

# Teleological Suspensions In *Fear and Trembling*

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## 1. Introduction

I focus here on the teleological suspension of the ethical as it appears in *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>1</sup> A common reading of *Fear and Trembling* is that it explores whether there are *religious reasons for action* that settle that one must do an action even when all the *moral reasons for action* tell against doing it.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation has been contested.<sup>3</sup> But I defend it by showing how the explicit teleological suspension of the ethical mirrors implicit teleological suspensions of the epistemological and prudential, and by articulating how it might be necessary for God to suspend the ethical in order to forgive us for our wrongdoings to others. I also discuss whether God's commands are implicitly conditional, whether religious reasons to act, believe, and forgive are in each case grounded in divine commands, and what role love plays in each type of teleological suspension.

Here is the plan for the paper. In section 2, I clarify talk of religious and moral reasons for action. In order to distinguish kinds of reasons, we need an account of what makes a given reason a reason of one kind rather than another. De Silentio appeals to

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<sup>1</sup> *Fear and Trembling* was published under the pseudonym "Johannes de Silentio". I will treat de Silentio as the author since I don't intend to settle which views mouthed by de Silentio are actually endorsed by Kierkegaard. See Mooney (2015) and Lippitt (2003: 8-11) for a discussion of Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Rudd (1993: 144) and Mulder (2002) defend this interpretation. See also Outka (1973: 205), Carson (2001: 444-446), Wallace (1984: 269-270), and Stump (2008: 138). Westphall (1996: 112, ft. 15) suggests that, in *Fear and Trembling*, the ethical and the religious are antithetical.

<sup>3</sup> Cross (2003) argues against this reading. On his view, "Abraham's faith, as expressed in the teleological suspension, consists . . . in his trustful confidence that what seems certain – that he will have committed a monstrous wrong – will not obtain. . . ." One concern with Cross's interpretation is that in de Silentio's story, some monstrous wrongs did obtain: the very acts of binding one's child and then drawing a knife to his throat are themselves monstrous wrongs that occurred even though Isaac was not in fact sacrificed. Were those actions in some way obligatory? If so, not by way of moral reasons. I do agree with Cross though that there is what I will call a teleological suspension of the epistemological; this is discussed in section 4. An anonymous referee has suggested that either de Silentio or Kierkegaard might not have viewed the binding itself (as opposed to the action it apparently foretold) to be morally wrong, perhaps because children were viewed more as beloved possessions. I am inclined to doubt this, but I agree with the referee that the focus of the text is clearly on the anticipated possible killing rather than the acts that led to it.

*universality* as a mark of the ethical; I provide a brief interpretation of this. I also discuss when one has a religious reason to act.

In section 3, I discuss two ways in which one set of normative considerations might “suspend” another set. First, one set might *override* the other. When this happens, both sets of considerations are genuinely in play but the first set contains the stronger reasons. Second, one set of normative considerations might *silence* the second set. When this happens, only the first set of considerations provide genuine reasons for action; in this context, the other considerations, which would otherwise be reasons for action, do not. I illustrate these two ways by comparing religious and moral reasons, and moral and prudential reasons. I show how distinguishing between these two ways of understanding what a teleological suspension is matters when assessing the plausibility of the divine command theory of moral reasons for action.<sup>4</sup> Finally, I present some reasons to favor understanding the teleological suspension of the ethical in terms of overriding reasons.

The teleological suspension of the ethical is not the only teleological suspension present in *Fear and Trembling*. There is another, which I call the teleological suspension of the epistemological, and it is the focus of section 4. There, I assess whether there can be religious reasons for belief. Although de Silentio does not explicitly mention it, the possibility of this suspension is a second central theme of *Fear and Trembling*, and exploring this possibility helps explain why de Silentio labels Abraham “the father of Faith” and a “guiding star for the anguished”.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, like the teleological suspension of the ethical, there are two ways of understanding the teleological suspension of the epistemological, and I argue that the text favors understanding the teleological suspension of the epistemological in terms of overriding reasons rather than silencing reasons. Given that the text favors understanding the teleological suspension of the epistemological in terms of overriding reasons, there is a (defeasible) reason to understand the teleological suspension of the ethical in terms of overriding reasons as well, since the overall interpretation of the text is thereby more uniform.

In section 5, I address an objection to the heart of my interpretation, namely, that if Abraham teleologically suspends the epistemological when he believes that all will be well even if he sacrifices Isaac as commanded by God, then Abraham does not believe that there are moral considerations against sacrificing his son in this situation, and so Abraham does not teleologically suspend the ethical. In response to this objection, I show how these teleological suspensions are compatible.

In section 6, I discuss whether the testimony of a person with a religious reason to believe can provide someone else that religious reason to believe. I argue that the answer is no, and that this is partly why Abraham cannot be understood by others, including his wife Sarah. I also discuss one reason why Abraham may not tell Sarah about his intention to sacrifice Isaac.

In section 7, I discuss a role that the teleological suspension of the ethical might play in accounting for how God can forgive us for our sins. Initially, it seems that I can forgive you for your wrongdoing only if that wrongdoing was done to me. The “can” here is the can of morality: my forgiving you for a wrongdoing done to a third party, at best, carries no positive inherent moral significance, and at worse is morally impermissible. In

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<sup>4</sup> Although I won’t discuss the historical scholarship about the Akedah (but see Jacobs (1981)), it would be interesting to learn how the teleological suspension was understood by prior philosophers who also recognized it.

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 18, 21)

what way could it then be permissible for God to forgive us for our wrongdoings to others?

In section 8, I discuss the critical role that love plays in each instance of a teleological suspension. In all instances, love is what makes teleological suspensions possible.

Finally, in section 9, I summarize the main results of this paper.

## 2. Religious Reasons for Action

A reason for a given action is a consideration that partially determines whether that action is absolutely what must be done. Reasons for action are what make an action just plain obligatory, wrong, or permissible.<sup>6</sup>

There are distinctive kinds of reasons for action just in case two conditions are satisfied. First, reasons for action can be partitioned into independently characterizable types such that no reason for action of one type is a reason for action wholly in virtue of other reasons for action that belong to different types. Second, the types correspond to distinct sources of the reasons for action. For example, perhaps a given agent's prudential reasons for action derive from facts about that agent's desires, while that agent's moral reasons for action derive from facts about rationality in general. Note that de Silentio not infrequently appeals to the notion of "a person's wish", i.e., desire, when discussing what is central to the welfare of some of the characters he describes.<sup>7</sup>

On my interpretation, whenever God singularly commands an agent to perform an action, that agent has a religious reason to perform an action. Let me illustrate the distinction between singular and general commands. Suppose I may give commands to my students. I might issue the general command, "Everyone study for the test!" This command applies to each of my students, although it does not address any of them as individuals. Alternatively, I could say to a particular student, Janet, "Janet, study for the test!" Even though the former command applied to Janet, only with the latter singular command do I command her as an individual.

Distinguishing general and singular commands is especially important if we interpret de Silentio as endorsing a divine command theory of moral reasons for action. If both moral and religious reasons ultimately derive from divine commands, it's initially hard to see how they can be genuinely distinct kinds of reasons. But perhaps moral reasons are grounded in general divine commands and religious reasons are grounded in singular ones.<sup>8</sup> I discuss this more in section 3.

Regardless of the ultimate source of moral reasons, de Silentio says that ethics is universal.<sup>9</sup> Moral reasons are universal in the following respects. First, moral reasons for action are always subsumable under more general principles. These principles apply to everyone, but explicitly mention no one; in logical terms, they are universally quantified principles.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of what we just plain must do can't be identified with what we ethically must do on pain of ruling out the possibility of a teleological suspension of the ethical by fiat. See Nielsen (1958) and Carson (2001: 445-446) for discussion.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Kierkegaard (1983: 18, 76, 78), among others.

<sup>8</sup> However, if we reject the divine command theory of moral reasons (as I think we should), we could say that all divine commands, whether specific or general, generate religious reasons for action.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 46). Lippitt (2003: 81-82, 143, 161) disagrees and instead suggests that part of de Silentio's project is to question whether the ethical is universal, not to assume that it is.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps there are irreducibly many general principles. Perhaps at root there is one general principle that subsumes the rest, such as, for example, Kant's categorical imperative. Perhaps for every principle of sufficient generality, there is a more general principle that subsumes it. I needn't settle this here.

Second, they refer to no particular being in describing the conduct that they mandate. Consider, for example, the principle that one must always obey the commands of God. Although a universally quantified claim, the principle nonetheless explicitly mentions a particular being, namely, God, and hence is excluded from being a moral principle. Third, universal principles are understandable, in principle, by anyone.<sup>11</sup> Unlike religious reasons for action, they don't require a special act of divine revelation to know them. Because ethical reasons are subsumed under general principles, they govern a wide range of social phenomena, and hence can be implemented differently in different social settings, thus giving rise to more concrete and local duties in those social settings.

There is an extensive literature on whether de Silentio's operates with a Kantian, Fichtean, or Hegelian conception of ethics.<sup>12</sup> I think that what de Silentio commits himself to is merely the rather thin account of universality stated above, which is acceptable to a wide range of ethical systems, including Kantianism, Hegelianism, consequentialism, natural law theories, and many others.<sup>13</sup>

That said, the majority of commentators take de Silentio to operate with a Hegelian view of ethics on which ethics is understood as social morality, and in which one ought to do is determined by the roles one plays in society.<sup>14</sup> What I say here is mostly compatible with this reading, although I am sympathetic with Donnelly's (1981) argument that one can make sense of a social role played by knights of faith, which generates worries about whether they can be said to suspend the ethical. This in turn creates pressure against a straightforwardly Hegelian interpretation.

