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AFFECT AND PARADOX: SOME REFLECTIONS ON A DARE TO REJOICE

AFETO E PARADOXO: ALGUMAS REFLEXÕES SOBRE...

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Abstract: Few of us regard joy as an especially daring act, yet this is how we find Kierkegaard thinking of it in early 1853. This paper situates Kierkegaard's "dare to rejoice" as a theological alternative to the solipsism of modernity's "mirror of happiness," which developed from late medieval thought and lives on in the ethical torpor of some contemporary theories of affect. This alternative, only briefly outlined here, is rooted in a theological ontology of paradox that gives to affect its real significance. The result is an audacious joy that enabled Kierkegaard to rejoice not only in his own suffering but also, perhaps even more remarkably, in the happiness of others—a joy I also see expressed in the traumatic life of a Congolese refugee I came to know.

Key words: Emotion; Ethics; Kierkegaard; Spinoza; Ontology.

Resumo: Poucos de nós consideram a alegria como um ato especialmente ousado, mas é assim que encontramos Kierkegaard pensando no início de 1853. Este artigo situa o "ousar alegrar-se" de Kierkegaard como uma alternativa teológica ao solipsismo do "espelho da felicidade" da modernidade que se desenvolveu a partir do pensamento medieval tardio e subsiste no torpor ético de algumas teorias contemporâneas do afeto. Esta alternativa, aqui apenas brevemente esboçada, está enraizada em uma ontologia teológica do paradoxo que dá ao afeto o seu real significado. O resultado é uma alegria audaciosa que permitiu a Kierkegaard se alegrar não apenas no seu próprio sofrimento, mas também, talvez ainda mais notavelmente, com a felicidade dos outros – uma alegria que também vejo expressada na vida traumática de um refugiado congolês que conheci.

Palavras-chave: Emoção; Ética; Kierkegaard; Espinosa; Ontologia.

INTRODUCTION

Few of us regard joy as an especially daring act, yet this is how we find Kierkegaard thinking of it in early 1853. Let's peek over his shoulder as he writes in his journal under an entry he titles "My Praying." "Well, this is how it is: I live in melancholia's private berth—but I dare to rejoice in the happiness of others. … I dare to rejoice in seeing the happiness of others; I dare confirm them in their belief that it is well-pleasing to God to be happy with life and to enjoy it" (2017, NB27:71, p. 183; 2008, p. 183).[1] The people of Copenhagen were surely grateful for Kierkegaard's blessing, but should there really be anything less in need of derring-do than joy over someone's prosaic happiness?

Then again, say Kierkegaard was right that if the "sickness unto death"—despair—wanted a good hiding place it could fare no better than behind the happy grin of a carefully manicured selfie.[2] In that case to affirm another's happiness would be bold indeed, like a jig during Last Rites. And then there's the fact that some of us more than others just find it difficult to rejoice, either because we were touched by a dolorous disposition or because circumstances have left us wretched.

Some years ago, I came to know a young Congolese refugee who had lost nearly everything in an attack on his mountain village. But the most gut-wrenching loss of all was his fiancée whose body had disappeared before his eyes in the sudden conflagration of a bomb. He lived with the traumatic memory of "now you see her, now you don't." A few times each week he would show me his only picture of her and start down the path of repetition compulsion as we met together under the awning of the community center. Sometimes after this ritual he would ask to see pictures of my family. I reciprocated reluctantly, knowing it wouldn't be long before his eyes got watery. It's only too obvious why he would need to dare to rejoice, especially over other people's happiness. In his

[1] References to *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* include the entry number (in this case NB27:71). Where I have modified a translation, I provide the corresponding cross-reference followed by a semicolon, as above.
[2] This is a rather updated version of what Kierkegaard wrote under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus. His actual words were, "For despair the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness" (KIERKEGAARD, 1980b, 25).

agony how could the happy couple walking down the street not remind him of what could have been?

Despite the many differences between my Congolese friend and Kierkegaard—for starters Kierkegaard didn't lose his fiancée to a brutal death; he chose to break off the engagement—these observations may help us make some sense of this dare to rejoice, but since Kierkegaard has a way of unsettling our habitual ways of thought I suspect there's more. Let's give Kierkegaard some space as we step back for a wider angle before circling back for another look.

A few years earlier Kierkegaard noted that there is a difference between understanding and *understanding* (1980a, p. 142).[3] If this indicates the difference between causal explanations and having a grasp of something's meaning as it unfolds in the concretions of everyday life, then in the same vein we can distinguish between joy and *joy*. The joy of the dare—the joy at stake here—is the latter. Every body has pleasures, any hostage to fortune may stagger in and out of happiness, but joy assumes that we suffer and have the audacity to suffer well. As Kierkegaard wrote, "all the joy proclaimed in the world in which sorrow is not heard along with it is but sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal that tickle the ears but are repulsive to the soul" (1990a, p. 122). This is possible only after we reject modernity's reduction of our affective lives to a single immanent principle that flatlines paradox and divorces affect from the sacred, its source of enduring meaning that we not only understand but *understand* as we move from affect's cause to its meaning. Only then can the affect of joy be liberated from immanence and see above the suffering with which it remains intertwined. Thus, the audacity that is joy's *sine qua non*.

[3] My thoughts on this distinction reflect Wittgenstein's differentiation between causes and reasons, but I believe it's consistent with Kierkegaard's point. See WITTGENSTEIN, 1979, p. 4; WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, nos. 608, 609. Wittgenstein rejects views like Russell's and James's that volitional acts are caused by empirical sensations. See JAMES, 1950; RUSSELL, 1921. For a view similar to Wittgenstein's, see RYLE, 2009. Similarly, ANSCOMBE (1957) distinguished between the role of intention in action and the causality of natural law. One could possibly also interpret this distinction along the lines of the property pluralism inherent in DAVIDSON's "anomalism of the mental" (2001a).

Despite his reputation as "the melancholy Dane," Kierkegaard offers us a joyful alternative to modernity's affective reduction that was sown in the rocky soil of the univocity of being. Kierkegaard's interest in univocity centers on the role of Spinoza in modernity, but the idea refers back to Scotus's view that God has being in just the same way as you, I, or an amoeba. And this makes the difference between God and creation a matter of quantity, not quality.[4] It may be that univocity was intended as a point of theological grammar to help us make sense of why analogical language works in the first place. After all, Scotus would suggest, if we were to say we participate in the infinite goodness of God, then we must be using the term "goodness" univocally if the term is to retain meaning, even if God has this goodness to a degree a human being could never attain. And if how we speak were never to spill over into how we think then we would be right to see Scotus's point as having precious little consequence to anyone besides a Franciscan grammarian.

But what happens in the friary doesn't stay in the friary. Our language and our concepts *do* permeate one another. The broader movement of which univocity was a part proved to have far-reaching ramifications, not all of which were regrettable, not univocally anyway. But in the history of theology, it leaves us with a conception of God as one being among others (Heidegger's ontotheology) whose primary mode of relation is conceived as will or power rather than being or knowing (voluntarism's *potentia ordinata* and divine command theory). As the character Augusto puts it in Unamuno's very theological novel *Mist*, "Nothing is known which has not first been willed" (2000, pp. 44-45). And so it is that with univocity one could think of a relationship with God as to an arbitrary ruler who has no more being than anyone else, just a lot more oomph. But of course, arbitrary potentates like to remain inaccessible to the commoners so that their moments of descent may be felt as grace. Ironically, then, the history of univocity also leaves us with an image of God who is also radically other, as we see in certain forms of modern Protestantism.[5] Univocity and equivocity are two sides of the same coin.

[4] This was formulated as an alternative to the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, in which our being contains a rhythmic and paradoxical two-step of similarity and even greater dissimilarity to divine being, as was upheld by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. See PRZYWARA, 2014.
[5] Gilles Deleuze recognized this when he wrote that "being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself" (1994, p. 36). Derrida

The shift to univocity results in a reduction of our affective lives to a purely immanent principle that cannot but lead to self-absorption. Suffering, even a pious *imitatio Christi*, becomes incapable of being lifted up into a concomitant joy, while joy is reduced to lonesome auto-affection. This shift to affective univocity also helps to make sense of the excessive sentimentality of Pietism's *devotio moderna* and the tendency that begins with Schleiermacher but continues even still to think of religion in terms of a pure affective experience separable from the supposed taint of affirmable content.[6]

Kierkegaard saw this. Don't take me to imply that Kierkegaard wanted a return to a golden age of analogy as though univocity were just a bad dream. I mean only that he saw the dangers of modernity's affective reduction and its tendency to flatten our emotional lives as we become more and more self-enclosed.[7] And he calls us out of this enclosure toward the openness of a joyful transcendence in which our affective lives contain real meaning because they open onto the eternal like a small mountain road that suddenly discloses an expansive vista. In this sense Kierkegaard offers us a joyful and thoroughgoingly Romantic expression of the Christian tradition that retains transcendence and reframes the two-step of analogy as paradox, not analogy's "this then that" but paradox's "both/and."[8] The consequence is a different trajectory in modernity driven neither by a conative self-preservation (Spinoza) nor by an epistemological "dare to know" (Kant) but by the morally-psychologically and I daresay theologically affective "dare to rejoice" with which I began, and thus the promise of a present characterized not by the liberation of forbidden *jouissance* nor by pietistic sentimentality but by the cultivation of paradoxical joy. Space prevents me from laying out this alternative in detail

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implies something similar in his famous phrase, "every other is wholly other [*tout autre est tout autre*]" (1995, p. 82), which is precisely why every other is *not* wholly other.

