this exploration is then going to be used as a background for my reflection on Kierkegaard's thought experimenting.

4.3. The Argument Account of Noël Carroll

According to Carroll (2002), literary fictions, like philosophical thought experiments, can function like arguments that mobilize conceptual knowledge that we already possess. By operating on the reader's antecedent conceptual knowledge, they exploit the reader's ability to apply concepts so that that knowledge is clarified and brought out in the open. In this way, literary scenarios can function as extended philosophical thought experiments that instantiate and analyze abstract concepts. They may, for example, enable conceptual discrimination, dispel vagueness, test new ways of setting up a problem or a question, illuminate the criteria that lead us to apply the concept, and so forth.

As a consequence, some literary fictions—according to Carroll—can serve as "wheels of virtue", promoting and guiding the reader's reflection on the concept of virtue and the conditions under which it is applied. He takes E.M. Forster's novel *Howard's End* to be an example of this. Here, the cast of characters bear structured and polarized relations of comparison and contrast to each other. By prompting us to apply concepts of vice and virtue to the characters in question, the narrative, thus, sharpens our ability to recognize the abstract concept that the leading figures instantiate, Carroll argues. Since this type of literary thought experiments relies on the conceptual knowledge that the audience already possess, they are, in some senses, rhetorical. At the same time, "they are rhetorical in a way that is not divorced from argumentation" (Carroll 2002, p. 14). That is, while the narratives set up arguments and points to possible conclusions, the argumentation itself is completed in the mind of the reader.

In this respect, they are doubly educative: not only do they afford knowledge of concepts, but they guide the reader through the process of conducting a grammatical investigation of the virtues by arraying in a structured way imagined examples that point toward pertinent distinctions (Carroll 2002, p. 14).

Hence, although the aim of the imaginative scenarios is not to make empirical discoveries of the world, they reorganize and refocus the audience's conceptual knowledge in novel ways. Carroll formulates his account as a response to epistemic arguments that deny that literature and art can function as genuine sources of knowledge. According to what he refers to as the *no-evidence argument*, artwork do not contribute to knowledge, since they do not, in general, provide any justification of the beliefs they advance. The so-called *no-argument argument* denies, in turn, that art lacks the kind of argumentation and analysis that are required to justify knowledge claims. Carroll's strategy is, accordingly, to argue that literary fictions and philosophical thought experiments only contribute with conceptual knowledge and therefore do not require empirical justification. Of the two objections raised against literary cognitivism, it is primarily the no-argument argument that Carroll addresses. In terms of the no-evidence argument, Davies (2010) rightly points out that Carroll's response "only applies if the cognitivist's claims are restricted to conceptual knowledge" (Davies 2010, p. 62).

Another critique of Carroll's approach is raised by Egan (2016), who argues that an absolute paralleling of thought experiments and literary fictions is misleading. While the purpose of thought experiments is exhausted by the role it plays in a philosophical argumentation, Egan emphasizes that literary works, on the contrary, have multiple functions.

We read literature with a degree of openness: we remain alert and attentive to the ways the text might surprise us, provoke unexpected thoughts, insights, feelings, and so on. None of this is required, or even expected, when we read thought experiments. Reading a thought experiment might provoke thoughts, insights, or feelings beyond what is needed for the argument at hand, but these additional responses are accidental outcomes rather than central to the experience of reading a thought experiment (Egan 2016, p. 143).

A related critique that Egan raises is against what he refers to as Carroll's "allegorical reading" of literary fictions. When approaching a text in such a manner, the reader "treat[s] each element in the story as a symbolic representation of some aspect of the abstract problem under consideration" (Egan 2016, p. 144). Rather than having a value of its own, the characters in the narrative are now evaluated in terms of their instantiation of analogues at the abstract level. This is different from literary

reading, which—Egan argues—draws "meaning from the connections *between* elements at the concrete level rather than finding meaning only at the allegorical level" (Egan 2016, p. 144).