Conversely, there is at least one character in *Fear and Trembling*—the Merman—who is subjected to ethical appraisal, but for whom no clear social role is definable.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Abraham, who is a father, and Agamemnon, who is a king, what social role does the Merman occupy?<sup>16</sup> And in what way could this social role determine his duties? There are no clear answers to these questions. Similarly, I discuss in section 6 whether God teleologically suspends his own ethical duties to secure our salvation. How does a conception of ethics as a system of social duties allow for an ethics of divine conduct?

Let us now examine the teleological suspension of the ethical.

<sup>11</sup> See Evans (1981: 144), Holmer (1981: 90), Taylor (1981: 180), and Piety (2010: 28).

<sup>12</sup> Green (1992) extensively details Kant's influence, though Green (1998: 264) cautions against a strictly Kantian take on the universal. Hampson (2013: 54), Pojman (1984: 84-85), and Shrader (1968: 689) attribute a Kantian conception of ethics to de Silentio. Evans (2004: 67-71, 74-77; 2009: 104-109; 2015), Ouka (1973: 211), and Walsh (2009: 150-151) attribute a Hegelian conception to de Silentio. Rudd (1993: 145) attributes a Hegelian conception, although he claims that Kierkegaard's teleological suspension is also inconsistent with Kant's ethics. Green (1993: 195-196) discusses Hegelian interpretations. Kosch (2006) extensively discusses a Fichtean interpretation. See also Krishek (2009: 101-108).

<sup>13</sup> Hannay (2008: 242-243) seems to agree; he writes, "Why should Kierkegaard have any special philosophical theory in mind at all?" See also Perkins (1981b: 53) and Carlisle (2015: 48-49).

<sup>14</sup> Westphall (1991: 26-27) reads *Fear and Trembling* as an "all-out assault on the Hegelian understanding of *Sittlichkeit*". See also Westphall (1991: 194), Stewart (2015: 125-126), Quinn (1990: 185), and Simmons (2007: 323).

<sup>15</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 93-99).

<sup>16</sup> An anonymous referee has suggested that one might try to argue that the Merman is a *potential husband*, but as the referee also noted, he stands outside such customs.

### 3. Two Kinds of Suspension

There are two fundamentally different ways to understand the idea of a teleological suspension of the ethical. In order to illustrate them, we'll consider the interplay between ethical and prudential reasons.

That there are conflicts between prudential and ethical reasons for action is commonplace. All my prudential reasons might favor a course of action while my moral reasons tell against it. Although it is less obvious, I assume that there are facts about what agents absolutely must do and that in some way prudential and moral reasons factor into determining this. Figuring out what that way might be will help us better understand the teleological suspension of the ethical.<sup>17</sup>

The first way of understanding the teleological suspension of the ethical is that religious reasons can override ethical reasons.<sup>18</sup> Call this "the overriding interpretation".

Sometimes moral reasons *override* prudential reasons. One set of reasons overrides another in a given context just in case the sets of reasons favor actions that cannot jointly be done but the collective strength of the overriding set of reasons is stronger than the collective strength of the overridden set of reasons. Here is an example. I see a child in danger. I can save him, but I will ruin my fancy clothing if I do so, and I do not want my fancy clothing to be ruined. My desire gives me a prudential reason to not save the child, but this reason isn't as strong as the moral reason to save him, and so what I absolutely must do is save the child. We may say that, in this situation, the prudential has been "suspended" for the sake of a higher *telos*, namely the ethical. And, if I save the child because I take the ethical reason to be stronger, *I* have suspended the prudential for the ethical.

On some deflationary views about normativity, there are only prudential reasons for action and the existence of moral reasons is an illusion. Still, people might act in accordance with what they take to be higher than prudential reasons for action. With this in mind, note that de Silentio considers the general question of whether there can be a teleological suspension of the ethical while also describing agents, such as Abraham, *as* teleologically suspending the ethical.<sup>19</sup> The difference between these two ways of speaking is subtle but important. Even if there are no religious reasons that can "suspend" ethical reasons, an agent might believe that there are, and act in accordance with what she believes. Abraham might believe that he has a religious reason to sacrifice his child and act accordingly even though he is mistaken. And in this situation, we may say that Abraham suspends the ethical for what he takes to be a higher *telos*, even though the ethical is not in fact suspended by any higher *telos*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Westphall (1992: 112-113) briefly notes that it would be profitable to consider how the aesthetic might be teleologically suspended *for* the ethical.

<sup>18</sup> See Evans (1981: 141-142) and Quinn (1990) for assertions of this interpretation. This interpretation is suggested (and rejected) by Davenport (2008: 198-199). Westphall (1987: 87) calls the teleological suspension a "trampling of the ethical". (One way to trample something is to ride over it!) See also Hannay (1982: 74; 2001: 189) and Rudd (2015: 193-195).

<sup>19</sup> Two quick examples: the title of Problema I is whether there is a teleological suspension, whereas at Kierkegaard (1983: 59), de Silentio speaks of Abraham as suspending the ethical.

<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Ferreira (2009: 55) suggests that de Silentio has illustrated what a teleological suspension of the ethical would be while leaving it open to the reader whether such a suspension would be legitimate.

There's another way to understand the teleological suspension of the ethical. Say that one set of reasons *silences* another set of putative reasons in a given context just in case the sets favor actions that cannot jointly be done but, given the silencing reasons, those putative reasons that are silenced in that context do not even provide considerations for or against acting.<sup>21</sup> In a context in which a putative reason is silenced, it does not even function as a reason, even though it would in other contexts in which the silencing reasons are not present.<sup>22</sup> Call "the silencing interpretation" one in which religious reasons silence ethical reasons.

On both interpretations of the teleological suspension, we can make sense of de Silentio's remarks about ethical duties "becoming relative" while we have an "absolute duty" to God.<sup>23</sup> An absolute duty of a given type is a duty such that no other duty of a different type can override it or silence it. A duty is relative provided it is not absolute. But perhaps the silencing interpretation better fits the description of ethical duties as "becoming relative", because, on this interpretation, ethical considerations are not in play in every situation in which an agent might act, and hence are, in that sense, situation-relative. However, de Silentio also says that the ethical "applies at all times", which suggests that there is never a silencing of ethical considerations, and that they are always in play even if they are sometimes overridden.<sup>24</sup>

I think the balance of interpretative and philosophical considerations favors the overriding interpretation over the silencing interpretation, and I will elicit those considerations in this paper. That said, I don't think that the balance of these considerations makes the silencing interpretation unsustainable, and this is why I will carefully and sympathetically explore it as well.

Let's assess some important philosophical differences between the overriding and the silencing interpretations.

First, the overriding interpretation imposes more structure on the "space of reasons" than the silencing interpretation. If reasons can be overridden, then reasons have gradable strengths: some reasons are stronger than others. More specifically, religious reasons would always override ethical reasons; hence, there is an upper bound to the strength of ethical reasons and a lower bound to the strength of religious reasons. But the silencing interpretation doesn't imply that reasons have gradable strengths.

Second, if a reason is overridden in a given situation, it is still a reason, and hence certain evaluations of the action performed might be apt. For example, in a given situation, the moral reasons for acting a certain way might be strong enough to override the prudential reasons against, but since they do not also silence those reasons, the action is *imprudent* but morally required. Because of this, it might also be appropriately described

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<sup>21</sup> On silencing, see McDowell (1998: 17), Scanlon (1998: 51), Seidman (2005), and Tanyi (2013: 890).

<sup>22</sup> The silencing interpretation is suggested by Backhouse (2016: 226), who writes, "... *suspension* implies a temporal pause." Mooney (1992: 75), Conway (2015: 220-221), and Pattison (2005: 106) consider readings on which moral laws are not genuinely universal but which have exceptions; Pattison (2005: 109) considers an analogy with natural laws, which God is also able to suspend, i.e., render them causally inert, at will. Stiltner (1993: 225) claims that a knight of faith does not have both religious duties and moral duties, but has only religious duties; if religious reasons silence moral reasons, Stiltner's claim is plausible.

<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 71).

<sup>24</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 54).

as *brave*. Moreover, because these prudential reasons are genuine reasons, one can be *tempted* to act in accordance with these reasons.

However, if moral reasons silence the putative prudential reasons in that context, then the action is *not* imprudent; one can say only that it would have been imprudent if those silencing reasons had not been present. Since silenced reasons are not genuine reasons in the contexts in which they are silenced, it is hard to see how one may be tempted by them.<sup>25</sup>

Consider now a case in which the prudential reasons to act override the moral reasons. In such a situation, what one all things considered must do is the prudent action, yet one still has some reason to feel guilty or at least badly, since the action is morally wrong. However, if one is in a situation in which prudential reasons silence moral reasons, one needn't even feel guilty, since there is no moral reason not to do it. At worst, what one does is what would be morally wrong were the silencing reasons not present.