[6] As one can see in William James, Rudolf Otto, Harvey Cox, and in some affective theoretical interpretations of religion.

[7] This is also the sense of Kierkegaard's critique of eudaimonism. See WEBB, 2017.

[8] Some have seen this as an indication that Kierkegaard's thought not only complements but points toward Roman Catholicism. See PRZYWARA, 1929, p. 77. For a thoughtful consideration of the issues, see MULDER, 2010. For an attentive study of Kierkegaard's reception by Catholic thinkers in the early twentieth century, see FURNAL, 2016. It's clear that Kierkegaard developed an appreciation of certain aspects of Catholicism, such as the role of asceticism (see KIERKEGAARD, 2018, NB33:48, p. 294), but it isn't evident to me that Kierkegaard points toward Roman Catholicism in any straightforward sense.

here. I will devote the majority of my attention to creating two clearings within which his audacious joy may be seen more plainly.

1. THE MIRROR OF HAPPINESS

Kierkegaard frequently lamented that his age no longer made distinctions, conceptual or otherwise. Not much has changed, which is perhaps part of the reason we resist teasing out the difference between joy and similar states like happiness. The failure to make this distinction has disastrous consequences. Without it we would be prone to conflate feeling good and living well, as though the fluke firing of neurons or a happy shrug at happenstance were equivalent to the development of enduring meaning. We would be likely to mistake the thrill of the virtual for the deep-seated and often painful joy of reality. We would wait around for an easy fix the lasting satisfaction of which will come just after Godot. Without this distinction, we would incline toward escapism, scrolling through a feed of virtual friends who echo our perspectives rather than engaging in difficult face-to-face conversations, or mindlessly buzzing on the latest theoretical trend rather than carefully attending to the task of thinking. We would be lured into the false, lonely happiness of "Cyberia" (DOOLEY, 2015) where we get everything we want but nothing that matters, where the solitary titillation of pixelated sex replaces the shared work of making love and immediate gratification substitutes for the slow dawn of gratitude. We would choose selfishness over duty, hope for a never-arriving future reflecting our endless desires over the daring affirmation of the joy at our feet, and thus never able to embrace a concrete love of time and place—even if we're not haunted by memories of a scorched Congolese village.

Equally working against this distinction is that we've inherited centuries of the mirror of happiness, the flipside of the modern melancholy arising from early modernity's loss of social and cosmological stability. As the world was untethered from the great chain of being and the divine receded behind a voluntarist haze, traditional hierarchical communities gave way to more dynamic civil societies, and the gradated Ptolemaic cosmos dissolved in the infinitude of the Renaissance universe. While one might assume this increased sense of autonomy would likewise yield increased feelings of well-being, it also created the impression of what Walter Benjamin described as "an empty world" where even our greatest accomplishments amount to no more than "a rubbish heap of partial, inauthentic actions" (1998, pp. 138-139). God's remove from nature left behind a *deus absconditus* who could be found only by retreating to the secret sanctuary of an inner pietism. The modern subject, whose microcosmic life was as empty within as the infinite space without, found that melancholy had drawn intimately near.

But so had happiness. The coincidence of these two contradictory states of being is represented well by Milton's poems "*L'Allegro*" and "*Il Penseroso*," devoted respectively to happiness and melancholy and intended to be read together (2008, pp. 22-30). The poet, like modernity, is willing to devote himself to both ways of being. Happiness and melancholy present themselves to Milton as differently pleasurable but equally viable ways of life. In early modernity we find alongside melancholy a celebration of everyday pleasures to a degree hitherto unseen since the Romans.

If we're disinclined to join the party, then it's tempting to see instead a lamentable decline to an age in which the world, sensing itself abandoned (or banished) by God, suffers under the weight of its own immanence and constructs a new idol with which to lighten its journey: a lightminded, secular happiness, a substitute for the earnestness that characterized life before it lost the sense of divine presence. Alas, this narrative of secular happiness continues, this new idol has turned out to be a still heavier burden, a terrible god, insufferable and unappeasable. There is an intuitive allure to this narrative even if its story is incomplete. The perceived duty of euphoria has indeed become an intolerable master for many (BRUCKNER, 2011; AHMED, 2010), and its commands are advertised with such frequency that they distract its devotees from the hollowness in their hearts. This was expressed with uncanny clarity in twentieth-century dystopian novels like James Gunn's *The Joy Makers* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, each of which portrays a future world that punishes people who claim a right to unhappiness, putting a science-fiction spin on a theme found already in Fyodor Dostoevsky and explored social-scientifically by Philip Rieff.

The first problem with the secular happiness narrative, however, is that there is no form of happiness that is purely secular if by "secular" we mean theologically neutral. Even the modern veneer of happiness has theological roots that eventually caused us to stop looking up and out in transcendence as we shifted our gaze back on ourselves. Modern happiness arrives as a long look in the mirror. And the second problem is that when the thesis of secular decline into happiness is taken in just this way it leaves those who rightly see the result as oppressive with meager alternatives, such as an indifferent acceptance of happenstance (more on which below).

What novelty there is in modern happiness didn't arrive *ex nihilo*. In the midst of the atrocities of the Reign of Terror, the bloodthirsty revolutionary Saint-Just would proclaim happiness "a new idea in Europe" (1908, p. 248). This jejune *archange de la mort* (as Michelet called him) never realized that the foundation for this new idea was laid by the same laborers whose other handiworks he was so hellbent on razing. And how could he have known it while believing as he did that "the world has been empty since the Romans" (1908, p. 331)?[9] He thus portends the way modern happiness destroys the very self it hopes to indemnify.

There are two ways of telling the story of modern happiness. Both begin in medieval Paris, the hotbed of the Aristotelian revival a few centuries before Saint-Just's perplexing proclamation. In the first narrative, Aquinas's *analogia entis* provides the theoretical groundwork for modernity's noble attempt to attain an imperfect likeness of heavenly happiness. Unlike Augustine, whose later thought precluded the possibility of any terrestrial foretaste of beatitude, Aquinas analogically relates the happiness achieved through natural capacities and the highest happiness of seeing God in the beatific vision,[10] which then carves out the space for the Enlightenment's blessing of everyday pleasures (MCMAHON, 2006, pp. 122-133). But the snag in this version of events is that by imagining an easy slide from the medieval *analogia entis* into a modern *analogia beatitudinis* we overlook the significant shift inaugurated by nominalism and its *via moderna*.

An alternative narrative, then, sees in nominalism's separation of nature and grace and its prioritization of will over being the roots of the Scotist distinction between *affectio iustitiae* and *affectio commodi* (roughly, the affect of justice and the affect of comfort or advantage), where the latter would encompass the analogical understanding of beatitude implicit in Aquinas's virtue ethics (SCOTUS, 2017, Ordinatio II, especially d. 6, q. 2; d. 39, qq. 1-2; WILLIAMS, 1995). This distinction reflects the more fundamental

[9] See also Camus's insightful discussion of Saint-Just (CAMUS, 1991, pp. 117-132).
[10] The early Augustine allows for beatitude within one's lifetime. See AUGUSTINE, 2010. On Augustine's later retraction, see 2010, p. 21. AQUINAS, 1968, p. 219, 1a, q. 62, art. 1, reply.

distinction between nature and grace, since the purely natural *affectio commodi* is deemed necessary in order to produce the negative on which the grace of *affectio iustitiae* can operate, and this *affectio iustitiae* reflects not any natural ethic but only the more or less arbitrary will of nominalism's God, the seed of modern divine command theory. With such a distinction, ethics is no longer ordered toward beatitude even through our suffering, joy is postponed until some future existence, leaving behind only a Schillerian "resignation" that readers of Kierkegaard will recognize as a poor, other-worldly substitute for faith (KIERKEGAARD, 1983, pp. 27-53; see also SCHILLER, 1838, pp. 95-98).

