

# PASSIONATE REASON: KIERKEGAARD AND PLANTINGA ON RADICAL CONVERSION

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It is reasonable to take Kierkegaard and Plantinga as presenting very different approaches to the rationality of adopting religious beliefs. Kierkegaard says Christian doctrines are absurd, and Plantinga argues that the existence of God is part of the deliverances of reason. I argue that in spite of these apparent differences, Kierkegaard and Plantinga agree on some foundational epistemological issues. I begin by exploring the topic of radical conversion, as discussed by van Fraassen. I use the notion of radical conversion as a tool, to focus our investigation and illuminate the agreements between Kierkegaard and Plantinga. Because of the role of passions and affections in epistemology, we will see that Kierkegaard and Plantinga share a basic epistemological outlook.

When one thinks of philosophers of religion, Soren Kierkegaard and Alvin Plantinga represent two very different points of view. Kierkegaard is often regarded as one of the fathers of existentialism and continental philosophy, and Plantinga revolutionized analytic philosophy of religion. Continental thinkers approvingly quote Kierkegaard, but he is seldom referred to by analytic philosophers. Plantinga is one of the most influential analytic philosophers, cited by many, but it would be unusual to find continental philosophers discussing his works. Because of this, one common view might be not that Kierkegaard and Plantinga really disagree, but that their ideas are incommensurable in some sense. The idea here would be that they are talking about very different things using very different concepts, and their ideas have little to do with each other. Although some have suggested that Plantinga is really a fideist, it is fair to say that most take Kierkegaard and Plantinga to be at opposing ends of the philosophical spectrum when it comes to epistemology and the rationality of religious beliefs. Plantinga argues that belief in God's existence is part of the deliverances of reason, whereas Kierkegaard is well-known for saying religious belief is absurd. These philosophers are held to be about as different as philosophers can get.

In what follows I will argue that this common view is mistaken; deep down, we find Kierkegaard and Plantinga share a common basic epistemological outlook. Although they appear to have very different views about reason and religious belief, this is illusory. There is deep agreement



between them, in spite of apparent differences. To see the agreement between Kierkegaard and Plantinga, we will begin by exploring the philosophical problem of radical conversion in philosophy of science, as it is developed by Bas van Fraassen. I will use the notion of radical conversion as a tool to help focus our investigation and bring to light some ideas held by both Kierkegaard and Plantinga. The problem of radical conversion arises for many epistemological positions, but there are good reasons to think some cases of radical conversion are rational. We will then look at rationality and radical conversion from the perspective of Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the *Philosophical Crumbs*.<sup>1</sup> There are many ways to interpret Kierkegaard's writings, and in this article I will ignore most of these debates. I will simply assume one plausible interpretation of Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus, one argued for by Stephen Evans, even though I am aware that other commentators may disagree. Thus my position might be more accurately described as claiming that one plausible way of reading Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Crumbs* results in Johannes Climacus and Plantinga having very similar basic epistemologies.<sup>2</sup> We will then discuss the rationality of religious belief according to Plantinga. We will look at a seldom discussed chapter in Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*, in which he investigates the role of the affections and reason. A central topic in our investigation will be the role of the passions in epistemology, and we will see that Kierkegaard and Plantinga have much more in common than is usually thought when it comes to the epistemology of religious belief.

### *Radical Conversion*

Often we change our beliefs in ways that result in our new beliefs being very different from what we previously held. Perhaps we acquire some new evidence and in response we completely change our way of thinking; if the change is significant enough, we consider these to be examples of conversion. For example, Antony Flew claims he changed his beliefs and became a theist on the basis of evidence.<sup>3</sup> Let us call cases in which reasoning about evidence produces a significant and important change of belief "ordinary conversion." Attempts at providing evidence for religious belief are attempts at bringing about ordinary conversion. It is important to see that cases of ordinary conversion are considered rational from the

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<sup>1</sup>"Philosophical Crumbs" is a translation of Kierkegaard's "Philosophiske Smuler," which has often been translated as "Philosophical Fragments." *Philosophical Crumbs* and *Philosophical Fragments* are the same work by Kierkegaard.