Note that, often in *Fear and Trembling*, prudential reasons are suspended for the sake of the ethical. De Silentio contrasts the story of Abraham with the story of Agamemnon, who sacrifices his child for the sake of his nation.<sup>26</sup> De Silentio notes that Agamemnon does this because his duty to his nation is "higher" than his duty to his child. This suggests that one moral reason is stronger than—and hence has overridden—another moral reason. But Agamemnon also tells himself that sacrificing his child is not "his wish".<sup>27</sup> Agamemnon's sacrifice of his child is bad not only for the child but also for Agamemnon himself, and so Agamemnon has a *prudential* as well as a moral reason not to sacrifice his child. But this prudential reason is not strong enough to override the moral reason stemming from the needs of his nation, and hence Agamemnon is also teleologically suspending the prudential. This prudential reason is not silenced—and this is why Agamemnon actually takes some small comfort in that he is going against what is "his wish"—but rather is overridden.<sup>28</sup>

If the religious reasons for Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac override the moral reasons against, the action is absolutely required but morally impermissible.<sup>29</sup> However, if the religious reasons for action silence the putative moral reasons, then it is not correct to describe the attempted sacrifice as morally wrong. If a murder is a killing of a person that is morally wrong, then when religious reasons obligate a killing by silencing the moral reasons against it, that killing cannot be described as a murder.

Abraham is portrayed as wracked with fear, guilt, and anguish over his decision to sacrifice Isaac. If we interpret the text as holding that Abraham is correctly responding to the moral reasons against his action, we have a reason to accept the overriding interpretation. But a friend of the silencing interpretation may claim that fear and trembling are appropriate when one is unsure whether a decision of this magnitude is what one all things considered must do.<sup>30</sup> Second, the text is unclear on whether what Abraham

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<sup>25</sup> See Seidman (2005: 68-69).

<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 58).

<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 78).

<sup>28</sup> De Silentio tells us that the knight of faith is required to give up both his moral duty *and* his wish; see Kierkegaard (1983: 78). See also Cross (2003: 10) and Stump (2008: 142).

<sup>29</sup> Those who think moral reasons always override all other reasons will deny this possibility; Mooney (1991: 160, ft. 19) briefly discusses this.

<sup>30</sup> In section 4, I argue that Abraham cannot know what he all things considered must do.



intended to do is appropriately described as murder, although it is clear that the intended action is appropriately described as such if there is no teleological suspension of the ethical.<sup>31</sup>

Probably the strongest textual reason favoring the overriding interpretation is that Abraham is tempted to do the morally right thing. De Silentio writes, “It is an ordeal, a temptation. A temptation—but what does that mean? As a rule, what tempts a person is something that will hold him back from doing his duty, but here the temptation is the ethical itself, which would hold him back from doing God’s will.”<sup>32</sup> If his duty is a temptation, then the moral reasons to act should be genuine reasons, rather silenced putative reasons. The ethical would not be a temptation if Abraham could not see genuine reasons to act ethically.

The third important difference between these interpretations is how they connect with a divine command theory of moral reasons. It is controversial whether de Silentio accepts a divine command theory of morality.<sup>33</sup> I’ll now argue that a divine command theory of moral reasons fits better with the silencing interpretation. This means that interpretative pressure favoring the overriding interpretation is also pressure against interpreting de Silentio as accepting the divine command theory of morality.

To see this, we’ll closely examine the divine command theory. We’ve already distinguished between general and singular commands. But we also need a distinction between conditional and unconditional commands. Consider the difference between “You: close the door!” and “Close the door if you are cold!” Both commands are singular. The latter command is explicitly conditional; the former command is, on the surface, unconditional. (I say “on the surface”, because arguably many commands are implicitly conditional.) If I make an unconditional command to an agent, there are only two possibilities: either the command is obeyed or the command is disobeyed. Conditional commands, on the other hand, correspond to three possibilities. If I say to you, “close the door if you are cold!”, and you are not cold, the condition for the command is not met. Following Bradley and McDaniel (2008), we can say that in such a situation, the command is cancelled, and hence cannot be either obeyed or disobeyed.<sup>34</sup>

Let’s now consider general conditional commands. Here is an example: “Everyone: help an animal if that animal is injured”. With general commands, we shouldn’t simply say whether it is obeyed or disobeyed tout court, but rather speak of whether given

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<sup>31</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 66). Davenport (2008: 224), following Lippitt (2003: 71), argues that Abraham does not view what he intends to do as murder. Even so, it is still ethically impermissible to tie bind one’s child and place a knife to his throat.

<sup>32</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 60).

<sup>33</sup> Although de Silentio says that, “duty is precisely the expression for God’s will” [Kierkegaard 1983: 60], this is not clearly an expression of the divine command theory. He might simply mean that God’s commands generate the strongest reasons for action. Rudd (1993: 134) suggests that viewing ethical reasons as grounded ultimately in God is necessary if moral reasons are to be viewed as “having an absolute character” and “being overriding”. Evans (2004: 120-124, 305-306) does not attribute a divine command theory to de Silentio—Evans takes him to be a Hegelian about ethics—but does attribute a divine command theory to Kierkegaard. Green (1993: 197-198; 1998: 266-269), Davenport (2008: 207-208), Sagi (1992: 88-89), Simmons (2007: 326-328), and Lippitt (2003: 145-147) caution against attributing a divine command theory to de Silentio. See also Stiltner (1993).

<sup>34</sup> I follow Bradley and McDaniel (2008), who deny that a conditional command is just a command to make a conditional true. Bradley and McDaniel develop a similar theory of conditional desires, so what I say about divine command theories could also be adapted to apply to divine volition theories of ethics.



individuals in their particular situations have obeyed or disobeyed that command. And, if the command is conditional and the condition is not met in that context, we should say that in that context, the command is cancelled with respect to that agent in that context, and hence the agent can neither obey nor disobey that command. Suppose that Jim is in a context in which there is an injured animal while Sally is not. Then Jim will either obey or fail to obey the general conditional command. But Sally can neither obey nor fail to obey that command because the condition of the command is not met. So, for Sally, the command is cancelled.

With this background in mind, let's return to the divine command theory. On this theory, the source of moral reasons for action are divine commands that this action be done. Since ethics is universal, there are general moral principles, and given the divine command theory, these correspond to general divine commands. Here's a toy example: "One is morally obligated not to kill" is a general moral principle whose ground is the general divine command "Thou shall not kill."

Now let's tie the discussion back to interpreting the suspension of the ethical. Suppose that God's general commands are always conditional commands, and that their conditions always include that God has not issued a singular command to the contrary. Now suppose that the ground of one's moral obligation not to kill is the general conditional command: "Each of you shall not kill on the condition that I do not command you specifically to do otherwise." Suppose that Samantha has not been commanded to sacrifice her child (or any other person). Then, with respect to her, the condition of this general conditional command is met, and hence she can either obey the command or disobey it. Since the condition is met, and she can obey the command, she is morally obligated to obey the command. Suppose now that Abraham has been commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. Then the condition of God's general conditional command to not kill has not been met with respect to Abraham. Hence, Abraham can neither obey nor disobey the conditional command, and hence he has no moral obligation stemming from that general command to not sacrifice his son. He does, however, have a religious reason to sacrifice to his son because God has issued a singular command that this be done. Had that religious reason not been present, Abraham would have had a moral reason not to sacrifice his son. So, in that sense, the religious reason to sacrifice his son has silenced the moral reason not to. By bringing about the cancellation of the general command in Abraham's case, God prevents what would otherwise have been a moral reason to act from being a reason.<sup>35</sup>

Are God's commands implicitly conditional in this way? Let's return to the story of Abraham. Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac. As he is about to fulfill this command, he receives a second divine command, namely to sacrifice a ram instead of Isaac. Why doesn't Abraham have two incompatible religious obligations?<sup>36</sup> How is it that the second command constitutes a rescinding of the first? It is clear from the story that the second command in some way cancels the first. The view that the first command was conditional on their being no other command contrary to it explains this. If God's

<sup>35</sup> McInerney (1957: 304-305) suggests a view on which the morality of "natural law" has conditions, and when these conditions are not met, actions that would otherwise be murders are justified killings. This view fits well with the picture I have just articulated.

<sup>36</sup> That there is a conflict between *religious reasons* is suggested by McClane (1993: 205). Davenport (2008: 211-212) argues that God's ultimate "agapic" commands are never suspended, even during Abraham's ordeal. This might be, but some of God's subsidiary commands would still be, if they are what ground Abraham's ethical obligation to not sacrifice his son.

commands are always implicitly conditional on God not further commanding us to do a contrary action, we have a straightforward explanation of why Abraham has only one religious obligation – namely, the obligation not to sacrifice Isaac – after the second command is made.<sup>37</sup>

Understanding some divine commands as implicitly conditional and general and other divine commands as singular accounts for how divine commands can ground moral reasons and religious reasons while preserving the distinction between them; moreover, this way of understanding divine commands also explains how religious reasons can silence moral reasons. For this reason, I claim that the divine command theory of moral reasons fits well with the silencing interpretation.

However, I don't see a straightforward way for the divine command theory of moral reasons to accommodate the idea that moral reasons are overridden by religious ones. For one reason to override another, both must be in play, and hence both would have to be grounded in uncanceled commands. Moreover, the commands would have to be contrary. Can a perfect being issue contrary commands?<sup>38</sup>

Even if a perfect being can issue contrary commands, the deeper issue is how to account for the strength of the reasons in question. If one reason overrides another, it is because the first is more of a reason than the second. If moral and religious reasons are both grounded in divine commands, in virtue of what is one command more of a command than another? Perhaps one command is stronger than the other if the weaker command is conditional on the second command not being made but not vice-versa. But, if so, religious reasons silence moral reasons rather than override them. If the commands are unconditional, we could say that one command is stronger than another command if we take the strength of a command to correspond to the strength of the desire or intention of the commander that the command be obeyed. But can a perfect being have contrary desires or intentions?