4.4. The Exemplification Account of Catherine Z. Elgin

For Catherine Z. Elgin, thought experiments have a slightly different function than the one Carroll proposes. Rather than playing a role in philosophical argumentation, she argues that thought experiments exemplify properties and patterns of the phenomena they pertain to. The same cognitive function is, according to her, performed by literary fictions. In both kinds of narratives, exemplification gives the reader epistemic access to the real-world equivalents of the features displayed in the fictional world. In the last case, the author "abstracts individual elements instantiated in fact, finds or devises an appropriate pattern, and embodies that pattern in fiction" (Elgin 2014, p. 232). The general principle of Elgin's approach is, accordingly, that the consequences the readers draw out from the events and features of the fictional world, may also help them to configure things in the world outside of the fiction.

Although philosophers sometimes disagree on what conclusions to draw from a thought experimenting scenario, Elgin points out that the interpretations of stereotypical thought experiments "are supposed to be univocal, at least until the relevant background assumptions change" (Elgin 2014, p. 239). For literary fictions, univocal interpretation is, on the contrary, not the common standard. Here, narratives can, on the contrary, bear a multitude of correct interpretations without this being considered to be a weakness. In Elgin's view, it is rather *because of* (rather than in spite of) their multilayered nature that literary fictions can enhance our understanding. At the same time, instead of making a sharp distinction between the two types of narrative, she maintains that they do similar kinds of cognitive work.

Whether or not we call works of fiction thought experiments, I have urged that fictions, thought experiments, and standard experiments function in much the same way. By distancing themselves from the facts, by resorting to artifices, by bracketing a variety of things known to be true, all three exemplify features they share with the facts. Since these features may be difficult or impossible to discern in our everyday encounters with things, actions, thought experiments, and standard experiments advance our understanding of the world and of ourselves (Elgin 2014, p. 240).

Although Elgin sometimes refers to philosophical thought experimenting, her primary focus seems to be the comparison between scientific thought experiments and literary fiction. As a consequence, she argues that these types of narratives can contribute to conceptual knowledge as well as knowledge about empirical states of reality. On this basis, it may be argued that Elgin's account fits particularly well with the kind of comprehension that Davies describes as an "understanding of general principles operative in the real world" (Davies's second category). That is, by exemplifying and instantiating these principles, the fictional narratives provide insight into how they operate in an outside world. Depending on the exact character of the exemplification in question, this strategy can, consequently, give raise to various forms of knowledge, Elgin proposes. In relation to Egan's categorizations, it appears as if her account reflects claims of applicability as well as cognitivism. In the last case, both thought experiments and literary fiction gain their cognitive value by having the capacity to instantiate features of the world outside of the fictional world. It is less clear, however, whether or not Elgin also proposes that literary fictions in fact *are* thought experiments (an identity claim). However, from what one may infer from quotations as the one cited above, it seems that her primary concern is the shared cognitive function of both narratives—rather than their exact interrelation.

What particularly stands out in Elgin's Exemplification Account is that it has more resemblances with scientific modelling than with the development of philosophical arguments. Elgin's view of thought experimenting should, consequently, be seen against the background of her earlier writings about "felicitous falsehood" in scientific modelling (Elgin 2007; Elgin 2017). By highlighting selected properties of a target area, Elgin argues, models afford epistemic access to their real-world equivalents and can, therefore, from a scientific perspective, be "true enough". For this reason, she focuses more on the concept of understanding than on the concept of knowledge. In contrast to philosophers like

Pritchard (2014) and Grimm (2014), who claim that it is impossible to have an accurate understanding of reality without having any true beliefs, Elgin, thus, states that understanding can be a cognitive success without being factive. The literary cognitivism that she advocates has, consequently, more to do with considerations being "cognitively acceptable" (to the extent that they can figure in an understanding of the world) rather than being, in all aspects, true. As an illustration, she refers to commercial samples cards that instantiate the colors of paint. Besides color, these cards include a number of other properties that are considered irrelevant to their function. (They consist, for example, of sequences of colored rectangles with a name or number associated with each color, have a certain size, were manufactured at a particular date, and so forth.) Accordingly, these cards are not patches of real paint but should, rather, be viewed as fictions that give us access to the color they represent (Elgin 2007, p. 39–40). In Elgin's view, scientific models—as well as thought experiments and literary narratives—are fictions of a similar kind. Hence, although not being literally true, they are cognitively valuable since they give us epistemic access to—and creatively reconfigure—certain features of reality that otherwise would be difficult or impossible to discern.