The history of modern ethics devolves from this chasm. On one side we have thinkers who seized on *affectio commodi* as the heart of ethics. In Spinoza, for example, all affect is reduced to varying degrees of power, resonating with Hobbes's assertion that everything has "a perpetual and restless desire for power after power" (1998, 11.2, p. 66), the increase of which is for both early modern thinkers the sole content of joy. Even Spinoza's beatitude can only be conceived as a higher quantity, not quality, of the natural pleasure or joy (*laetitia*) of *affectio commodi*.

So too in Locke, who, without reducing all to power, still fell prey to the hedonic reduction, making all ethics an extension of *affectio commodi* (flipping Scotus's point on its head but preserving the Subtle Doctor's distinction). The body and its pleasures point to nothing higher. Beatitude is no longer that in which our pleasures participate, however imperfectly. The relationship is reversed. Beatitude rather participates in *our* pleasures. Beatitude becomes merely an extension of taste. In Locke providence and happiness are so conjoined that pleasure becomes not only legitimated by God but a significant mode in which God is operative in the world. As Darrin McMahon has argued (2006, pp. 175-188), in Locke pleasure is more than permissible; it becomes a divine mandate enforced by nature. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke quotes the apostle Paul approvingly when he writes that happiness is what "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entred into the Heart of Man to conceive," but, he says, we do nevertheless have a "very lively impression" of it, which is what motivates all our actions (1979, Book II, Chapter 21, Section 42, quoting 1 Corinthians 2:9). The will is driven solely by the divinely created desire to remove pains and enjoy pleasures (1979, II 21.36), which becomes the defining feature of good and evil.[11] Even joy he defines as the result of having a good "*in our power*, that we can *use it when we please*" (II 20.7, emphases mine). This is a joy that can only see a reflection of one's own power to satisfy one's pleasure. Locke polishes the mirror of happiness handsomely.

This is clearly a departure from Aquinas, who maintained that one's conception of the good determines one's desire. Wrongdoing for Aquinas is the result of ignorance of the good; for Locke it's merely a miscalculation of pleasure and a failure to perceive "the best bargain" (LOCKE, 1958, p. 70). John Milton, Locke's slightly older contemporary, might have seen Locke's ethics as merely another expression of a Hobbesian joy in the self rather than the good (despite Locke's unmistakable opposition to Hobbes). Milton memorably depicts this in *Paradise Lost* in the figure of Beelzebub, who, after insuring that Hell would be governed by popular vote (2008, Book II, lines 313-315), hopes to "interrupt [God's] joy / In our confusion, and our joy upraise / In his disturbance," after which "joy / Sparkled in all [the demons'] eyes; with full assent / They vote" (2008, II, 370-373, 387-389). Demonic joy relishes in the partisan assertion of self over against a shared, transcendent good, expressing affectively the self-love that characterized Augustine's earthly city.

So strong is the self's reflection in modernity's mirror that even Kant, one of its strongest opponents and the most obvious successor to *affectio iustitiae*, cannot conceive of an unearned happiness. If the *summum bonum* is as Kant said a synthesis of virtue and proportional happiness (rather than a happiness related to virtue organically as it was for the Stoics and Epicureans), it's still a happiness *merited* through performance of duty and is thus a reflection of the self and what it is owed. The separation of nature and grace that we find in Scotus results here in a conflation of grace and merit. Despite their many differences, Hobbes would have nodded with approval at Kant's inadvertent glorification of the self.[12]

[11] "Things then are good or evil, only in reference to pleasure or pain" (LOCKE, 1979, II 20.2).
[12] Schleiermacher is an interesting case here. On one hand Schleiermacher is like Kant in sundering morality and feeling (SCHLEIERMACHER, 2002). But unlike Kant, Schleiermacher finds a way to preserve the importance of feeling in his philosophy of religion. This option was unavailable to Kant because he aligned religion with morality. However, by parceling things out in this way both thinkers have imported an assumed separation between nature's *affectio commodi* and grace's *affectio iustitiae*. The result is that feeling doesn't receive real importance in either case—for Kant because it simply plays no positive role, and for Schleiermacher because feeling is denied any moral or metaphysical significance beyond a vague,

Hegel, for whom periods of happiness are the "blank pages of history" because all striving toward a cause has ceased (1975, p. 78), rejects Kant's one-sided attention to duty and delayed happiness, insisting instead that living ethically should result in well-being here and now (HEGEL, 1991, pp. 50-52, 150-158, 283-288). Importantly, however, for Hegel living ethically means finding one's fit within civil society and thereby gaining recognition from others. While this might seem to be a form of admirable mutuality, ethics' divorce from transcendence renders self-worth the *consequence* of recognition, not its precondition. For Hegel a person has worth not by virtue of bearing the *imago dei* but only by virtue of receiving recognition, which cannot but result in the same assertion of self-will that characterizes the master's failed efforts to achieve self-consciousness in the master-slave dialectic (HEGEL, 1977b, pp. 111-119). This same drive for external recognition emanates outward to the state, allowing the right of the law-state to slide into the might of the war-state, for it's in war that "the ideality of *the particular attains its right* and becomes actuality" (HEGEL, 1991, p. 361).[13] This is a sharp departure from the classical theological view that recognition flows first from God, who gives worth quite apart from any external, human recognition. As a result, for Hegel well-being, like Kant's well-earned happiness, is a reflection of what one has attained through one's efforts to acquire recognition, a more or less forced fit within civil society, which makes this well-being not simply a reflection but a reinforcement of the self. Leave it to a speculative idealist to make of well-being a self-serving *speculum*.

It's worth noting that the Enlightenment was not a singular phenomenon. We find a very different strain for example in Shaftesbury, who saw in Hobbes and Locke (and we can safely assume he would have included Spinoza despite their shared appreciation for Stoicism) that nominalism's modern ascendance resulted in a loss not only of

canine sense of dependence. See the role of feeling in SCHLEIERMACHER, 1996, pp. 45-47. This became increasingly the case in later editions of *On Religion*, where the concept of intuition is deemphasized and the role of feeling gains the prominence it receives later in *The Christian Faith* (SCHLEIERMACHER, 2016). It's for this same reason that Schleiermacher downplays the mediatory roles of culture and tradition in favor of a typically Romantic immediate experience. His *Christmas Eve Celebration* give more weight to culture and tradition than we find in either *On Religion* (excepting salon culture) or *The Christian Faith*, but even here the impression is a Bultmannian demythologization *avant la lettre*, seeing for example every new birth and instance of happy domesticity as the reality of which the nativity is but a poor shadow. See SCHLEIERMACHER, 2010.

[13] See also ELSHTAIN, pp. 143-147. An additional consequence was explored by Albert Camus, who attributes this loss of transcendence to Hegel's totalism. Camus sees a link between this totalism and Hegel's admiration of Napoleon, calling him "the Napoleonic philosopher" (CAMUS, 1991, p. 134).

transcendence but also of social cohesion, a loss in which feeling, especially the feeling of the *sensus communis*, cannot be given its due (SHAFTESBURY, 1999). It's the warmth of Shaftesbury's moral sense that, by preserving the real, non-egotist significance of feeling and transmuting this to Romanticism, indirectly makes possible something like Kierkegaard's Romantic Christian retrieval of the significance of paradoxical joy.

Another way to view the trajectory I have been sketching is to say that we see in modernity the foundation for what sociologist Philip Rieff described as "the triumph of the therapeutic," which brought with it the emergence of a new type of human being, "psychological man" (RIEFF, 1966). Once, Rieff suggests, people asked how they might find consolation for the pain of living. Now we just do our best to make sure the painful question won't be heard over the relentless ding of notifications or even felt through the euphoria of reuptake-inhibited serotonin. Sigmund Freud, who like Kant was no consoler-in-chief, believed we need to outgrow this need for comfort and learn to embrace meaninglessness. "I lose the courage to rise up before my fellow human beings as a prophet," Freud writes, "and I bow to their reproach that I can offer them no consolation: for at bottom that is what they are all demanding—the wildest revolutionaries no less passionately than the most virtuous believers" (1961, p. 111; 2009, pp. 107-108). Consolation, to say nothing of joy, requires more daring than Freud had at his disposal. The best that can be hoped for here is an uneasy peace with the culture that bridles our impulses in exchange for its benefits. But since the gradual erosion of cultural institutions in the West means we receive very little in exchange for our self-control, we now seek not salvation but the full release of impulse as though melting into a pleasurable flow of power, or what Romain Rolland described as the "oceanic feeling," where everything is so undifferentiated that even selflessness becomes "limitless narcissism" (FREUD, 1961, p. 20).

Despite his critiques of Freud, the French postmodern philosopher Gilles Deleuze offers us the best glimpse of the "triumph of the therapeutic" and its narcissism, too enamored of its own navel to see the emptiness of the self in the mirror of happiness.[14] In his final essay, Deleuze applauds Fichte's mystical treatise *The Way Toward the Happy Life* for its transcendence of the subject-object dichotomy (DELEUZE, 2005, p. 27). As

[14] For Deleuze's critique of Freud, see DELEUZE AND GUATTARI, 1983.