These reflections show that it's unclear how to make sense of religious reasons overriding moral reasons if *both* are ultimately grounded in divine commands. These reflections do not show that we should accept the silencing interpretation, since it is not clear that de Silentio takes moral reasons to be ultimately grounded in divine commands. On the contrary, as noted earlier, many commentators take his conception of ethics to be either Kantian, Hegelian, or Fichtean. What I have tried to do here is show that it is not trivial whether the overriding or silencing interpretation is correct, either philosophically or hermeneutically.<sup>39</sup> And I have tried to show that there are some interpretative and

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<sup>37</sup> As we'll see, this is a problem the overriding interpretation must face. My inclination is that religious reasons override ethical reasons, but that later religious reasons silence earlier ones.

<sup>38</sup> Evans (2004: 308-309) argues that a perfect being would not make inconsistent commands. See also Stiltner (1993: 228). Jackson (1997: 99) argues that God's commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son only "ironically" rather than genuinely. This might explain why the second command appears to override the first command: God never genuinely commanded sacrifice. Interestingly, Luther seems to suggest that God can make contradictory commands. See Carlisle (2015: 54-55) for relevant quotations and commentary.

<sup>39</sup> These two interpretations of the teleological suspension strike me as more faithful to the text than other alternatives. That said, there are further interpretations to consider. Mooney (1991: 15, 65-66, 80-82, 85) defends a reading on which de Silentio describes a conflict between two "exceptionless requirements". On this view, Abraham's religious and ethical reasons do not silence or override the other, and there is no objectively right choice of which reasons should determine one's action. Quinn (1990) considers a view, which he does not attribute to de Silentio but favors himself, on which Abraham confronts a "tragic dilemma", i.e., both the choice to sacrifice his son and the choice to refuse God's command are all things considered wrong. See also Lippitt (2003: 154-155).

philosophical reasons to favor the overriding interpretation over the silencing interpretation.<sup>40</sup>

We'll revisit the question of whether religious reasons override or silence other kinds of reasons in the next section, where our focus is reasons for belief rather than action. There I will present a further reason to endorse the overriding interpretation rather than the silencing interpretation of the teleological suspension of the ethical.

#### 4. Teleologically Suspending the Epistemological

*Epistemology* is the branch of philosophy that determines the conditions in which a person has evidence for her beliefs and the conditions in which a person has knowledge. *Evidence* for a given belief is what makes a certain strength of belief *epistemically permissible* or *epistemically required*. In other words, evidence provides us with *epistemic reasons* for belief.

Like ethics, epistemology is universal. Epistemic reasons for belief are subsumable under general principles.<sup>41</sup> As with ethical principles, general epistemological principles apply to everyone, but explicitly mention no one. These universal principles can, in principle, be understood by anyone.<sup>42</sup> Because they are so general, they can be realized in a variety of social circumstances, and hence different social standards for implementing epistemic norms can be developed.<sup>43</sup>

Consider a believer and a possible proposition she might believe. That proposition might have three different statuses according to her epistemic reasons: her epistemic reasons might make belief in that proposition (epistemically) permissible; they might make belief in it (epistemically) obligatory; and they might make belief in it (epistemically) impermissible. Moreover, her epistemic reasons might also dictate how strongly she should hold (or reject) that belief.<sup>44</sup> One teleologically suspends the epistemological when, because of one's trust in a higher order, either one believes a claim that is epistemically impermissible to believe or one believes a claim with a strength greater than what is epistemically permitted by the evidence. And the epistemological is teleologically suspended in a given situation when an individual's religious reasons to believe override or silence either that individual's epistemic reasons to disbelieve or that individual's epistemic reasons to refrain from believing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Additionally, an anonymous referee has suggested that the silencing interpretation is particularly vulnerable to the criticism that the view reduces to fideistic savagery. This might be right, and if so, we would have a further philosophical reason to worry about the silencing interpretation. But we should also note that de Silentio's God is a God that loves us and acts out of love, rather than arbitrary whims. In section 8, we will further discuss the role of love in teleological suspensions.

<sup>41</sup> See Simmons (2007: 321), who says that rationality is "classically defined" partially in terms of necessity and universality.

<sup>42</sup> See Cross (2003: 8-9).

<sup>43</sup> Piety (2010: 61-62) argues that Kierkegaard's epistemological principles are externalist in the sense that whether a belief is justified is partly a matter of factors external to the believer, specifically, the standards of justification adopted by the community in which the believer is embedded. Similarly, Westphal (1987: vii, 21-23) suggests that what counts as a reason for a belief is socially determined.

<sup>44</sup> The testimony of my seven year old child that a real astronaut visited her school might license me to believe that this happened, but it would not license me to believe with great conviction that it happened. (It turned out that it happened.)

<sup>45</sup> I agree with Hampson (2013: 32), who writes, "In many respects, what Kierkegaard will attempt in relation to ethics in *Fear and Trembling* and in the field of epistemology in *Philosophical Fragments* . . . run in parallel." But I go further: what Kierkegaard attempts in relation to ethics in *Fear and Trembling* runs parallel to what he attempts with epistemology in *Fear and Trembling*! See also Ferreira (2009: 68), Evans (1981: 143), and Hannay (1982: 99-100). I thank an anonymous referee for helpful discussion here.

The story of Abraham and Isaac illustrates the teleological suspension of the epistemological as well as the ethical. To be clear, Abraham does not teleologically suspend the epistemological when he believes in God, since God has revealed himself to Abraham on many occasions. Accordingly, Abraham has excellent evidence for God's existence, perhaps even decisive evidence. Nor does he teleologically suspend the epistemological when he believes that God has commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. According to de Silentio, Abraham knew that it was God who tested him.<sup>46</sup> But Abraham does teleologically suspend the epistemological when he firmly believes that, somehow "by virtue of the absurd", Isaac will not be lost in *this* world (rather than that they will be reunited in an afterlife) despite God's command that Isaac be sacrificed.<sup>47</sup> De Silentio's depiction of the story of Abraham is one in which Abraham is absolutely committed to this belief, but it is a belief for which the evidence available to Abraham does not warrant this commitment.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, Abraham's knowledge that God has told him to sacrifice Isaac is itself strong evidence that Isaac will be lost in this world.<sup>49</sup> Abraham believes with a certainty that his evidence does not warrant.<sup>50</sup>

Abraham also teleologically suspends the epistemological when he believes that he absolutely must do what God commands him to do. What justifies this belief? When there is a conflict between reasons of different kinds, what is the epistemic status of the principles that adjudicate which kind of reason to follow? Abraham is not depicted as engaging in philosophical reflection about the rules of belief. Moreover, if ethics encompasses those rules concerning conduct whose truth can be known by reasoning, then the truths about how we all things considered must act when moral and religious reasons

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<sup>46</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 18). For a potentially contrary view, see Evans (2004: 308), who suggests that, although God can cause a person to believe that she has been commanded to sacrifice her child, "such a belief could not be formed through rational processes". Simmons (2007: 339-340) also suggests that Abraham could not be certain that God commanded him, and that this certainty is necessary for a collision of moral and religious duties, and sufficient to eliminate anguish about what to do; as will emerge, I disagree with all three claims. Also relevant are Evans (2004: 310-311; 2015) and Kosch (2006: 285).

<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 29-30, 36). See also Davenport (2008: 201), Rudd (1993: 151), Pattison (2005: 110), Walsh (2009: 148-149), and Lippitt (2003: 67-76). Hampson (2013: 33) notes that Luther also seems to think that Abraham teleologically suspends the epistemological when he forms this belief.

<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the knight of faith who gives up his beloved but believes by faith that she will be returned to him teleologically suspends the epistemological since "he was convinced, humanly speaking, of the impossibility. This was the result reached by the understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it"; see Kierkegaard (1983: 46-47). The understanding is that faculty which recognizes epistemic reasons for belief. (Westphall (1987: 100) briefly comments on this passage.) Krishek (2009) convincingly articulates connections between love and faith, and Krishek (2009: 146) notes that Abraham is a knight of faith because he believed and trusted despite what evidence told him that he would get Isaac back (and even though he is also resigned to losing him).

<sup>49</sup> Does Abraham have two jointly inconsistent beliefs, specifically a belief that Isaac will be lost and a belief that he will not? Krishek (2009: 77-81) argues that he might. Krishek's argument is plausible, but I focus here on the belief that Isaac will not be lost, because Abraham's confidence in this belief could be justified only by religious reasons.