<sup>2</sup>For further discussion of similarities between Kierkegaard and Plantinga, see Stephen Evans, "Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge: Plantinga and Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 183–205, and Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs," in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 169–182.

<sup>3</sup>Antony Flew and Roy A. Varghese, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

perspective of the previous beliefs, once the new evidence is taken into account; the change from the old to the new beliefs was rational because it was based on one's epistemic principles and acquired evidence. In advance of the conversion, one could say that if I came to have such and such evidence, then I would change to the new beliefs; when I get the evidence, the new beliefs follow simply from one's old beliefs, the new evidence, and the epistemic principles one accepts. From the point of view of the prior beliefs, there is nothing irrational about this change, even though the beliefs may change in significant ways.

There are, however, cases of conversion that are more difficult to account for. In ordinary conversion the person will consider the change rational, because the change is a result of the beliefs and epistemic principles one holds, as well as the new evidence. But there are cases of conversion in which the new beliefs cannot be seen as following from one's beliefs, epistemic principles, and evidence. In some conversion cases, from the prior perspective the new beliefs are not arrived at rationally from the prior beliefs and the new beliefs appear irrational or absurd. From the prior perspective, there does not seem to be any way to move from the earlier beliefs to the later beliefs in a rational way. However, from the posterior perspective, the change from the prior to the posterior beliefs was completely rational. This is a very puzzling situation. We could, of course, simply declare that all such cases are irrational, but that would be too hasty, and simply ignores the accounts of those who have had these conversion experiences. Bas van Fraassen clearly describes the situation:

The problem is simple to state. Imagine yourself looking back to your past self, or to our communal past. Say: I can now understand quite well how I thought at that time, but I see that by those earlier lights what I now think makes no sense at all. How was it possible for me to go through that fortunate change? That I now see it as fortunate and vindicated does not at all mean that it was rational, reasonable, or rationally acceptable at the time. So should I applaud bursts or binges of irrationality as acceptable crisis response? Should I glory in having done precisely what I would now forbid myself in the name of Reason? Should I give up my commitment to rational management of opinion, since I now applaud that previous unratifiable change of mind? Or am I just mistaken to think my present views were absurd or unintelligible then? Is the whole idea of radical conversion, of true revolutions in scientific thought or elsewhere, an illusion?<sup>4</sup>

Let us call conversions in which the later beliefs are not permitted by the prior beliefs and new evidence "radical conversion." Radical conversions in which according to the prior view there is no possible evidence (evidence assigned a non-zero probability by the prior view) that would allow a rational change to the posterior view, we will call "extreme conversion." Extreme conversion is just a special case of radical conversion; in radical conversion none of the actual evidence justifies the change to the posterior

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<sup>4</sup>Bas van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 72.

beliefs, and according to extreme conversion there is no possible evidence that justifies the change. The idea, common to both radical and extreme conversion, is that from the perspective of the old beliefs the new beliefs are not a proper response given new evidence, but according to the new beliefs the change was a good response to the evidence. The challenge will be to give an account whereby cases of radical and extreme conversion can be rational. Radical conversion can arise whenever one's prior beliefs place restrictions on responses to evidence. Epistemologies in which future beliefs are a function of or are limited by rules that apply to old beliefs and evidence will have difficulties accounting for radical conversion, since the new beliefs violate the rules in cases of radical conversion.