Fichte develops this thought it becomes difficult to avoid the impression that he is expounding an otherworldly bliss that can only relate to the everyday world as to a nuisance.[15] "Only the metaphysical makes one happy," Fichte said, "in no way the historical. The historical only provides understanding" (1845, p. 485). Much the same could be said for Deleuze's transcendental field of immanence, but in Deleuze the Fichtean I=I becomes a naught=naught. The nothingness of the transcendental field projects nothingness, and the Deleuzian subject interacts with the world not even as an object of opposition but as an empty manifestation. Deleuze writes that "pure immanence … is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. … It is complete power, complete bliss" (2005, p. 27). The possibility of bliss (or power, which Deleuze like Spinoza takes to be the same thing) depends upon our seeing his most foundational metaphysical principle (immanence) as residing "in nothing," which is to say, in you and me. In Deleuze, you and I do not gaze at each other. *I* can't even gaze back at *myself*. Rather "*a* life," empty and impersonal to the core, stares blankly back on itself with nothing to see.

If this were truly believed—I set aside for now the question of whether it's really believable—it would have drastic consequences for how we relate to one another. Deleuze makes this clear in his interpretation of the death scene of Roger "Rogue" Riderhood in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*.

> What is immanence? A life… No one has described what *a* life is better than Charles Dickens, if we take the indefinite article as an index of the transcendental. A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found as he lies dying. Suddenly, those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love, for his slightest sign of life. Everybody bustles about to save him, to the point where, in his deepest coma, this sick man himself senses something soft and sweet penetrating him. But to the degree that he comes back to life, his saviors turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a "Homo tantum" with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude. (DELEUZE, 2005, pp. 28-29)

[15] Fichte attempts to persuade us otherwise. See FICHTE, 1845, pp. 427-431. On relating to the world as a nuisance, Hegel once said that Fichte's "transcendental intuition … assumes the awkward posture of something that is in opposition to the manifold deduced from it" (HEGEL, 1977a, p. 81). A similar critique of Fichte is taken up in KIERKEGAARD, 1989.

The histories of the individuals, their mutual recognition, their sense of the common—these are as unimportant for Deleuze's interpretation as they were for his philosophy, which he once likened to forcefully taking others from behind in an act of nonconsensual "sodomizing" (*enculage*) (DELEUZE, 1995, p. 6; 1990, p. 15). So focused on thrusting his way through the interpretive back door, Deleuze misses both the mutuality and the friendship in Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. We can more justifiably read Dickens' point as suggesting that the personal ties binding us in mutual relation are deeper still than our individual vices.

A personal illustration may help make this clearer. I was still a boy growing up in Oklahoma City when the bomb of Timothy McVeigh, a terrorist from upstate New York, ripped through the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and its daycare. I knew at least one victim of the explosion, and in those days before the ubiquity of instant communication I feared for my father, who worked down the street from the destroyed building. I regret but will nevertheless confess that, when the terrorist was executed only a few years later, I am human enough to have felt a subtle twinge of schadenfreude that half-surprised even myself. But I was young, prone to passions, and not yet proficient in controlling them. I didn't yet know myself well enough to realize that, if I had been present at his execution, no less than those ambivalent characters who surrounded Riderhood in his final moments would I have ineluctably felt a gentle remorse at the loss of yet another human life. If my sense of mutuality could have survived McVeigh's repulsive last words (the poem "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley), then it could also have found a way to reach through terror and anger.

The real challenge is not to achieve impersonal bliss by seeing through the concrete person to some *élan vital* (whether we name it "*a* life," "affect," "power," or any other reductive term) but to cultivate mutuality, even with rogues, be they terrorists or philosophical *enculeurs*. Deleuze was wrong. This has nothing to do with the virtual force of pure immanence surging through us as it takes the form of actualities. It has everything to do with learning to see oneself as imbued with a dialectical sense of mutuality as we recognize the intricacies of the hermeneutic self (see RICŒUR, 1992).

In Deleuze we see the mirror of happiness at its most concave, folding in on itself from every direction as it becomes but a single, mystical point, comitragically mistaking its solitude for beatitude. Deleuze's notion of bliss is reminiscent of *Murphy,* Samuel Beckett's early novel about a solipsist who for a time worked at a psychiatric hospital. Murphy particularly enjoyed tending to the schizophrenics, because "the impression he received was of that self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as *the only felicity* and achieved so seldom" (2011, p. 96, emphasis mine). Murphy's solipsistic felicity is typified in the worldlessness of the schizophrenic, not unlike the way in which Deleuze's bliss is best typified by a man who, having already closed himself off from mutuality and friendship, is being finally closed off from existence. Even outside of fiction, this schizoid bliss concludes with a terminal, defenestrated "line of flight" from existence, unwilling to affirm the prospect of sharing a vulnerable life. The same year he wrote about the bliss of pure immanence, Deleuze tragically gave up on joy.

In modernity, happiness is a reflection of our power (Spinoza), our desires (Locke), our effort (Kant), our civic fit (Hegel), or even our solipsistic channeling of impersonal force (Deleuze). No wonder there was such anxiety over unhappiness. Self and happiness were closely correlated. And thus, it's difficult even now to distinguish between happiness and joy such that joy can be thought as something that calls forth our audacity as we embrace the difficult task of learning to suffer rightly.

2. THE ORDER OF PERPETUAL AFFECTATION

Another way of getting this wrong can be seen in affect theory, which is only ostensibly another way, for it in fact makes the same error and gets us to the same place. Although affect theory sees itself as correcting what it regards as the problem of modernity—in this case modernity's corporeal amnesia or perhaps its embarrassing oversight, as though bodies went unnoticed until sometime in the late twentieth century—

it in fact misdiagnoses and repeats the same pattern we've already seen, resulting in the joylessness of ethical torpor.[16]

Affect theory promises to account for the ways in which feeling, more than or perhaps even instead of thought and language, determines a significant portion of our lives. It's such an incontestable point that affective modes of being play a large role in our lives that we can hardly be surprised to find it repeated many times by a number of earlier thinkers who had never been graced by affect theory: Heidegger, William James, Rudolf Otto, Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Hume, Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Shaftesbury, Spinoza, Aristotle, Xunzi, Mencius, Confucius. I could go on, but this should be enough to give us pause as we ask what affect theory brings to the table. The short answer is "not much," but it's worthwhile to see why.

That "affect" is notoriously difficult to define can be garnered from the fact that so few of its most prominent theorists offer a clear explanation of it. At its simplest, affect is a physiological reaction that can be distinguished from a biological drive—reactions like anger, fear, disgust, or joy (see TOMKINS, 2008)—and these reactions can be responses to other bodies or to other physiological reactions, as when everyone feels a contagious joy when children walk into the room, or when we feel disgusted over an inappropriate joy or joyful about someone else's disgust. This is why some affect theorists describe affect as "sticky." But of course, this "stickiness" is a result of phenomenological intentionality, an "aboutness" latent in our feelings rendering them capable of being at least partially expressed in language and when helpful corrected.[17] So far, then, what we're really talking about is what we usually describe as "emotion," but in affect theory's strongest formulations this is precisely what affect isn't supposed to be. And if it's conceptually indistinct from emotion (and yet still somehow nonintentional), as in affect theory's weaker varieties, then affect theory offers us only a strangely muddled version

[16] For a brief discussion of the differences between various strands of contemporary affect theory, see SCHAEFER, 2019. I recognize these differences, but for the purposes of this essay these strands are similar enough to treat together. Here I'm taking a step back and observing the unity of affect theory's landscape as I hold a hand to my brow to block the glare from its recently acquired gloriole. For a refutation of affect theory that has yet to be adequately answered, see LEYS, 2017.
[17] Although Lauren Berlant's notion of "attachment" can seemingly not function without phenomenological intentionality, she nevertheless wants to expunge intention from her argument in favor of "agency without intention." See BERLANT, 2011, pp. 18, 95-120. But arguments against intentionality or aboutness inevitably have to account for what they are arguments *about*.

of clearer work on emotions going back not merely decades but millennia. Maybe a different definition will help.

Brian Massumi claims that affect is “the virtual co-presence of potentials” (2015, p. 5), echoing Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that “affects are becomings” (1987, p. 256). If this is unclear, fret not! Massumi assures us that it doesn’t need to make sense, because “affect is only understood as enacted” (2015, p. vii). So if you failed to understand it the first time, try acting it out, or maybe just read it again but this time with feeling. Perhaps the best analogy for this is the invitation-only rituals of a mystery cult, an Order of Perpetual Affectation.