However, Davies (2010) questions why the content that a reader extracts from the fiction (and then test by projecting it onto the world) should be seen as a source of knowledge rather than as a source of hypotheses (Davies 2010, p. 63). Since Elgin prefers to talk about understanding rather than knowledge, Davies' critique does not so much challenge as clarify her position. That is, as I interpret her account, exemplification can be compared to a kind of modeling that, in turn, enables the reader to hypothesize about reality. Furthermore, although the examples are fictional and include aspects that are not true, features of reality can still be detected that contribute to her overall understanding of it. During this process, the real-world testing of the hypotheses necessitates a continuous reassessment and reconfiguration of the exemplification in question.

4.5. Fear and Trembling in Light of Carroll's and Elgin's Account

Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* is, as earlier noted, a hybrid case in many aspects. On the one hand, its combines philosophical and theological elements in such a way that it, as I previously suggested, can be referred to as a Socratic–theological thought experiment. On the other hand, it has a narrative character that, just as well, could be described as a case of literary fiction. One could therefore, in light of Noël Carroll's account, argue that it is literary thought experiment that develops an argument against certain aspects of Hegelian philosophy (in particular, the idea that faith is beyond reason). This claim gains support from the fact that the entire work is purposely designed to provoke the readers to explore and challenge their own assumptions about the concept of faith, but since this is an existential undertaking, Kierkegaard argues, it cannot stop with a purely philosophical reconfiguration of an abstract concept. In order to grasp the core of the concept, the audience has to actualize it "in the flesh"—as a lived reality.

Johannes de Silentio consequently uses the Socratic technique of interrogation as a way to disclose that faith cannot be acquired by objective philosophical reasoning. As a result, the text may be said to develop a philosophical argument but does so in a way that leaves the argumentation dependent on the reader's own existential contribution. In this way, the reading of *Fear and Trembling* acquires certain resemblances to the subjective engagement that is required when reading literary fictions. On Kierkegaard's part, he deliberately chooses a narrative format that evokes the reader's subjectivity and, hence, parallels the existential situation he aims at depicting. Therefore—even if I agree with Egan that literary fictions, in general, cannot be reduced to philosophical arguments—I also suggest that there are some exceptions to this rule. I argue that *Fear and Trembling* is an example of this. Here, the argumentation is deliberately laid out in such a manner that the text (a) acquires literary qualities and (b) emphasizes a subjective—rather than an objective—standard of justification. This kind of justification is "rooted in its personal disclosure value alone" (Clayton 1989, p. 4). In this case, it is a direct reflection of Kierkegaard's own characterization of how the paradoxical nature of the Christ event leads to "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness"

(Kierkegaard [1846] 1941, p. 182). At the same time, this type of justification disqualifies Kierkegaard's fiction from being the standard type of philosophical argumentation. Instead, it becomes a theological thought experiment whose intuitions depend on revelation. Even so, the narrative maintains those of its philosophical features that can be harmonized with its overall theological approach.

The theological nature of *Fear and Trembling*, in turn, influences the type of explanatory work it can be said to perform. Nonetheless, in order to avoid mixing things up, I propose that we distinguish between three functional levels of the text that, in different ways, influence its possible explanatory force. On the first level, the narrator develops an argument about the subjective nature of faith. This argumentation is embodied in a fictional narrative that enables the reader to explore the concept of faith. Although the argument and its "fictional vehicle" are a unit, they also have different functions. On this basis, I suggest that the fictional narrative belongs to a second level, which—accordingly—is the representation level on which the execution of the thought experiment takes place. Furthermore, since the argument on the first level can only be subjectively justified in relation to the lived reality of the reader, a third, existential level is required. On this level, the explanations offered at the first and second level are tested against the readers' own life experiences. I argue that it is, accordingly, in the interaction between these three levels that the specific thought experimenting character of *Fear and Trembling* is established. Hence, in order to examine the narrative's possible explanatory function, one needs to investigate it both as a unit and as a combination of separate functional levels.