In *The Empirical Stance* van Fraassen discusses radical conversion in the context of scientific revolutions, as described by Feyerabend and Kuhn. One characteristic of a scientific revolution is that a completely new way of thinking about issues is adopted, a way that is not reasonable by the lights of the previous theory. As Kuhn emphasized, the difference in paradigms is not due to some additional evidence, and there is no way to reason from the previous paradigm to the new paradigm using evidence. Yet those who come to adopt the new paradigm see this belief change as rational. What the old paradigm regards as improper or unreasonable, the new paradigm sees as an epistemically superior way to account for the evidence. Thus described, scientific revolutions are clear examples of radical conversion, and it would be extreme to deny that they exist or that they are rational. van Fraassen writes:

Yes, there are such changes, so radical that they are characterized by a remarkable historical asymmetry. From the posterior point of view, the prior can be made intelligible and the change ratified. From the prior position, however, the posterior view was absurd and the transition to it possible but incapable of justification. Taken together, these two points may seem less an answer than a paradox.<sup>5</sup>

Scientific revolutions raise the puzzle of radical conversion: how can the belief change be seen to be rational in retrospect, even though prior to the change it would be viewed as irrational?

Although the puzzle of radical conversion is intuitively clear, if we wanted we could give a more formal description of it within the framework of traditional Bayesianism, in which belief is changed in accordance with conditionalization. Suppose we have a Bayesian agent with a prior probability function on a language such that for all possible evidence statements in the language, it is not the case that conditionalizing on some or all of that evidence will result in some proposition H having a high probability. In other words, there is no way to get to a posterior probability function in which H is assigned a high probability by conditionalizing on evidence. Suppose the agent changes belief by assigning

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<sup>5</sup>van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance*, 65.

H a high probability, and furthermore considers that change rational; this describes a case of extreme conversion, because there is no possible evidence for the prior probability function to conditionalize on and get the posterior probability function. An agent using orthodox Bayesianism to manage beliefs will consider any change of belief that assigns H high probability irrational, even if the belief change were considered rational from the resulting later point of view. A Bayesian managing beliefs will consider certain belief change improper, but after the change the belief change may be seen as a good response to the evidence even though it violated the deeply held epistemic principles at the time. The question is how it can be rational to violate one's deeply held epistemic views.

We do not need to appeal to philosophy of science or Bayesianism in order to describe cases of radical conversion; it is easy to find examples in ordinary life. Suppose we have a naturalist who holds all belief change must be based on sufficient evidence. She has views about what constitutes sufficient evidence and beliefs about what are proper and improper responses to evidence. She also has thought about the possibility of religious experience, but holds that religious experience is a result of cognitive processes that are unreliable and thus provides no basis for religious beliefs. Thinking about what to believe if she were to have a religious experience, she says that she has thought about possible types of religious experience, but holds they are illusory. Thus she believes she should remain a naturalist, even if she were to have a religious experience; she holds that it would be epistemically improper for her to become a theist on the basis of religious experience. Now suppose that she has a religious experience of the sort she has considered, and comes to believe that she was previously in error about these experiences being unreliable; she thus changes her beliefs and becomes a theist. This is a case of radical conversion; her prior views do not allow her to take her religious experience as veridical and become a theist. However, from the point of view of her posterior beliefs, the change in belief was completely rational; she was correcting an error in her previous beliefs. According to her previous views on evidential support, religious experience provides no support for religious beliefs. But her later views on evidential relations allow religious experience to support religious belief. The puzzle is to account for the later claim that the change was rational, even though it appears irrational from the prior point of view.

One way cases of radical conversion can arise is when the epistemic principles used in managing beliefs exclude certain responses to experience. The epistemic import of having an experience can be very different from the epistemic import of thinking about the experience, and having the experience and imagining myself having the experience can have very different epistemic consequences. Without having a certain experience, I may truly believe that the experience would not be veridical, but after having the experience I may realize that my previous views were wrong. I hadn't had the experience, was unfamiliar with it, and my epistemic views

about it were from an impoverished epistemic position. Thus it can be rational to respond to an experience differently from what I earlier thought would be rational. Sometimes we undergo radical conversion because we respond to experience in ways we previously ruled irrational; we consider this response rational because we now hold that our previous views were in error.