A step toward clarity may be found in the work of Donovan Schaefer, perhaps the most helpful apologist for this Order of Perpetual Affectation, who writes that affect is “the flow of forces through bodies outside of, prior to, or underneath language” (2015, p. 4).[18] With such close attention to *flows*, on this understanding the affect theorist can be likened to a urologist of unspeakable feelings. Unlike a certified urologist, however, the affect theorist cannot without dishonesty prescribe an alpha-blocker or even its intellectual or moral equivalent. Affect theorists can only settle for trying to describe these invisible flows with the hope that we appreciate and maybe even believe them. And this means that, at least in its current configuration, affect theory can never change the world but only describe it, even if (sticking with the urological imagery) it can only do a piss-poor job of it. Let me elaborate.

Whatever is meant by “force” when affect is defined as “the flow of forces through bodies” without reference to language, it’s evidently not something consciously exerted by one actor upon another. It’s something that flows between and through everything without participants’ consent, since consent is a form of rational communication (and thus language, subtle though it may be). I can agree to a flow of affect as little as I agree to a waft of air. Some wafts might be more pleasant than others, but the air never stops to ask about my feelings as it enters my nostrils. Such is also the case, so the affect theorist would suggest, with joy, sadness, shame, or any of the other feelings that penetrate us. They happen *to* you, whether you want them or not. We are right to hear more than a

[18] Similarly, Gregg and Seigworth write that affect is “force or forces of encounter” (2010, p. 2).

touch of violation in this force.[19] It's a metaphysical presupposition of affect theory that all cultural products are ultimately reducible to a matrix of power surging through them quite apart from linguistic mediation.[20] Like the most exclusionary kinds of discourse, affect theory ends the conversation before it can even begin, leaving no room for genuine dialogue in which partners might come to terms with one another, since disagreement can only be felt as a flow of oppositional power.

I would say that this disagreement is "interpreted" as opposition, but this would open me to accusations of "the linguistic fallacy," the assumption that "language is the *only* medium of power" (SCHAEFER, 2015, p. 8, emphasis mine).[21] If this fallacy were to exist anywhere in the world it could be a helpful notion, but no examples can be given of anyone who truly denies the existence of nonlinguistic forms of power, because there are none to be found. In practice, the brandishing of this straw man against competing discourses resembles the way a divisive political rally instills an us-versus-them mentality, setting apart those who "take the plunge" (MASSUMI, 2015, p. vii) into affective fundamentalism from those who choose the path of careful thinking.

Such a move is on the same level as Schaefer's disappointingly classist remark that the contemporary humanities' emphasis on language "risks turning us all into farmhands" (2015, p. 17). Farmers everywhere would surely twang gratitude through their patois for the warning of this impending humanities invasion if it weren't for the fact that even those who work the fields can detect here the din of "Build the wall!"—a different wall, a different border, the same divisive spirit. Amid the metaphysical clamor of competing channels of power, no dialogue can be heard, its very possibility having been shut down. Behind its enigmatic façade, the quasi-mystical Order of Perpetual Affectation functions like a sect that, with the impenetrable jargon of a contemporary gnosticism, can only divide the world into light and darkness, those who are with them and those who are against them.

[19] This despite Gregg and Seigworth's insistence that force is a "misnomer since affect need not be especially forceful" (2010, p. 2). The qualifications that follow get us no closer to an understanding what "force" indicates.
[20] Affect theory expresses "power outside language," because "bodies … are invested in fields of power that are not mediated by language" (SCHAEFER, 2015, p. 9)—except, somehow, the mediation provided by such sentences.
[21] See also SCHAEFER, 2015, pp. 7-9, 13, 15-16, 20, 22, 27, 35, 117, 155, 176, 207.

And thus, it's no surprise to find inoculative gestures such as the claim that affect is somehow "invisible" to the tools of critique (SCHAEFER, 2015, pp. x, 9, 16). But this invisibility is voyeuristically imagined to go only one way, like a hunter shooting from a blind.[22] By extension, religion (affectively construed) is thought to be "an invisible dance" (2015, p. 202), like hidden angels on the head of a scholastic pin. At such unbelievably empyrean heights, affect theory is as safe from criticism as it is from appreciation and good sense.[23]

In this dizzyingly thin air persuasion yields to compulsion. An intractable problem for any theory that reduces everything to force and power is that it too is rendered merely another force and therefore has little ability to win anyone's considered assent. Affect theory can only display its perpetual affectation with the hope that readers will finally get so bedazzled by argot and buzzed on fad that we passively submit, as stupefied as Donald Davidson's Swampman deprived of the "triangulating" benefits of the languages, communities, and histories that constitute our shared world (DAVIDSON, 2001b). *Sapientia* having been removed from *homo sapiens*, discourse as such is reduced to a warring troop of pre-linguistic Neanderthals gibbering and swinging their clubs, equally obtuse whether made of wood or theory.

This results in two errors. The first is that affect theory functions as what I call an *affective anti-transcendental*. Just as the transcendental unity of apperception establishes the condition of experience and therefore of any persuasive argument, so does the affective anti-transcendental name the precondition for the *im*possibility of all arguments,

[22] Affect is somehow thought to be "invisible" to language, a tool of critique, but "language is not invisible to affect" (SCHAEFER, 2015, p. 198).

[23] The angelicity of this "invisible dance" is in tension with Schaefer's frequent protestations that his discourse is decidedly *not* "angelic." Serving to bring the reader back to Disraeli's famous quip that he is "on the side of the angels" rather than apes, "angelic" typically functions throughout the text as a near synonym for "linguistically fallacious." But given the dubiousness of the "linguistic fallacy," we may well find ourselves also doubting the accuracy of this rhetorical use of "angels" and the supposedly unassailable, invisible, and oddly angelic status of affect. Regardless, a heavenly host of angelic references flits through the text (2015, pp. 4, 8, 10-12, 14, 17, 21, 22, 45, 63, 100, 102, 107, 117, 123, 156, 164, 170, 176, 181-182, 204, 208, 212). At least twice, this is combined with the (strangely assumed to be false) claim that we can control our emotions—Schaefer calls this "the myth of our own sovereignty over our emotions"—which is supposed to be tantamount to seeing ourselves "as angels hovering above the fray, only voluntarily choosing to run into the world" (2015, p. 93). Elsewhere, he states that to view ourselves as capable of controlling our "affectspheres … is to replicate the faulty model of calculating, sovereign angelic subjects" (2015, p. 128)—a doubly odd assertion since in most traditional angelologies (in the Abrahamic religions) angels are thought to be neither calculative nor sovereign.

including arguments for or against affect theory.[24] This is why affect theory is less theory than affectation. Affect theorists attempt to analyze linguistically, cognitively, personally, and humanly something that is claimed to be by nature extralinguistic, noncognitive, impersonal, and inhuman. This makes every sentence about affect a version of the liar's paradox. Barring Russell's ban on self-referential claims, the proposition "This sentence is false" is false if it is true and true if it is false. Similarly, "I am discussing affect" is false if it really intends to refer to affect, which is supposed to be unmediated by language, and true if it is false that affect is getting discussed. However, many times one strings together assertions about affect, force, and power, none of them will ever amount to a claim one can argue either for or against. Unless affect theory accounts for affect's linguistic disposedness, all we can do is *feel* the rhetoric of its assertions while asking ourselves: if assertions reveal the state in which we find ourselves in the world,[25] then is affect theory's world as empty as its assertions?

The second error follows from the affective anti-transcendental and so can be treated with some dispatch. Affect theory seems to confuse *is* and *ought*, mistaking its descriptive discourse for ethical-political projects. But if affect can't be thematized as part of our experience, can never help us account for "what it is like" for us as Thomas Nagel famously puts it (1982), then affect can never be communicated as a justification to act from or a cause to work toward. Just as an individual body becomes the passive medium for a "flow of forces" over which any cognitive judgment is meaningless (since affect is "invisible" to such judgments), so too is a body politic rendered passive. That such affects play a significant role in politics is undeniable. It's frequently incanted as a truism by affect theorists that politics isn't about making rational decisions but about theater, gut feelings, and engineered surges of affect pulsing through the masses (and one gets the impression that affect theorists generally believe this is just as it should be). This, the affect theorist avers, explains the hatred at a Trump rally or the unbridled optimism of a Sanders rally. But the affect theorist can give no *reasons* for preferring the latter over the

[24] See also Jürgen Habermas's insightful remarks on Foucault's "cryptonormativity" (1987, p. 276).