When reading *Fear and Trembling* in light of Noël Carroll's and Catherine Z. Elgin's account, it is primarily the first and second level that come into focus. Since I have already addressed the level of argumentation, I now intend to discuss the second, thought experimenting level. Here, one of the fundamental questions concerns the mode of representation that the fictional narrative utilizes. According to Carroll, characters such as the knight of infinite resignation, the tragic hero, and even Johannes de Silentio himself serve as symbols for specific abstract concepts. As concepts, they are related to how we perceive and categorize an entity or an event. As a result, different individuals can conceptualize entities and events in different ways. What Carroll claims is, consequently, that philosophical thought experiments and literary thought experiments operate on the concepts that the readers already possess, bringing them out in the open and enabling them to reassess and reconfigure them. However, according to Elgin, it is more accurate to refer to fictions as exemplifications of features in the real world. That is, even though the tragic hero is a fictional character, he can still exemplify properties and patterns in a world outside the narrative. Thus, in the comparison between Carroll's and Elgin's approaches, the distinction between "concept" and "example" becomes crucial. What is, for instance, the exact difference between seeing a thought experiment, such as Plutarch's story about the ship of Theseus, as an exploration of the *concept* of identity, or, on the contrary, as an *exemplification* of metaphysical properties? It is tempting to say that exemplification presupposes a much more far-reaching scope in terms of its presupposed real-world access. That is, the promise inherent in the term "exemplification" is not only to widen our conceptualizations of reality, but—in fact—to give access to actual reality. However, such a pledge needs to be viewed against the background of Elgin's quite modest truth claims. On her account, even if the aim of the total network is to depict reality as accurately as possible, not all parts of it have to be absolutely true. Elgin's proposal, thus, illuminates other aspects of *Fear and Trembling* than those we gain access to by applying Carroll's account to it. In particular, it problematizes the question of truth and what role it plays in cognitive advancement. For Kierkegaard, it is perhaps more a question of existential advancement and of *what kind* of truth actualizes such a movement.

4.6. A Brief Notice on the Explanatory (Exploratory) Function of Fear and Trembling

In this article, I have argued that Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* is a Socratic–theological thought experiment that engages the reader in a process of spiritual and existential discernment. It is a hybrid case of thought experimenting that displays Socratic, theological, and existential features. As such, it enables us to compare the cognitive functions that different kinds of thought experiments perform.

It may, however, be argued that Kierkegaard's novel can be spiritually and existentially illuminating without having to be framed in thought experimenting terms. In this article, my intention has, nonetheless, been to examine the interdisciplinary use of fictional narratives as a way to explain and explore different dimensions of reality. The purpose of addressing the resemblance between literary fictions and thought experimenting, has, consequently, been to find (as well as to problematize) a common narrative determinator. For this reason, I presented the accounts of Noël Carroll and Catherine Elgin, who both (although in different ways) develop theories about the resemblance between the epistemic role(s) that thought experiments and some (but not all) literary fictions may play.

As a thought experiment, *Fear and Trembling*, thus, does not so much "explain" an objective reality as help the readers to form their own answer to the questions posed. The explanatory function is, consequently, dependent on the readers' own existential contribution. Given this, I propose that it is more accurate to see the explanatory force of *Fear and Trembling* in relation to its *exploratory* function. On the performative stage that the novel sets up, the readers can imaginatively play out and test the problems that Johannes de Silentio has confronted them with. The full effect of this instantiation nonetheless requires that the solutions become the readers' lived and subjectively chosen reality. In one of his articles, Kierkegaard, consequently, writes: "In respect to God, the *how* is *what*" (Kierkegaard [1967] 1978, JP 2: 1405; Kierkegaard [1909] 1948, Pap. X2 A 644). In this view, the only way to grasp faith's paradoxical "what" is to be immersed in its subjectively experienced "how".

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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