It is important to distinguish cases of radical conversion from cases in which we would not be inclined to say the belief change was rational. For example, someone may ingest a drug knowing that it results in beliefs known to be false.<sup>6</sup> In cases such as this, some may claim the person is no longer themselves; they have lost control over their beliefs. How to handle such cases is controversial, but cases of radical conversion need not be cases like this. In radical conversion the person has not lost control of their beliefs or ceased to be the same epistemic agent. The problem is how to account for rational beings adopting views that they previously considered irrational to adopt.

To understand the concept of radical conversion, it may be helpful to look at the epistemic project of managing one's beliefs. Although there are many epistemic projects, one important project is that of responsibly and rationally managing our beliefs, including belief change. In managing our beliefs, we make use of beliefs we have about evidence and about what are proper and improper ways to change belief. Because of this, gaining some specific evidence and changing certain beliefs may be radical conversion for some and ordinary conversion for others, depending on other views about how to manage belief. For example, suppose one holds that seeming right is always sufficient evidence for a belief. For this person, it may not be possible to have a radical conversion; any change to a belief that seems right from the later perspective will be acceptable from the prior perspective. Now consider an orthodox Bayesian who accepts the requirement of conditionalization. Evidence learned is assigned a probability of 1, but beliefs of degree 1 or 0 cannot be changed by conditionalization. Thus any evidence belief or any other belief of degree 1 or 0 can never be changed. For such a person, the possibility of radical conversion looms large, because we often do change beliefs we were certain of. To determine whether a change of belief is radical conversion, we must not do so from the perspective of our epistemic situation, but we must consider the beliefs, epistemic principles, and evidence as it is understood by the person. From our perspective a person may not fully grasp some evidence or understand the right evidential relations, but radical conversion depends upon how they view their evidence and epistemic principles, not on how someone else views them. It is the agent's epistemic situation that is relevant, not ours.

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<sup>6</sup>Bas van Fraassen, "Belief and the Problem of Ulysses and the Sirens," *Philosophical Studies* 77 (1995), 7-37.

There are other examples of radical conversion; Chihara gives an example in which someone radically changes their beliefs because of a newly thought of hypothesis.<sup>7</sup> Chihara tells a story in which a suitor for a princess is given one number a day in something like a red ping-pong ball, for six days. On the seventh day he is required to guess what number he will be given; if correct he wins the princess and half the kingdom, but if wrong he is put to death. The first number is 47, but unfortunately after six days he can discern no pattern which would indicate to him what the seventh number is likely to be, and the new evidence hasn't given him much reason to change his initial probabilities. While thinking about the crimson color of the king's flag, suddenly "something clicks in his head":

The balls are crimson! "Crimson" has seven letters. There are seven days in a week. Could the numbers be Gödel numbers spelling out "crimson"? The king's logician has written a logic book. I saw it on the bookshelf. Here it is. Let's see: what is 47 the Gödel number of? Eureka! It's "c." I'll bet the seventh letter will be the Gödel number of "n," that is, 69.<sup>8</sup>

Chihara points out that simply thinking of the new hypothesis radically changed the suitor's probabilities and evidence relations, and the change was not due to any new evidence. The suitor had previously never considered the hypothesis that the numbers were the Gödel numbers of "crimson," but once he thought of it, finding that 47 was the Gödel number of "c" greatly increased the probability that the seventh number would be 69, the Gödel number of "n." Chihara argues that even if the suitor had found out that 47 was the Gödel number of "c" before thinking of the new hypothesis, this would not have resulted in any change in thinking the last number was likely to be 69; without thinking of the new hypothesis, the first number being the Gödel number of "c" didn't mean much at all. Chihara presented his example as a counterexample to orthodox Bayesianism, which requires all change of belief be in accord with conditionalization. Without going into the details of Bayesianism, we can say that rational change of belief is a function solely of the new evidence statement and the old beliefs; thinking of new hypotheses plays no role in the theory.<sup>9</sup> If the suitor were an orthodox Bayesian, this would be a case of