[25] Our *Befindlichkeit*, as Heidegger calls it (2006, p. 160). Heidegger's insight here is rather anodyne, but later he finds his way to a concept of joy that is "armed" (*gerüstete Freude*) rather than open-armed, "braced" rather than embracing, and thus unable to open the self to vulnerable communion with others (2006, p. 310). This is in marked contrast to the tenderness of Kierkegaard's joy briefly delineated below. Macquarrie and Robinson translate *gerüstete* as "unshakeable" (1962, p. 358), but a *Rüstung* is the armor a medieval knight wore when preparing for battle. I have opted for a more straight-forward, less disarming translation.

former. The move from *is* to *ought* requires an ethical judgment occurring within a linguistic framework and thus requires something more than affect. But this "something more" is precisely what affect theory can't consistently take up. As such, affect theory can't truly persuade anyone to prefer optimism and compassion over pessimism and hatred, or to prefer the sociability of mutually intelligible conversation over being barraged by invisible prelinguistic force.

This is not to deny such a thing as what Heidegger called attunement (*Stimmung*), nor does this suggest a denial of the fundamental importance of those social ties that are governed less by rational consent than by bonds of affection, like family. But attunements aren't exclusively pre-cognitive, and affect isn't attunement. An attunement is part of and expresses a *Lebenswelt*, a world of shared experience thematized into a form of meaning. And if the world of shared experience is bound up with my knowledge of "what it's like" for me and thus to some extent "what it's like" for you in our shared world, then the experience of attunement is inescapably *personal*, not pre-personal. And if affect can't rightly be said to be *experienced* because it can never be given meaning together, then neither can anyone give a convincing account of how its "flows" perforce carve out our shared world. So, it's not only that affect theory can't yield an ethics; it can't even give a believable description of a world filled with the mutuality that typifies most of the interactions you and I have as we go about our days (to say nothing of our nights).

For all the appeal of its focus on embodiment, affect theory never makes the leap from the mere fact of embodiment to its personal, interpersonal, transcendent meaning. And this has sweeping ramifications for how we think of joy in relation to happiness. After her trenchant critique of happiness for its complicity in producing wretchedness through affective "stickiness," for example, Sara Ahmed offers us instead a non-ethical conception of happiness as merely "the 'hap' of a happening," its absolute contingence, fully conditioned by the chance of "how we are affected" (2010, p. 39). Happiness has significance she thinks only when we take it "outside the domain of ethics" (2010, p. 217)—though somehow not outside the domain of ethics' extension as the political, showing us again the quick leap from *is* to *ought*. Rather than adjusting our judgments about what happiness is or isn't, the only task left for us is to attend to the wretch, the outsider of happiness, not in order to make them happy or to see them as more than wretched but to understand how their wretchedness is produced.

We might think this isn't much comfort to the wretch, and we would be right. It certainly wouldn't have been any use to my Congolese friend, who knew firsthand the joyless depravity that produces wretchedness. But the point for Ahmed is not to comfort, which would only reinforce what she sees as the problem. We shouldn't call for more pleasant interactions with people, shouldn't wish for our children to be happy, shouldn't try to substitute the supposedly less laden term "joy" for "happiness," since "joy" is thought to evoke only straightforward "experiences of pleasure and delight" (2010, p. 214, p. 92). A gnarled joy that coexists with suffering—the real joy of many a real wretch—is rejected from the outset, since joy is assumed to take us "beyond pain" (2010, p. 215). But by excluding the complicated affective states that play a much greater role in most people's lives than anything as simple as unalloyed pleasure, Ahmed has deprived her argument of the humanizing vigor that could make it not only endurable but compelling.

Ultimately, we are rendered passive before whatever streams might flow over us. We can only sit idly on our hands and settle for bland happy-go-luckiness and mishaps. "Neither happiness nor unhappiness, there is *happenstance*," only "the 'hap' of happiness" (NANCY, 1997, p. 151). Ahmed's incisive critique of the exclusionary tendency of happiness ultimately gives way to a bleak world bereft of joy, absent any demonstrable and intellectually consistent concern for the wretch, without even the basic hope for the happiness of one's own children, and with nothing in this whole drab view of the world to do about it. This is a world in which no "hap" can be consistently regarded as better than another, and so a world we can neither appreciate nor work toward together—without, that is, the something more that surpasses affect theory, which the quality of our lives may thankfully bespeak even if our theories do not (a point that applies to us each and all, so frequently are our lives better than our theories). And if affect theory's dehumanizing twaddle could ever really be accepted without inconsistency or prevarication, it's a world we can neither believe in nor truly be said to experience. The words of James Gunn in his dystopic novel *The Joy Makers* suitably capture what it's like to gaze into modernity's mirror of happiness only to find affect theory's power-mongering universe petering out in the solipsistic impotence of moral pallor: "All a man had was himself and his faith in himself and such illusions as he chose to believe" (1984, p. 213).

3. THE PARADOX OF JOY

Clearly, how we think of being matters for how we think of affect,[26] so we should expect that Kierkegaard's ontology would play some role in his thoughts on joy. And since his thoughts on being are rooted in his understanding of the writings of the New Testament, it makes sense to begin there. In contrast to affect theory, which can't consistently regard affect as an ethical (and therefore political) matter, Paul sees joy as compulsory for the new religious-political community of the *ecclesia*, a conciliar community of equals (even if differentiated by hierarchical roles) who are to relate to one another not by force but by mutual love. And when we consider the dire straits in which the early Christian community was commanded to be joyful, it's obvious why this joy would require someone to muster more than a little audacity. It came down to the Christian joy (χαρά) of bodily resurrection—against all odds and at times in the face of the early disciples' own lack of faith[27]—over against the Pax Romana's warmongering worship of *Fortuna*. The writers of the New Testament found in the paradox of the resurrected messiah cause for rejoicing in *all* circumstances. Even from prison Paul tells the Philippians to "Be joyful [χαίρετε] in the Lord always!" And in case they had started daydreaming at this point, he thought it important enough to repeat: "I will say it again, be joyful [χαίρετε]!" (Philippians 4:4).

Kierkegaard too sees joy as obligatory. In "Christ as Prototype," Kierkegaard writes,

> To *suffer* for the doctrine. It is this that infinitely changes everything in becoming and being a Christian. … Christ himself knew that he had to make these men as unhappy and miserable, humanly speaking, as human beings could be, 'the most wretched of all' [1 Corinthians 15:9]—if they were to belong to him. And not only this, but that he must *require* of them that they nevertheless maintain that this was the chosen condition that was to their benefit, that it was *sheer joy* to suffer in this way, God's overwhelming special grace and love shown to them. Horrible! That this, which is supposed to be the good news, comfort, and *joy*—that it is this that, humanly speaking, makes me the most wretched of all, … that the *requirement* is not only that I am to bear this patiently but that I am to find joy and blessedness in this. (1990b, pp. 203-204, all emphases but first mine)

[26] See RORTY, 2004; RORTY, 1984.
[27] "While from joy [ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς] they were disbelieving and still wondering…" (Luke 24:41).

Kierkegaard makes joy in suffering a defining feature of religiousness. "A religious person," he writes elsewhere, "is always joyful," especially "in danger … out on 70,000 fathoms of water, many, many miles from all human help" (1988, p. 470). In still other texts we are expected to learn joy in finitude from the lilies and birds of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, even in sorrow and even if the mount is a dunghill (1997b, pp. 36-45, 28), and we are to find joy when we suffer for a conviction, following the example of the disciples who dared to rejoice even in a thorough flogging (Acts 5:41) (1993, pp. 321-341). Clearly Kierkegaard sees a certain kind of joy as something more than an accidental feature of Christian life.

The paradoxical ontology informing this joy stands out against the backdrop of Spinoza, whose ontology has been operating mostly in the background of my argument so far. Spinoza's monism lent Scotus's univocity its lingering significance for modernity, while his equation of *affectus* and nondialectical power is behind the blunt force trauma of affect theory's anti-transcendental. Kierkegaard, attuned to Spinoza's significance, was unusual in the mid-nineteenth century for offering a critical response not only to the first half of Spinoza's *Ethics* but also, remarkably, to Parts IV and V on the emotions and blessedness, which were all too often ignored in Kierkegaard's day.[28] Space won't permit me to lay out the extent of Kierkegaard's Romantic Christian alternative to Spinozism, but I can chart in brief outline one possible path forward that will aid in the task of understanding this Kierkegaardian dare to rejoice.