<sup>50</sup> Mooney (1991: 86-89; 1996: 48-50) introduces another Abraham into the picture, one who defies God's command to sacrifice his son but who nonetheless believes that despite this refusal, God will be reconciled with him nonetheless. In my sense, Mooney's Abraham also suspends the epistemological.

conflict cannot be known by the use of reason.<sup>51</sup> Given this, Abraham cannot know by unaided human understanding that he is all things considered justified in what he is doing.<sup>52</sup>

De Silentio's praises Abraham not only because of what Abraham does – perhaps not even *primarily* for what Abraham does – but also for the steadfastness of Abraham's beliefs. Abraham maintains, despite his evidence that tells to the contrary, his confident belief that Isaac will not be lost.<sup>53</sup> And it seems that de Silentio's attitude is that Abraham is right to do so, although from a purely epistemological standpoint, Abraham is mistaken to be this confident.<sup>54</sup> So Abraham's belief is permissible (perhaps even mandatory) despite the evidence. Accordingly, other reasons must be in play besides evidential reasons. These are *religious* reasons for belief.

We'll address two questions about religious reasons for belief here. First, what is the source of religious reasons for belief? Second, do religious reasons for belief override or silence epistemic reasons for belief? In section 6, we'll discuss a third question: are religious reasons for belief transferable by testimony in the way that evidential reasons for belief can be?

There is no direct textual support for any claim about the source of religious reasons for belief. I think that Abraham's religious reasons stem from his commitment to a life lived in loving trust in God.<sup>55</sup> On this view, if you adopt a particular way of life for which love of and trust in God is a central component, you can acquire religious reasons for belief. Specifically, you have religious reasons to believe those propositions the acceptance of which is partially constitutive of adopting that particular way of life.

But why does living a committed life of faith generate religious reasons for belief? I believe the deeper explanation appeals to divine commands. Just as divine commands to act generate religious reasons to act, divine commands to believe generate religious reasons to believe. True, at no point in the story is it *explicitly* stated that Abraham was commanded to maintain his confidence that Isaac will not be lost. But it is part of the

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<sup>51</sup> De Silentio claims that faith begins where thought stops, and that it is a paradox inaccessible to thought that the "individual as individual is higher than the universal". See Kierkegaard (1983: 53, 55-56, 66). Conway (2008: 193) says that de Silentio depicts the faith of Abraham as a reason-defying paradox. See also Wren (1981: 159), Pojman (1984: 82), and Rudd (1993: 148). Mooney (1991: 65-66) says something in the neighborhood of this claim. Westphal (1996: 39) suggests that there is nothing "conceptually inevitable" about the transitions from the ethical to the religious; I agree, if this means that there is no evidential reason that demands that we recognize religious reasons for belief. See Adams (1977) for further discussion of Kierkegaard's views on objective reasoning about religion.

<sup>52</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 62-63). See also Sagi (1992: 95).

<sup>53</sup> See Carlisle (2005: 99).

<sup>54</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 16), where de Silentio tells us that one who expects the impossible becomes the greatest of all. Hampson (2013: 37) briefly comments on this passage. Ferreira (2009: 51-52) says that Abraham's greatness lies in his belief in and love of God, and in his expecting that "the impossible" will obtain. See also Sagi (1992: 92). What de Silentio means by "the impossible" is not metaphysical impossibility, since God can bring these "impossible" situations about. Rather, it seems that a state of affairs is impossible in de Silentio's sense provided that only a God can bring it about and human understanding cannot fathom *how* God can bring it about. I thank an anonymous referee for discussion here.

<sup>55</sup> Abraham is described as someone who cheerfully and confidently trusts God; see Kierkegaard (1983: 18). Evans (1981: 146) suggests that trust in God is what made it possible for Abraham to believe that sacrificing Abraham was his duty. Davenport (2008) stresses the importance of what he calls "eschatological trust" in *Fear and Trembling*. See also Carlisle (2005: 105-106) and Krishek (2009: 98-101).

accepted Christian *background* of the story that we are commanded to trust God.<sup>56</sup> That God has commanded us to trust him is arguably part of what is expressed in the injunction to love God with all our heart, all our soul, *and all our mind*.<sup>57</sup>

Abraham lives a life trusting in God. However, de Silentio lacks faith.<sup>58</sup> He doesn't disbelieve in God; de Silentio is not skeptical about whether God exists. Nor is he inclined to disobey a command of God to act; on the contrary, he tells us he would obey a divine command to sacrifice his own son.<sup>59</sup> So he is positioned to acquire religious reasons to act, and to follow them.<sup>60</sup> But de Silentio doesn't trust God as Abraham does, and so, although he can obey a command of God to make sacrifice, he cannot bring himself to believe that, nonetheless, all will be well.<sup>61</sup> He does not love God with all his mind, and so he cannot access the religious reasons for belief that Abraham can. Moreover, de Silentio doesn't even know what it is like to be in Abraham's position; that is, he lacks access to the qualitative experiences of a life of faith.<sup>62</sup> If he were to live a life of faith like Abraham's, he would enjoy what Paul (2016) calls a "transformative experience".

That one can have religious reasons for belief doesn't imply that one can *know* the proposition believed on the basis of religious reasons. On my interpretation, one can have religious reasons to believe in God, and *perhaps* one can come to know or at least reasonably believe that one has religious reasons for believing in God by engaging in philosophical reflection.<sup>63</sup> But, even if one knows that one has a religious reason to believe in God, one does not thereby *know* that God exists. If religious reasons for belief make belief in the existence of God permissible or even mandatory, they do so by teleologically suspending the epistemological, not by converting true belief into knowledge.<sup>64</sup>

Should this teleological suspension of the epistemological be understood in terms of overriding reasons or silencing reasons? The texts don't settle this, but they favor an overriding interpretation. First, de Silentio frequently uses the phrases "the absurd" and "paradoxical" when describing religious belief. These phrases suggest a negative epistemological evaluation: if one believes that something will happen by virtue of the absurd,

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<sup>56</sup> Davenport (2008: 220) briefly suggests that Abraham has a duty to *trust* "the divine eschatological promise", but he doesn't specify whether this is an epistemic, ethical, or religious duty, and he doesn't indicate the potential source of such a duty.

<sup>57</sup> See Matthew 22:37.

<sup>58</sup> Compare with Krishek (2009: 47-48).

<sup>59</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 34-35). See also Cross (2003: 11).

<sup>60</sup> Compare with Lippitt (2003: 29). Mulder (2002: 312) notes that knights of infinite resignation can teleologically suspend the ethical.

<sup>61</sup> Davenport (2008: 206) says that faith is trust that an ethically ideal outcome is possible even if not humanly possible. On my interpretation, faith requires more: it requires trust that an ideal outcome will be *actual* even if not humanly possible. Later remarks suggest Davenport (2008: 218) agrees. See also Krishek (2015: 117).

<sup>62</sup> See Lippitt (2008: 88). I discuss Abraham's phenomenology more in section 6.

<sup>63</sup> If Abraham cannot know that he is justified in acting, he also might not know that he is justified in believing.

<sup>64</sup> A more complicated picture of knowledge is defended by Piety (2010: 3), who distinguishes between objective knowledge, which is knowledge that is not "essentially related to the existence of the individual knower" and subjective knowledge, which is. What we commonly think of as knowledge is objective knowledge. If Piety's picture is correct, I would say that epistemic reasons are what potentially provide us with objective knowledge, whereas other kinds of reasons for belief (such as religious reasons) can provide us with what Piety calls "subjective knowledge".



it seems that it is absurd to have that belief. Moreover, a belief that is paradoxical is a belief that one has excellent evidence against, since paradoxes are not likely to be true. If this is correct, then there must be evidential reasons to not have this belief, since evidential reasons are that to which this kind of evaluation of beliefs is sensitive. If the putative evidential reasons are silenced, then at most one can say is that such a belief would be absurd were it not for the existence of religious reasons for it. Note that de Silentio says he is appalled by the prospect of “being able to lose one’s understanding and along with it everything finite...” while also taking faith to be “the one and only marvel”.<sup>65</sup> The position seems to be that sometimes when one believes against reason, one can nonetheless believe admirably.<sup>66</sup> But when there is also a strong evidential reason against such a belief, a negative attitude (such as being appalled) is also appropriate.

An interpretation of the text in which both teleological suspensions are understood as involving reasons being overridden is simpler than one in which some kinds of reasons are overridden whereas other kinds of reasons are silenced. This provides some reason to interpret the teleological suspension of the ethical in terms of overriding reasons rather than silencing reasons.

De Silentio repeatedly calls Abraham the father of faith.<sup>67</sup> On my interpretation, Abraham deserves this label not simply because of his great faith, but also because what his great faith demonstrated.<sup>68</sup> The story of Abraham illustrates at least two teleological suspensions, but it is the teleological suspension of the epistemological that provides hope to the faithful who are concerned about whether they believe as they should. Abraham not only obeys God’s commands to act, but also God’s commands to believe. Abraham loves God with all of his mind. The story of Abraham illustrates the possibility of permissible belief that goes beyond what is permitted by evidential reasons alone. This possibility is of great comfort to the faithful, and this illustration is partly why Abraham is a “guiding star that rescues the anguished”.<sup>69</sup>

## 5. The Compatibility of the Two Suspensions

In this section, we will address an important objection to my interpretation, namely, that if Abraham teleologically suspends the epistemological by believing that all will be well even if he carries through with the sacrifice of Isaac, then he does not also suspend the ethical, since he does not believe that his action violates the requirement to not murder or the requirement to do what is reasonable to vouchsafe the life and well-being of his

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<sup>65</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 36).

<sup>66</sup> See also Green (1992: 135-136) and Piety (2010: 145), the latter of whom argues that, for Kierkegaard, religious belief is paradoxical and hence offensive to reason.