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<sup>7</sup>Charles S. Chihara, "Some Problems for Bayesian Confirmation Theory," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 38 (1987), 551–560.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>9</sup>Otte attempts to accommodate Chihara's example within Bayesianism, or any rule-based epistemology, by characterizing the thinking of the new hypothesis as new evidence. This allows radical conversion to be consistent with rule-based epistemologies, but does so by making the rule consistent with almost any belief change resulting from a new idea. Any rule that allows significant belief change based on coming up with a new idea will be a very permissive rule; very little will be ruled out by any such rule. In this way it is similar to the previously discussed view according to which seeming right always justifies belief change. Since most Bayesians do not allow thinking of new hypotheses to be new evidence, thinking of new ideas may result in cases of radical conversion for them. See Richard Otte, "A Solution to a Problem for Bayesian Confirmation Theory," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 45 (1994), 764–769.

radical conversion, because the suitor changed his beliefs, but not because of acquiring any new evidence. According to the prior view, which does not include the new hypothesis, the suitor should not be confident that the seventh number will be 69. Holding 69 more likely than other numbers would be irrational. Chihara's point is that simply thinking of a new idea can result in our changing our beliefs in ways that are not sanctioned by our old beliefs. We can view this as the new idea giving us a reason to think our old evidential relations among beliefs are in error. Chihara's example shows that some cases of radical conversion are clearly rational; we can be rational even if we change beliefs in ways not sanctioned by our previous commitments.

Van Fraassen's analysis of the problem of radical conversion in scientific revolutions relies on the ambiguity of scientific language. van Fraassen argued that we can understand radical conversion by paying attention to how ambiguities are made clearer. We do not have time to discuss this in the detail it deserves, but ambiguities can be disambiguated in different ways. van Fraassen's idea is that in scientific revolutions the later view can be seen as disambiguating the language in such a way that the new paradigm is a rational continuation of the prior and the prior paradigm can be seen as a special case of the latter. From the later view, vagueness, incompleteness, and ambiguities were seen and made explicit, and this allows for a way to see the new theory as rationally continuous with the past.<sup>10</sup> Suppose that an ambiguity in a concept results in theory T being ambiguous between T1 and T2. Evidence might be very unlikely on T, unlikely on T1, yet very likely on T2. Evidence may disconfirm T, yet confirm T2. A more fine-grained or disambiguated language may contain evidential relations not contained in the less-detailed language. van Fraassen gives the example of mass, which illustrates ambiguities giving rise to different evidential relations. In Newtonian science, mass can be characterized as proper mass, inertial mass, or gravitational mass.<sup>11</sup> These are different concepts, but because they coincide in the Newtonian framework they were not clearly separated. A Newtonian thinking of mass as proper mass will think it absurd that mass varies with velocity, whereas Einstein pointed out that inertial mass varies with velocity. Ambiguities in the Newtonian framework excluded certain ideas that played a central role in a relativistic framework. van Fraassen says:

This example shows at least that the most precise language about nature we have, devised by the most precise of physical scientists, can harbor hidden ambiguities. Here we have the makings of one quick resolution of our dilemma. Conceptual revolutions bring such hidden ambiguities to light; or perhaps we should say, conceptual revolutions can occur when they come to light. So, is the posterior view unintelligible or demonstrably absurd to the

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<sup>10</sup>van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance*, 114, 115, 151.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.



prior? Yes, provided of course that demonstration is given in the ambiguous language of the past! But no, in the (retrospectively) disambiguated terms.<sup>12</sup>

In radical conversion our language or conceptual framework changes in a way that allows the change to be seen as rational.<sup>13</sup> Although this handles many cases of radical conversion, it does not handle all; there may be cases of radical conversion in which the rationality of changing to the later view does not primarily depend on previous ambiguity.