Let's start by addressing the ontological pluralism within which this religious joy emerges.[29] I said near the outset that I'm not arguing Kierkegaard wanted to return to a medieval *analogia entis*. This doesn't prevent Kierkegaard from using an analogical approach when it suits him, nor does it preclude other forms of pluralism.[30] One of the

[28] I owe my appreciation of this to Cyril O'Regan's kind feedback. Some scholars would prefer to continue ignoring these parts of the *Ethics*. Regarding Part V's discussion of blessedness, for example, Jonathan Bennett writes that "after three centuries of failure to profit from it, the time has come to admit that this part of the *Ethics* has nothing to teach us and is pretty certainly worthless" (1984, p. 372).
[29] On ontological pluralism, see TURNER, 2010; MCDANIEL, 2017. For a Kierkegaardian approach, see FERREIRA, 2019.
[30] See the analogical use of parental love in KIERKEGAARD, 1990a, p. 133. Kierkegaard prefaces this analogy with a reference to the classical theological notion of the divine simplicity obtaining in knowing and acting: "[God's] knowing is not something other than his giving, … is at all times a co-knowledge with the gift and thus also in the moment it is received," which then gives way to language of participation in goodness as a gift of God (1990a, p. 134).

clearest passages with which to tackle this is found in a footnote in *Philosophical Fragments*. "God is not a name but a concept, and perhaps because of that his *essentia involvit existentiam*," the pseudonym Climacus writes, to which he adds a lengthy footnote. "For example, Spinoza, who, by immersing himself in the concept of God, aims to bring being [*Væren*] out of it by means of thought, but, please note, not as an accidental quality but as a qualification of essence. This is the profundity in Spinoza." Despite his appreciation of Spinoza, Climacus observes that this leads to a tautology, such that "the more perfect the thing is, the more it *is*; but its perfection is that it has more *esse* in itself, which means that the more it is, the more it is." The tautology, Climacus suggests, is caused by Spinoza's lack of distinction between factual and ideal being (as one finds in Hegel's distinction between *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität*, even if Kierkegaard also thinks Hegel, a bit like Spinoza, does not ultimately give *Wirklichkeit* its due). But without this distinction, speaking of degrees of being becomes unclear. "With regard to factual being, to speak of more or less being is meaningless. A fly, when it is, has just as much being as the god; with regard to factual being, the stupid comment I write here has just as much being as Spinoza's profundity" (KIERKEGAARD, 1985, p. 41n). This final remark might seem to resemble a model nominalist, but Kierkegaard closes the note with paradox's *coup de grâce*: "Spinoza's thesis is quite correct and the tautology is in order, but it is also certain that *he completely circumvents the difficulty, for the difficulty is to grasp factual being and to bring God's ideality into factual being*" (1985, 42n, emphasis mine). Kierkegaard leaves us with two options: *either* univocity's ontotheology that makes of God one factual being among others, *or* an ontological pluralism consisting of a paradoxical both/and, both factual and ideal being. The stubborn perdurance of factuality means that a monism of ideal being isn't an option unless we assume our world is illusory or mistake ourselves for God.

And of course, Kierkegaard devotes the remainder of the *Fragments* to just this paradox, faith as the "happy passion" of thought (1985, p. 59) concerning the impossible juncture of factuality and ideality, the god as a human being, the eternal within time. This happy passion or fortunate suffering[31] can be thought of as a capacity for being

[31] "*lykkelige Lidenskab*" (KIERKEGAARD, 1998, p. 261). *Lidenskab* (passion) is conceptually and linguistically linked to *Lidelse* (suffering).

commensurate with the incommensurate. Readers of Karl Rahner may recognize the basic idea here even if "commensurate with the incommensurate" is an admittedly quirky phrase for it. Rahner called it (no less quirkily) the "supernatural existential" (RAHNER, 1978, p. 127; RAHNER, 1950), a predisposition to the reception of grace which arises within our factual experience, suggesting that we are readymade to receive what doesn't fully fit us. The human being's relationship to grace is less like a hand in search of a smartphone (a superfluous neo-scholastic addition) or a hand with a severed finger waiting for reattachment (*nouvelle théologie*) than like hands cupped at the altar preparing to receive what they cannot contain. And I would suggest that the affective correlate for this in Kierkegaard is this strange joy within suffering.

My purpose here isn't to enter into a debate concerning interpretations of the *Fragments* (and much less of Rahner). I only want to observe, first, that Kierkegaard's ontological position is identical to both Aquinas's and Spinoza's stance that God's essence is identical to God's existence, and second, that Kierkegaard's critique of Spinoza is that his monism shortchanges paradox by not giving contingent being—our way of being—its due. While this comment on Spinoza doesn't necessarily commit Kierkegaard to a medieval *analogia entis*, it does suggest that the paradox of the incarnation's both/and is an inescapable part of his pluralist ontology.

One would expect this to show up in the "inverted dialectic" of his discourses on joy, as indeed it does (KIERKEGAARD, 2011, NB4:11, pp. 292-293). It's worth taking a moment to situate this inverted dialectic in light of Kierkegaard's later reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* in 1846. His reading notes succinctly elaborate the ethical implications of the basic ontological claim we saw in Climacus' footnote in the *Fragments*. Kierkegaard observes, first, that Spinoza's key ethical principle of self-preservation (*suum esse conservare*) is too ambiguous. It is strange, he writes, "to construct an ethics on what is such an indeterminate, though no doubt, correct, principle … and to keep it so ambiguous that it can just as well mean bodily, egoistic love as the highest resignation in intellectual love" (2008, JJ:443, pp. 266-267).[32]

[32] Cf. SPINOZA, 1992, Part III, Proposition 7, p. 108. I would be remiss if I failed to note that Spinoza is clear about how he regards the nature of ethical self-preservation only two pages away (in Kierkegaard's 1830 edition of the *Opera Philosophica Omnia*) from a passage Kierkegaard quotes. Kierkegaard's claim

The second problem Kierkegaard has with Spinoza's *Ethics* is its dissolution of the possibility of ethical progress in the ateleological view *sub specie aeternitatis*. Spinoza may be right in the final part of the *Ethics,* Kierkegaard concedes, when he says that beatitude coincides with virtue, but how can we simultaneously contemplate everything at rest through the ateleological lens of eternity *and* strive to make ethical progress through the preservation of our own being? This ethical progress, the increase in our power, is what Spinoza calls joy (*laetitia*), but how would the highest joy be possible if the only way we can achieve it is by assuming a standpoint that has already surpassed it? As one interpreter of Spinoza puts it, Spinoza ascribes blessedness "only to beings conceived as not in time. It is as if the problem of life can ultimately be solved only by taking a standpoint from which the problem cannot be conceived" (JARRETT, 2007, p. 173).

On the other hand, if human beings are modes of God endowed with both thought and extension, as Spinoza's monistic ontology stipulates, then it would make sense that using our capacity for adequate ideas we can peer through the lens of eternity while simultaneously striving to acquiesce to necessity. In this case, "striving" is deceptive. We only need to intuit our place in this intricate nexus of existence. For Spinoza we don't *achieve* blessedness. We *accede* to it.

Nevertheless, for Kierkegaard even the point of view that would allow for accession is unavailable for us poor individuals who still exist in factuality. Kierkegaard's stance is that Spinoza's misuse of the concept of eternity makes it impossible to conceive of ethical progress and thus joy. And this is the same impossibility faced by the Order of Perpetual Affectation, if not for precisely the same reason then a remarkably similar one since factual being—characterized as it is by open-ended mutuality, traditions, the determination of good and bad reasons, not to mention all kinds of language, such as the musical languages informing our music theories, and so forth—receives short shrift in either case. At stake in the Spinozistic erasure of factual being is nothing less than the meaning of affect on the hither side of paradox.

can be upheld if we take him to refer to the lack of dialectic in Spinozistic self-preservation, which would be consistent with his earlier critique in *Philosophical Fragments*.

How then does Kierkegaard uphold this paradox in his joyful discourses as he provides an alternative to modernity's mirror of happiness? As but one of several possible examples, we could point to the notion of strength in weakness, which Kierkegaard borrows from Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 in such a way as to bring it to bear on Spinoza's perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*. In "Attunements in the Strife of Suffering," [33] Kierkegaard's frequent and sometimes confusing use of the concept of eternity all but disappears in the central discourse, "The Joy of It: That The Weaker You Become the Stronger God Becomes in You." [34] While the surrounding discourses thus seem to elaborate Kierkegaard's second critique of Spinoza (regarding eternity), this central discourse pertains directly to the first critique (the ambiguity of monistic self-preservation).