<sup>67</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 18, 55, & 66) among many others.

<sup>68</sup> See Krishek (2015: 107). In the Supplement to *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard (1983: 260), writes, “As far as Abraham’s faith is concerned, which you maintain in particular, you do not entirely avoid the absurd here, for the absurd is also present in Abraham’s faith. Abraham is called the father of faith because he has the formal qualifications of faith, believing against the understanding...”

<sup>69</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 18). I disagree with Green (1993: 204), who writes, “It is precisely because he knew himself to be justified by grace alone that Abraham is deservedly the ‘father of faith’.” On my view, this can’t be right, since Abraham doesn’t know that he is justified period, although he has religious reasons to believe that he is.

children. In short, the teleological suspension of the epistemological is in tension with the teleological suspension of the ethical.<sup>70</sup>

Let us provisionally understand teleological suspensions in terms of overriding reasons. In section 3, I distinguished between (i) situations in which an agent acts in accordance with her belief that there are religious reasons that override ethical reasons and (ii) situations in which there in fact are religious reasons for action that override ethical reasons for action. Recall that the former situations are ones in which I say that *an agent teleologically suspends the ethical*; the latter situations are ones in which I say that *the ethical is teleologically suspended*. I will appeal to this distinction to answer the objection. But given this distinction, there really are two worries to address: can an agent consistently simultaneously suspend the epistemological and the ethical? And is the teleological suspension of the epistemological incompatible with the teleological suspension of the ethical?

We'll focus on the latter question first. Speaking first-personally, the following seems consistent: I have a religious reason to sacrifice my child that stems from a divine command; nonetheless, in fact all will be well even if I sacrifice my child; but even though all will be well even if I sacrifice my child, I still have a moral reason not to sacrifice my child. (Perhaps the moral reason to not kill my child stems from the type of action it is—for example, it is a killing of a defenseless innocent who posed no threat to me or anyone else—and not from the consequences of the action, and so it is irrelevant to the presence of the moral reason that all will be well.) Consistency is preserved even if we add that, although I am not epistemically justified in believing that all will be well, I am all things considered justified in believing that all will be well because this belief stems from my trust in God and I have been commanded by God to trust God. In short, it is possible for the ethical and the epistemological to be simultaneously suspended.<sup>71</sup>

Abraham's psychology is certainly hard to discern. That said, given that the ethical and the epistemological can be simultaneously suspended, Abraham could coherently act and believe so as to simultaneously suspend both. This is of course exactly what I have depicted as occurring according to *Fear and Trembling*. We can however go deeper. Let us consider whether Abraham takes his action (specifically, his beginning of the sacrifice) to be violating the ethical requirement to do all that's reasonable to keep one's children alive.<sup>72</sup> Remember, on my interpretation Abraham doesn't *know* that his action will keep his child alive and he has plenty of evidence that it won't. On my interpretation, Abraham believes *against* the evidence that he has; he believes despite his epistemic reasons that tell him not to. On my interpretation, he does have a religious reason to believe that all will be well, and this religious reason overrides the epistemic reasons that forbid believing that all will be well. But the moral principle we have been considering is more carefully stated as the principle that one should do what is

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<sup>70</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee for forcefully presenting this objection.

<sup>71</sup> Similar remarks apply to the silencing interpretation of these suspensions. Suppose that in Abraham's situation, religious reasons silence putative moral reasons. Then, in that situation, considerations that would ordinarily be moral reasons to act a certain way aren't even genuine reasons. On the silencing interpretation, in Abraham's situation, there are no moral reasons to not sacrifice his child; there is only the religious reason to do so. (That said, there are still considerations that would be moral reasons in absence of the silencing reasons.) Still, it is consistent to hold all of the following: I have a religious reason to sacrifice my child, all will be well even if I sacrifice my child, but even though all will be well even if I sacrifice my child, there would be a moral reason to not sacrifice my child had the religious reason not silenced it.

<sup>72</sup> Again, I thank an anonymous referee for pressing this important worry.

*epistemologically* reasonable to keep one children's alive. (Moral principles are universal and know nothing of religious reasons to act or believe.) Abraham is violating a moral obligation to do what he knows or has good evidence for believing will keep Isaac alive and healthy. Moreover, Abraham could know that he is violating this moral obligation. And so Abraham might still believe both that he is violating an ethical obligation and that he is still all things considered permitted to believe that all will be well. So Abraham can act and believe so as to simultaneously suspend the ethical and the epistemological.

Moreover, as I argued in section 4, not only does Abraham not know that Isaac will be alright despite his intention to sacrifice him, Abraham doesn't even know that sacrificing Isaac is what he all things considered must do. With respect to both claims, Abraham believes but doesn't know. He hopes and he trusts that he is doing what he all things considered must do.

Abraham can coherently simultaneously teleologically suspend the ethical and the epistemological. This doesn't mean that he can do so without tension—far from it. Abraham is in a miserable situation. But what I have tried to do in this section is to show that there is no philosophical incoherence in the interpretation I offer.

## 6. Religious Reasons and Testimony

One puzzling question that de Silentio pursues is whether Abraham is morally culpable for not telling his wife Sarah of his plan to sacrifice their child. De Silentio writes at the opening of Problema III, "If there is no hiddenness rooted in the fact that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, then Abraham's conduct cannot be defended, for he disregarded the intermediary ethical agents."<sup>73</sup> De Silentio suggests that Abraham cannot tell her—that he must be silent—and hence he is not culpable provided that Abraham has religious reasons to act as he intends.

But in what sense of "can" is it true that Abraham cannot speak?

Some claim that Abraham cannot speak because his experience of God's commanding him to sacrifice his son is ineffable.<sup>74</sup> But let's be careful. Certainly, the propositional content of the command is expressible; if it were not, Abraham would also not understand what God has commanded him to do. And, if Abraham could not understand what he is commanded to do, he could not act as he does. Most of us don't know what it feels like to receive such a command, and I suspect that the non-propositional qualitative aspect of Abraham's experience is too extraordinary to be communicable in ordinary terms. But Abraham needn't express what this experience feels like in order to express to Sarah that he has been commanded by God to sacrifice their son or that he nonetheless believes that all will be well.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 82).

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Kraushaar (1942: 573), Taylor (1981: 184), and (perhaps) Mooney (1991: 72-73) and Hannay (1982: 87-89).

<sup>75</sup> Some commentators appear to conflate the inability to express the content of Abraham's experiences with an inability to express what Abraham intends. Hampson (2013: 42) writes that faith "...by definition is subjective, non-communicable"; see also Hampson (2013: 52). Hough (2015: 5) writes that "...there are no propositions, none, that can express the absurdity of his existential condition", but Hough (2015: 6) also suggests that what can't be expressed is the way in which Abraham comports himself to the world. Conway (2008: 177-178, 180-181) claims that, in general, knights of faith cannot speak, "a language in which they could possibly convey to others the particular content of their interiority and the specific nature of their religious obligations". In general, the richness of experience cannot be fully expressed in language, but that doesn't mean I can't communicate that I intend to eat a bar of chocolate. For interesting reflections on Abraham's phenomenology, see Furtak (2015) and Rudd (2015: 199-201).

There are senses of “understand” in which Sarah could not understand Abraham—our task is to pin down the appropriate sense. Suppose Abraham does speak, and tells her that, although God has commanded that he sacrifice Isaac and that he intends to obey, all will be well for Isaac. Sarah understands the words Abraham says, but she does not understand *how* what he says could be true. In this sense of “understand”, she does not understand Abraham. But in that same sense, Abraham does not understand himself either: Abraham believes that all will be well but doesn’t really understand how all will be well.<sup>76</sup> But Abraham doesn’t need to know how something might be true in order to believe that it is true, and he doesn’t need to know how something might be true in order to say that it is true. We haven’t yet pinned down the right sense of “understand”.

The relevant sense of “understand” is this: you can understand me when I am able to express my reasons for acting to you in a way that enables you to reasonably believe that my course of action is reasonable, or at least that there is a reason for me to act in that way. Similarly, you can understand me when I am able to express my reasons for believing to you in a way that enables you to reasonably believe that my belief is reasonable, or at least that I have a reason to have that belief. If I cannot communicate my reasons to you in such a way that by doing so you can see that I have these reasons, then in this sense, I cannot be understood by you: I cannot make my behavior or thought understandable to you. De Silentio writes, “Abraham *cannot* speak, because he cannot say that which would explain everything (that is, so it is understandable): that it is an ordeal such that, please note, the ethical is temptation. Anyone placed in such a position is an emigrant from the sphere of the universal.”<sup>77</sup>

Contrast Abraham’s situation with Agamemnon’s. Agamemnon *can* explain to Clytemnestra why he must sacrifice their child. Agamemnon’s action is mandated by ethical reasons, and ethical reasons can in principle be understood by anyone. De Silentio writes, “The authentic tragic hero sacrifices himself and everything that is his for the universal; he is open, and in this disclosure he is the beloved son of ethics. This does not fit Abraham; he does nothing for the universal and is hidden.”<sup>78</sup> Clytemnestra has as much access to the ethical as Agamemnon and hence can *reason* through the terrible choice that Agamemnon faces.<sup>79</sup> So too can Agamemnon’s daughter Iphigenia. De Silentio writes, “Iphigenia submits to her father’s resolve; she herself makes the infinite movement of resignation, and now they have a mutual understanding. She can understand Agamemnon, because the step he is taking expresses the universal.”<sup>80</sup> But were Agamemnon to express a belief that all will be well grounded in a religious reason for belief, “he would instantly be incomprehensible to Iphigenia”.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Suppose that Abraham did understand *how* all will be well in a way that he could articulate. Then he could communicate that understanding to Sarah as well, and his testimony to Sarah would provide some epistemic reason for her to believe that all will be well. Abraham’s lack of understanding in this sense is part of the explanation for why he cannot make Sarah understand how all will be well.