Chihara showed that simply thinking of new ideas can result in radical conversion, and as a result of new ideas it is rational to rearrange and modify our previous beliefs. It is worth noting similarities between van Fraassen's and Chihara's accounts. For Chihara, thinking of a new hypothesis brings a new concept or idea into the language, and with it we get a whole new set of evidential relations. For van Fraassen, disambiguation basically has the same effect. Disambiguating concepts can result in new evidential relations. In both accounts, our conceptual scheme is expanded in such a way that new evidential relations arise.

We have seen that there are cases of radical conversion, and some of these are clearly rational. In addition to van Fraassen's and Chihara's examples, in the example of religious experience we saw that the epistemic implications of having an experience may surprise us, and we may change our beliefs based on that. In general, cases of radical conversion are ones in which one comes to hold that one's previous views about how belief should change were incorrect. In radical conversion, we hold that some of our previous beliefs were in error, perhaps because they were not sensitive to ambiguities, perhaps because they did not account for new ideas, or perhaps because they did not adequately account for experience. From the later point of view, we were earlier in an impoverished epistemic situation, and in radical conversion we correct that error. Our later views are not continuous with our previous ones because we hold the previous ones were in error. We will now use these ideas about radical conversion to compare the thought of Kierkegaard and Plantinga, focussing on their ideas about religious conversion.

#### *Kierkegaard*

[T]he seeker must lack the truth right up until the moment he receives it; he cannot even possess it in the form of ignorance, because then the moment becomes merely an occasion. No, he cannot even be a seeker. This is how the problem must be characterized if we do not want to revert to a Socratic account. He must be defined as being outside the truth (not approaching it

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>13</sup>This account of radical change also allows van Fraassen to account for cases in which the later theory retains the predictive power of the predecessor, which is common in scientific revolutions.

as a proselyte, but going away from it), or as being in error. He is thus in a state of error.<sup>14</sup>

In *Philosophical Crumbs* Johannes Climacus expresses several ideas that reject much of traditional epistemology and lead to a very different picture of our epistemic lives. According to Climacus, we are alienated from God, and we hold the doctrines of Christianity to be unreasonable, unlikely, or even absurd. An encounter with God can cause a change from this epistemic state to one where it is held that Christianity is reasonable and very likely to be true.<sup>15</sup> This is a radical change in one's epistemic life, and is not based on prior beliefs and evidence combined with standard logical and epistemic principles; instead, it is based on the passion of faith. As a result of this new passion, reason will now accept limits to its scope, whereas the contrary passion of offence will lead reason to not accept religious mysteries. Reason is not a neutral judge between these different epistemic positions, which are ultimately based on different passions; these differing passions result in the old and new epistemic states differing in basic and fundamental ways. Of course this is a very brief summary of some of the ideas that Climacus presents, and it is not intended to be anything near an adequate investigation into Climacus's thought.

Climacus often says the doctrines of Christianity are preposterous, absurd, and refers to "the ultimate paradox." The way to read these comments of Climacus is very controversial. Although I do not here have time to argue for this position, I will follow the interpretation of Stephen Evans, who holds that Climacus is not claiming Christian doctrines are logically inconsistent or violate reason.<sup>16</sup> According to Evans, "in saying Christianity is essentially paradoxical, Climacus is not committed to the claim that it is logically contradictory and therefore contrary to reason, but he is committed to the claim that it is something human reason can never master or comprehend."<sup>17</sup> Christianity may be incomprehensible without being contrary to reason. Furthermore, "Climacus . . . regularly uses the term 'contradiction' to refer to what might today be designated as an 'incongruity,' with formal logical contradictions seen as a species of the incongruous."<sup>18</sup> According to this view, in saying Christian doctrines are

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<sup>14</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), 92.

<sup>15</sup>Characterizing Climacus as holding that Christian belief is probable in any sense is controversial. According to Climacus the believer will be certain of Christian belief and does not hold it to be merely probable. However, I am using the term "probable" somewhat differently than Climacus, and holding something to be certain entails holding it to be highly probable, and in saying the believer holds Christianity to be very probable I am not claiming it is less than certain. I here merely characterize the believer's epistemic state very generally, which may also be complicated by having to renew one's faith.