Rather than conceiving of power univocally as Spinoza does, Kierkegaard here distinguishes between two poles of power that will meet in a paradoxical coincidence of opposites: the self-assertive power of free will and the self-retractive power of relation, or in other words, love. At the risk of too concisely glossing this rich discourse that deserves an article of its own showing how Kierkegaard is playing with the medieval distinction between *potentiae ordinata et absoluta* while also offering an understated critique of the Spinozan triad of *admiratio*, *veneratio*, and *devotio*,[35] we could say that a weakness in self-assertion is simultaneously a strength in love. We become weaker by sacrificing our own self-assertive will, while divine love grows stronger in us. But—and here is the paradox where ideality and factuality meet—Kierkegaard then surprises us by stating that while he has been saying God becomes stronger, it is *we* who become stronger because it is *we* who participate in the paradox's ongoing presence. And we do so *just as* we become weaker, both because omnipotence cannot really be said to grow stronger and because all along we have been learning to cooperate with the divine works of love continuously operative in the world, the true power in vulnerability that characterizes the

[33] The Danish title is *Stemninger i Lidelsens Strid*. This is translated in the Princeton edition as "States of Mind in the Strife of Suffering." Here I translate *Stemninger* as "Attunements" in keeping with the musical allusions Kierkegaard makes. See also the musical reference concerning this text in KIERKEGAARD, 2011, NB4:22, p. 298.
[34] The terms "eternal" (*evig*) or "eternity" (*evighed*) occur 252 times in a mere 59 pages. See KIERKEGAARD, 2004, pp. 107-166. The middle discourse contains only 1 of these 252 occurrences.
[35] See SPINOZA, 1992, Part III, Proposition 52, Scholium, pp. 134-135. Kierkegaard's reflections concern wonder (*Forundring*), admiration (*Beundring*), and worship (*Tilbedelsen*). See KIERKEGAARD, 1997a, 130-133; 2004, pp. 141-143.

mutuality of *agapē* (and, going beyond Kierkegaard, represents what the conciliar community of the *ecclesia* strives to be while too frequently falling short).

This is the fundamental insight through which we should read what Kierkegaard does with the much-used concept of eternity in the surrounding discourses. Eternity meets temporality[36]—ideality is brought paradoxically into factuality—to set into motion our ethical progress, our growth in power and therefore joy, now understood as our entering more and more deeply into the openness and attendant suffering of authentic relationship.[37] Opening ourselves in this way is to suffer and yet to be joyful.

And at the risk of again too much concision about a rich idea found in the next few discourses, this perspective should disrupt any efforts to dismiss Kierkegaard's use of the concept of eternity here as an example of a simplistic theologico-economic calculus, as though he were simply saying that we ought to exchange our present losses for a delayed gain, sacrifice a little temporal happiness for a longer-lasting joy as we write this world off for the net gain of another. Kierkegaard was no modern gnostic. Like Paul, Kierkegaard's interest is in joy *now*, a *present* victory: "We are not saying that the good person is eventually victorious in another world, … suffering, he is victorious while he is still alive—he is victorious on the day of suffering" (KIERKEGAARD, 1993, p. 331).[38] This is why suffering and joy can coincide so readily in Kierkegaard's textually inaccurate but fecund recounting of Jesus's words to the penitent thief on the cross. Shortly after defining joy as "truly *to be today*," Kierkegaard has Jesus say to the penitent thief "This very day you *are* in paradise" (1997b, p. 39, p. 44, emphasis mine).[39] In the presence of the paradox, suffering and joy coalesce to such an extent that our dying away *is* the life

[36] "Eternity seems so far away; the task is to bring it as close as possible" (KIERKEGAARD, 1997a, p. 135).
[37] Elsewhere in "Attunements in the Strife of Suffering," Kierkegaard suggests that this perspective enables us not to turn inauthentically away from suffering (as though we were escaping the realm of factuality for ideality) but to see deeply enough into the depths of reality that suffering appears as something more than suffering only, as though it were illuminated by the moving image of a magic lantern (see 1997a, pp. 103-104).
[38] To be clear, this does not exclude the Christian hope for resurrection, which Kierkegaard seems also to have upheld. If Kierkegaard implies that learning to be joyful in the present is to learn to live into the kingdom of God as that "place" where God's will is accomplished, then his thought is once again consistent with that of Paul in the New Testament.
[39] Kierkegaard alters the tense in Luke 23:43 from future to present.

of joy.[40] Beyond any egotist give and take, Kierkegaard would have us conceive of loss *as* gain, suffering *as* joy, a paradoxical both/and so thorough as to lead Kierkegaard eventually to the startling claim that "there is, then, really no loss in the world, but sheer gain" (1997a, p. 143).[41] And this is so because the entirety of our affective lives—even our suffering—is an opportunity to grow ever deeper together into love, an opportunity denied us by modernity's mirror of happiness and the monistic force of affect theory's Order of Perpetual Affectation. Just as for Climacus thought is most fully itself when it collides with the paradox of ideality and factuality, so too is affective life most fully itself in its collision with the transcendence that moves us from mere causality to shared meaning.

The peculiar audacity of the "dare to rejoice" in that 1853 note with which I began is that it finds the courage to venture beyond the self through modernity's looking glass as it embraces not merely affect's power but its meaning, which in the dialectical vagaries of the paradox will make that power look like weakness. Thus, can joy coexist with suffering.

But it's more. Audacity also doubles back and is able to find joy not in suffering only but also (and perhaps even more remarkably from the perspective of Kierkegaard's thought) in prosaic happiness. In his 1853 "dare to rejoice" Kierkegaard is working his way back to an idea he had already explored in *Fear and Trembling*, where the Knight of Faith finds "joy by virtue of the absurd" (1983, p. 50) as he receives again the whole ethical order (*Sædelighed*; Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*)—represented in the relationship between Abraham and Isaac—now not grounded in the necessary unfolding of speculative reason where we ungratefully see only ourselves in the mirror but instead suspended upon the grace, absurd and paradoxical, that the infinite makes its home in the finite. The laughter in Isaac's name (**יצחק**, "he laughs") ceases to be the transgressive chortle of derision[42] and becomes instead the gentle mirth of being wonderstruck by the mystery of what is

[40] On Kierkegaard's concept of dying away (*Afdøden*), see THULSTRUP, pp. 166-187.
[41] For another example: "The task itself is not merely a hope for a future time but is a joyful present" (KIERKEGAARD, 1993, p. 279). A fuller analysis will show that there *is* a kind of economy at play here, but not an *egotist* economy.
[42] As it is in the opening of the biblical narrative. See Genesis 17:7, 18:12-15.

ever given right under our feet. In this way the happiness of the ethical order finds its way from the speculum's self-regard to joy's reception of shared meaning.[43]

In early 1853 Kierkegaard came just shy of fully embracing the earlier perspective of the Knight of Faith. "Ah, but if this is to be proclaimed: dying away, that to be loved by God is to suffer and to love God is to suffer—then I must, as it were, disturb the happiness of all the others and *cannot have the sorrowful joy of being happy with their happiness*" (2017, NB27:71, p. 184, emphasis mine). We've already seen that this weak strength (here described as "dying away") is itself a reason for joy richer still than happiness, a point that Kierkegaard will almost work himself around to again later in this circuitous note. But for now he seems to feel himself temporarily boxed into an affective corner brought on by the difficulty of holding on to the tensions of the paradox. He thus leaves off: "I am not yet strong enough to pray myself into suffering. But I have been brought to a halt, and, quietly leaving everything to God, I await a clearer understanding" (2017, NB27:71, p. 185)—a helpful reminder that this note isn't really about the nature of affect and paradox or the distinction between happiness and joy or the labyrinths of medieval ontology. It's about praying. And so we leave him to his prayers as he quietly awaits not just understanding but *understanding*.

But if we could peek once more over Kierkegaard's shoulder the following year, a year before he died, we would thankfully find him able to define belief in God in terms of the impartial joy his prayerful waiting afforded him. "To believe in God is essentially to be equally joyful always, essentially equally joyful. For the joy of faith is that God is love, which—if only I relinquish my understanding—he is just as much when I encounter what according to my conception is joyful as when it is something sorrowful. Everything, everything, everything is love" (2018, NB33:39, p. 287). Even if Kierkegaard is brought to a halt by his effort to hold together the tensions of the paradox, in a prayerful letting go he finds the sundered *affectiones* joined for him in the tensile joy that love sustains.

[43] That the attachments of the ethical order rest for Kierkegaard upon a prevenient grace that keeps these attachments from becoming reflections of the ego is clear also in *Christian Discourses* where Kierkegaard discusses the "if"—"my soul's fear and trembling"—conditioning every relationship (1997a, p. 243). Kierkegaard's 1853 revisitation of the Akedah narrative (KIERKEGAARD, 2017, NB28:41, pp. 250-251) doesn't fundamentally change this point but drives it further home. For an insightful interpretation of the figure of the tax collector in *Fear and Trembling* that also places mirth front and center, see HOUGH, 2015.

And if few of us regard this paradoxical affect as an especially daring act, perhaps my Congolese friend can help us see why we should. I gradually came to know him under that awning as a man of quiet prayer. And it was in his contemplative prayers that I caught glimpses of something more than wretchedness, brief flickers now and then of ideality's and factuality's discreet rendezvous, glimmers of the paradoxical joy to which his profound suffering had made him radically available. His was no glib consolation. In the stillness of prayer, he found that despite all he had lost there was still one thing he could dare to let go: the craven thought that all really had been lost and with it his openness to the love that casts its strangely joyful hues no less hither than yon, even over the happiness of others.

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