<sup>77</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 115).

<sup>78</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 113).

<sup>79</sup> This doesn’t mean that Agamemnon faces no risks by doing so: the tears of his wife will emphasize the great cost of doing his duty, thus increasing the risk of him not doing his duty. See Kierkegaard (1983: 113) and Lippitt (2003: 113).

<sup>80</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 115).

<sup>81</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 115).

If Abraham teleologically suspends the epistemological when he determines that his absolute duty is to obey God, he thereby surrenders even the pretense of having a publicly graspable epistemic reason for his action that he could provide Sarah with.<sup>82</sup> Abraham does nothing for the universal and *hence* is hidden.

What are the consequences of Abraham's inability to make himself understandable? Testimony is typically evidence. But when someone provides testimony for an antecedently incredibly improbable claim, we are more likely to lose confidence in the reliability of the testifier than we are to gain confidence in the testified claim. What could be more improbable than that God has commanded Abraham to sacrifice their son and yet nonetheless all will be well for Isaac in this life? If Abraham told this to Sarah, Sarah would most likely rationally believe that Abraham is delusional.<sup>83</sup> Sarah has no antecedent evidence for this, and his testimony would not provide evidence that all will be well for Isaac in this life.

God could reveal to Sarah that he has so commanded Abraham and that all will be well for Isaac, and she could thereby believe this. But then she would acquire evidence rather than a distinctively religious reason for this belief. I claimed earlier that the fount of religious reasons for belief is a life lived in trust of God. However, although God is the appropriate object of absolute trust because God is perfect, Abraham is not because Abraham is not perfect. Sarah cannot stand in the same sort of doxastic relationship to Abraham as Abraham can to God. Sarah cannot love Abraham with all of her mind. (And even if she could somehow love Abraham with all her mind, God has not commanded her to do so.) Sarah cannot acquire from Abraham's testimony religious reasons for the belief that Abraham has been commanded to sacrifice Isaac and yet all will be well.

Sarah can have neither evidential reasons nor religious reasons for believing that Abraham has been commanded to sacrifice Isaac and yet all will be well. If Abraham tells Sarah, he will succeed only in placing obstacles in the way of doing what his religious reasons require him to do. If Sarah believed that Abraham is delusional, she would try to stop him. Speaking would decrease the likelihood of doing what he absolutely must do. Were Abraham to speak or offer comfort, "... would not Sarah, would not Elizer, would not Isaac say to him, 'Why do you want to do it, then? After all, you can abstain.'"<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> In this vein, see Cross (2003: 12).

<sup>83</sup> Perkins (1981b: 57) suggests that, if Abraham were to try to explain himself, people would take his explanation to be based on "egotism, madness, pride, hatred, or some other determinant and would not pass as a moral explanation". Stiltner (1993: 239) says that Abraham cannot speak because he cannot appeal to ethical categories to explain his behavior to others. Evans (2004: 78-79) offers a "Wittgensteinian" explanation for why Sarah would be rational to believe that Abraham was not divinely inspired, namely that the standards of rational belief formation "cannot be separated from the social practices of society". What I say here is compatible with Evans's Wittgensteinian account, but does not require the truth of his account for its plausibility. (Evans (2004: 306-307) notes that it would not be reasonable for him to believe someone else has been called by God to sacrifice their child. He does not appeal to Wittgenstein to justify this claim though.) See Cross (2003: 13-15) for a criticism of this sort of Wittgensteinian explanation.

<sup>84</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 114). There, *de Silentio* also seems to worry that by speaking, Abraham will reveal himself to be a hypocrite, presumably because by offering words of comfort he would thereby indicate that he is not confident that all will be well.

Abraham may speak no more than he may hobble his leg on the way to Mount Moriah. To do his absolute duty, Abraham must remain silent.<sup>85</sup>

A more general lesson is this. Testimony often is a source of evidential reasons for belief, but (human) testimony is never by itself a source of religious reasons for belief. Suppose one believes in God by faith and thereby has religious reasons for belief in the existence of God. Still, others do not gain religious reasons for believing in God simply by one's testimony that there is a God. Testimony cannot by itself make belief in the existence of God all things considered permissible to believe. The testimony of others can provide the *occasion* for faith, but only by living a life of faithful trust in God can one have a religious reason to believe in the existence of God.<sup>86</sup>

## 7. Forgiveness and the Suspension of the Ethical

I'll now discuss the importance of the teleological suspension of the ethical for eschatology.<sup>87</sup> There are several places in *Fear and Trembling* where Kierkegaard raises concerns about salvation. For example, de Silentio suggests that if, the ethical is the highest normative order, then "the ethical is of the same nature as a person's salvation", the latter of which is a person's highest telos.<sup>88</sup>

Some commentators suggest that a necessary condition for our salvation is that God teleologically suspend the ethical. On their view, we do not deserve salvation, but rather deserve damnation because we are sinners. On their view, ethics demands that one receives what one deserves, and hence God ethically ought to allow our damnation rather than be active in our salvation. The only way that God can save us from what ethics demands of God is by acting in accordance with a higher set of reasons, i.e., by teleologically suspending the ethical.<sup>89</sup>

The above argument focused on what the *wrongdoer* deserves. I will articulate a different argument for the claim that God must teleologically suspend the ethical in order to secure our salvation, one that focuses on what *victims of wrongdoing* deserve. This argument turns on when it is morally permissible to forgive someone for her wrongdoing. Specifically, I will argue that God must suspend the ethical in order to forgive us for our wrongdoings to others.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Similar remarks are made by Luther; see Hampson (2013: 47-49) for quotations and discussion of Luther and Kierkegaard. See also Howland (2015: 35). This is not to say that Abraham is ethically obligated to remain silent. Conway (2008: 187) suggests that Abraham is ethically obligated to convey his plan to Isaac. This might be so, but he might nonetheless be absolutely obligated to remain silent. In short, this would be a second teleological suspension of the ethical. Davenport (2008: 225) suggests that Abraham must remain silent because to speak would be to betray God's confidence. However, if Abraham has promised to remain silent—but where in the story did he make this promise?—he has some ethical reason to be silent. But this ethical reason might be overridden by another ethical reason to speak.

<sup>86</sup> See Kierkegaard (1983: 80), where de Silentio writes that, "The true knight of faith is a witness, never the teacher. . . ." As Kosch (2008: 77) notes, one cannot teach faith to another.

<sup>87</sup> See Green (1993) and Lippitt (2003: 163-171). Pattison (2005: 104) briefly suggests that *Fear and Trembling* can be read as being about the possibility of redemption through Christ, but does not say more.

<sup>88</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 54-55).

<sup>89</sup> See Green (1992: 195-197), Green (1993: 109), Green (1998: 275-276), Mooney (1996: 57), and Lippitt (2008: 93-95).

<sup>90</sup> I am very sympathetic to remarks in Barry (1992: 202-203, 207), namely that forgiveness requires the teleological suspension of the ethical, that when we ask for forgiveness, we rely on the wronged party to provide it, and that, according to the Christian tradition, it is Christ who "hides the multiplicity of our sins". But Barry does not explicitly develop these remarks into the argument that I present here. See also Hannay (1982: 82-84).



The first premise is that a necessary condition for a person's salvation is that God forgives that person for both the morally wrong actions that he has done. One cannot enter Heaven with one's wrongdoings unforgiven!

The second premise is that the vast majority of the wrong actions we do are actions that are not simply wrong but *wrong someone else*. Each of us have wronged others by our wrongdoing, often in ways that we do not even realize. We are called to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, but rarely do we do this. Far from it—we are often content to let our neighbors both nearby and far away die because we prefer to spend our money on the enjoyment of comparatively trivial pleasures.

The third premise is that it is not ethically permissible to forgive someone for a wrong that she has done to someone else. Suppose that in a fit of rage I hit Fred very hard in the stomach. It is up to Fred whether he will forgive me. But Fred's wife cannot forgive me for hitting Fred. She can utter the words "I forgive you for hitting Fred", but even if her words are uttered sincerely, she does not have the moral authority for me to thereby be forgiven, since it was not her that I wronged by hitting Fred. By hitting Fred, I might have wronged her in other ways; I might have frightened or angered her. She does have the moral authority to forgive me for these wrongs done to her. But, as mentioned earlier, she does not have the moral authority to forgive me for the wrong done to Fred. Only Fred has this authority.<sup>91</sup>

When one wrongs another, one acquires a moral debt to the person wronged. In this respect, wrongdoing is like promising: when I make a promise to another, I thereby owe something to that person.<sup>92</sup> Although circumstances might conspire so that what I ethically must do is break the promise—in order to prevent a terrible event, for example—the fact that I have promised does not lose its moral force. (These external circumstances provide overriding reasons, not silencing ones.) Only the person to whom I have made a promise has the moral authority to release me from the moral burden my promise creates. A third party cannot do this.