<sup>16</sup>Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.

absurd or preposterous, Climacus is claiming they are very improbable, not that they are logically inconsistent.

One of the most important ideas that Climacus brings up is the idea that there are fundamentally different epistemic positions, and these differ on what is reasonable to believe. Beliefs generally are not reasonable or unreasonable simpliciter, but are reasonable or unreasonable relative to the rest of one's beliefs. When discussing whether it is reasonable to believe something, Climacus instructs us to ask from what perspective we are judging:

But is that which has been developed here conceivable? We will not be hasty in answering. . . . Before we reply, we must ask who it is who should answer the question. To be born, is that conceivable? Yes, why not; but to whom is it conceivable, one who has been born or one who has not been born? The latter is preposterous and could not have occurred to anyone, because he who has been born could never get such an idea. When he who has been born thinks of himself as having been born, he thinks of this transition from not being to being. This must also be the case with respect to rebirth. Or does it make the situation more difficult that the non-being that precedes rebirth contains more being than the non-being that precedes birth? But who can conceive of this? It must be he who is reborn, because it, would be preposterous for one who had not been reborn to think it, and would it not be laughable that such a thing could occur to him?<sup>19</sup>

Although Climacus is discussing who is able to conceive something, we can view the main point behind his use of "conceive" as being what it is reasonable to believe. That is why he equates being preposterous with being unable to conceive. Here Climacus is making the point, often made in twentieth-century discussions of scientific confirmation, that background beliefs are very important in assessing evidence and confirmation. A related point is that judgments of probability will also be relative to one's other beliefs.

This allows us to better understand Climacus's claim that Christian doctrines are improbable, and even "the most improbable."<sup>20</sup> Statements or propositions are not probable or improbable simpliciter, but are probable relative to some set of beliefs. So Climacus's claim is that Christian doctrines are very improbable relative to some set of beliefs; the natural question is, what set of beliefs or perspective is Christianity improbable with respect to? The obvious answer is that Climacus's claim that Christian doctrines are improbable must be viewed as claiming Christian doctrines are improbable from the perspective of the unbeliever. One of Climacus's most important points is that reason, like probability, depends on other personal factors, in ways we will explain shortly. When Climacus speaks of reason, it may appear as if he is speaking of something objective that is neutral and applies to all people. On the contrary, when speaking of

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<sup>19</sup>Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, 97.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 123.

reason he often is referring to the perspective of the unbeliever; believers and nonbelievers will have different background beliefs and views about reason, and Climacus generally talks as if the perspective of the unbeliever is the default position. Christianity is improbable with respect to the belief systems held by non-Christians, but Climacus gives us no reason to think Christian doctrines are improbable for a Christian.

Let us now apply Kierkegaard's thoughts to naturalism and Christianity. Naturalism and Christianity give very different perspectives on many issues. Naturalists will generally claim the central doctrines of Christianity are very unlikely to be true; the idea of God, the incarnation, and other doctrines, are all held to be extremely unlikely. Christians, on the other hand, will think it very likely God exists, along with doctrines such as the incarnation, even if they do not understand them. Although naturalists and Christians may not go so far as to say the others are irrational (this depends on their views about what it is to be rational and irrational), both will judge the central doctrines of the other position to be very unlikely, or preposterous, to use Climacus's phrase. Each will hold that the others are not in good epistemic situations and hold beliefs that are highly unlikely.

Let us suppose that both naturalism and Christianity can be rationally held; there is no clear objective standard of rationality, such as consistency, that either violates. The question that then arises is whether one can rationally reason from one of these positions to the other. Is there a way to reason that will lead a naturalist to become a Christian? Even if both naturalism and Christianity are rational to hold, it does not follow that there is a way to rationally change belief from one to the other based on reasoning. This is simply the question of whether ordinary conversion is possible, or whether all conversion must be radical conversion.