Perhaps all moral wrongs also wrong God.<sup>93</sup> So perhaps when I wrong Fred by hitting him, I also thereby wrong God. If so, I require the forgiveness of God for the wrong I have done to God. God certainly has the moral authority to forgive this wrongdoing. However, when I wrong God in this way, I do not wrong *only* God. Fred is neither a mere abstraction nor a Spinozistic mode of God. Fred is not God's property or plaything. Fred is a person in his own right. Perhaps we are rightfully thought of as children of God. But even a parent lacks the moral authority to forgive the offender who harms their child. A mother of a murdered child can forgive the murderer for taking her children *from her*. But she cannot permissibly forgive the murderer for the murder of the child.<sup>94</sup> Unless our own personhood is nothing in the eyes of God, even God lacks the *moral* authority to forgive me for the wrong I have done to Fred.

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<sup>91</sup> To say the least, it is controversial whether "third-party forgiveness" is morally permissible. Here, I claim, but do not argue, that it is not. For a contrary take, see Lippitt (2015: 519-520). Note that, on the view developed here, third-party forgiveness needn't be morally permissible in order for it to be absolutely permissible. For a very helpful overview of the philosophical issues concerning forgiveness as well as a list of references, see Hughes (2016).

<sup>92</sup> I thank Hille Paakkunainen for suggesting the analogy with promising and forgiving.

<sup>93</sup> In Kierkegaard (1983: 68), de Silentio does say that every duty is essentially duty to God. This does not imply, however, that every duty is only a duty to God.

<sup>94</sup> Cases like this are discussed in Hughes (2016). See also Lippitt (2015: 514-524).

De Silentio describes repentance as both the highest ethical expression and the deepest ethical self-contradiction.<sup>95</sup> Why would repentance be an ethical self-contradiction? Green (1992: 171-173) detects three undeveloped thoughts of Kierkegaard for why there is something ethically defective with repentance. First, although ethics directs us to act perfectly, we are incapable of perfect action; the best we can do is act imperfectly and repent. Second, it is unclear what ethical defect repentance itself is supposed to remove, and only religious instruction can explain this. Third, repentance itself is ethically unacceptable because engaging in it delays or distracts us from doing our other ethical duties, and at the very least depletes the energy needed to do those other duties.

These are interesting suggestions, but I do not think any of them get to the heart of what is ethically problematic about seeking repentance. First, there is no ethical contradiction or even tension generated by the existence of an obligation to do A and a conditional obligation to do B if one fails to do A. Second, getting clearer about what one ought to do often requires instruction from sources besides ethical reflection. Third, it is unclear that repentance does require delaying the performance of other ethical duties, and even if it depletes the energy needed to do those duties, what this shows is that our ethical obligations are extremely demanding, but not that there is something contradictory about them.

However, there is a fourth explanation for why repentance is “ethically self-contradictory”: what one seeks when one repents is God’s forgiveness for one’s wrongdoing of others, and it is *ethically impossible* for God to provide this forgiveness.

Given these three premises, a necessary condition for our salvation is God’s morally impermissible forgiveness of the wrongs we have done to others. If God cannot teleologically suspend the ethical by forgiving us for the wrongs we have done to others, salvation is not possible. Since salvation is possible, God can teleologically suspend the ethical.

Many note that forgiveness is an important theme in *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>96</sup> Early in the text, one of de Silentio’s Abrahams prays to God for forgiveness of his sin of attempted sacrifice.<sup>97</sup> Note that this Abraham does not ask *Isaac* for forgiveness! Later, we meet the Merman, who has wronged his beloved by deceiving her as to his nature.<sup>98</sup> But because of his fallen nature, he cannot return to the ethical—that is, he cannot bring himself to act in accordance with moral reasons for acting because they are moral reasons for acting—without establishing a “relation to the absolute”.<sup>99</sup> This is partly because he cannot ask his beloved for her forgiveness without further harming her, since to ask for forgiveness would reveal both his nature and his prior deception to her. The Merman lacks the faith needed to return to her and reveal who he truly is. But without forgiveness from someone, he is lost.<sup>100</sup> Note that in each depicted case of wrongdoing

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<sup>95</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 86).

<sup>96</sup> Berry (1992: 201) suggests that “the deepest irony of the text is Johannes’ failure to see that forgiveness manifests “a teleological suspension of the ethical”.”

<sup>97</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 13).

<sup>98</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 94).

<sup>99</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 97-98). Evans (2004: 81-83) and Green (1992: 190-197) comment on these passages.

<sup>100</sup> See also Krishek (2009: 137, 173-189) for extensive analysis of de Silentio’s Merman. Krishek (2009: 137) notes that de Silentio leaves it open whether the Merman will find the faith necessary to disclose himself to his beloved.

done to others, God is still the one from whom forgiveness might be granted, rather than the person who was directly wronged.

Perhaps believing that God forgives sins is itself an instance of teleologically suspending the epistemological. Abraham believes that all will be well despite his actions, even though he lacks the epistemic right to believe this. But similarly the sinner who asks God to forgive his sin lacks the epistemic right to believe that all will be made well, since the forgiveness of a third party seems ethically impossible. Yet the repentant sinner who asks for forgiveness trustfully hopes that by so asking, all will be well.<sup>101</sup>

One final bit of speculation. In Luke 23:34, Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. Many believe that the “them” includes not only those responsible for his crucifixion, but also all of fallen humanity. Do Jesus’s words compose a request or a command? My view is that it is a command, and if so, even the teleological suspension of the ethical necessary for our salvation is grounded in a divine command of Jesus.

## 8. Teleological Suspensions and Love

In this section, I briefly discuss love and its role in both unifying and making more palatable the teleological suspensions I have discussed. The teleological suspension of the ethical might seem a monstrous doctrine in which an arbitrary God imposes his amoral will on the rest of us. However, love plays an important role in each instance of a teleological suspension.

First, Abraham would not be put in a situation in which he must teleologically suspend the ethical if had not such a great love for his son Isaac. De Silentio stresses that Abraham is no Cain, and that Abraham has nothing but the purest love for his son.<sup>102</sup>

Second, Abraham can teleologically suspend the epistemological only because he lives a life of trusting faith in God, which in turn requires that Abraham loves God with all his mind. Part of Abraham’s love of God is his trusting him, and hence Abraham acts with full confidence that Isaac will not be lost, despite the evidence that he will be.

Finally, God teleologically suspends the ethical and forgives us for our sins because God loves us.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, Mooney (1992: 84) suggests that faith makes possible forgiveness. Perhaps this is another connection between love and a teleological suspension: we must have faith in God, which requires a trusting love of God, in order for God to suspend the ethical and forgive us for our sins.<sup>104</sup>

In each case, love is a necessary condition for those reasons that make a teleological suspension possible. Perhaps the teleological suspension of the ethical is a profound indication of the power of God’s love for God’s creatures.

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<sup>101</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for discussion here. This anonymous referee also suggested that the miraculous reconciliation of enemies in the hereafter would be the nearest equivalent to Isaac’s miraculous survival.

<sup>102</sup> Kierkegaard (1983: 65). Evans (2004: 137) argues that, for Kierkegaard, God’s commands are never arbitrary, but are always “rooted in God’s desire for human flourishing”. A desire for the flourishing of the other is partially constitutive of love for the other. Davenport (2008: 218-220) rightly stresses that at no point can Abraham cease to love his son.

<sup>103</sup> Krishek (2009: 7) stresses the importance of divine love for Kierkegaard.

<sup>104</sup> This is also suggested by Pattison (2012: 156-157), who writes, “The one who is not willing to open his or her heart in love will not be able to receive the forgiveness that is offered”.

## 9. Wrapping Up

I will bring this paper to a close by briefly summarizing the main moves made. My overarching goal is to defend a traditional view about the teleological suspension of the ethical, which is that there are religious reasons for action that can in some way suspend ethical reasons for action. However, there are two non-equivalent ways to understand what a teleological suspension might be: religious reasons might override moral reasons or religious reasons might silence moral reasons. These two ways of understanding a teleological suspension are not equivalent, and it matters to our overall interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* which of these is correct. As a way of demonstrating this, I showed that a divine command theory of moral reasons supports the silencing interpretation, and so reasons to deny the silencing interpretation are also reasons to worry that de Silentio rejects a divine command theory of moral reasons. I discussed textual reasons to favor the overriding interpretation over the silencing interpretation. And I argued that there are other teleological suspensions in the text for which an overriding interpretation is more plausible, and that given this our overall interpretation of the text is more uniform if the teleological suspension of the ethical is understood in terms of overriding reasons.

These other teleological suspensions are the suspension of the epistemological by the religious, which was also exhibited by Abraham, a suspension of prudential by the ethical exhibited arguably by Abraham but most clearly by Agamemnon, and a teleological suspension of the ethical exhibited by God when he forgives us our wrongdoing to others. On my view, in each case in which a religious reason suspends a moral reason, the source of the religious reason is a divine command made by a loving God.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>

I thank Robert Audi, Ben Bradley, Hille Paakkunainen, and Byron Simmons for helpful comments and suggestions. I received two sets of exceptionally detailed and helpful comments from an anonymous referee, and I continue to be grateful for them. Finally, I want to thank Jason Raibley, with whom I have had numerous conversations about the topics of this paper, and who read several drafts of this paper. Jason is directly responsible for my interest in Kierkegaard.

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