Climacus claims that Christianity is not the sort of religion we'd get if we relied on our reason; in effect, he is rejecting the whole project of natural theology. Climacus sees the non-Christian as not getting closer to the truth by reason, but as actually moving away from it:

To the extent that he was in error, he was constantly moving away from the truth, but in having received the condition in the moment, his course was altered, which is to say that he was turned around. Let us call this change conversion.<sup>21</sup>

It is not the case that rational non-Christians will get closer and closer to Christianity by reasoning; instead, using reason, they will always reject it as being unreasonable. Because of this, any change from one of these positions to the other is not a result of applying some neutral reasoning to available evidence. Conversion is a radical epistemic break with the past; Climacus even describes it as a rebirth, since it is like the transition from non-being to being. For Climacus, conversion is radical, not ordinary. But

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 92.

this does not mean that in conversion we are irrational or epistemically irresponsible. A person who undergoes radical conversion does not believe what they know is false, nor do they become irrational; on the contrary, they simply hold their previous beliefs were in error, and are being responsible in correcting them.

Since conversion is radical, according to Climacus, the basis of conversion is not reason, but passion. When confronted with the paradox of God incarnate, Climacus says we can respond with the passion of faith or the passion of offense. Conversion does not take place because of reasoning about some additional evidence, such as religious experience, but depends on our passions. People could have the same evidence or religious experience, and yet differ wildly on the beliefs formed in response to that experience. In Climacus's discussion of the case of the contemporary disciple, we find him dispelling the notion that more evidence is all that is needed to turn someone into a Christian. Contemporaries of Christ had lots of factual evidence, more than we could ever have, and yet that is not relevant to whether one becomes a Christian.<sup>22</sup> Without the proper heart, no amount of evidence will bring about conversion. What matters in the case of conversion is having the appropriate passion, which Climacus calls faith. According to Evans, it is easy to miss Climacus's point that reason depends on the passions: "From Climacus's perspective, human reason is not a disinterested quest for a god-like view of things, but the expression of a very interested human being."<sup>23</sup> This does not mean that our beliefs are irrational, or that non-rational leaps or choices are the foundation of belief. Conversion is not the result of more evidence. What is needed is a change of heart, which results in radical conversion. Reason is passionate reason.

According to Climacus, the passion of faith accepts limits to reason, but the opposite passion of offence does not. Certainly the Christian will accept that many things about God are simply unknowable by us, in principle. However, it is equally true that anyone, including naturalists who have the passion of offence, must recognize the limits of reason. One result of twentieth-century logic and mathematics is that we now know that many mathematical statements are undecidable. For example, in 1940 Kurt Gödel showed that we could not disprove the generalized continuum hypothesis within standard Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, and in 1963 Paul Cohen showed that we could not prove it either; the generalized continuum hypothesis is undecidable. And even if we stick to empirical facts, there are facts that all will agree are unknowable; for example, facts about any possible states of the universe before the big bang, or facts too far away in space-time. And there are empirical facts not too far away that are practically unknowable; for example, this morning how many spins did a leaf from my apple tree make as it fell to the ground unobserved?

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., chap. V.

<sup>23</sup>Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*, 61.

But perhaps Climacus has in mind issues like the incarnation or whether God has a good reason to permit evil that we don't know about. Many Christians are not worried by their inability to know God's reason for permitting evil; they hold that God's ways are beyond our ways, and it is not surprising that we are unable to determine God's reasons. Many naturalists are of the view that if God had a reason to permit evil we'd know what it was. This issue, and related issues in skeptical theism, are hotly debated today, and are the sort of issues that Climacus thinks depends on passion and not reason.

To summarize, according to Kierkegaard's Climacus, people with different passions have fundamentally different epistemic frameworks. The passion of faith and the passion of offence lead to epistemological positions that result in different judgments of rationality and irrationality. The passion of offence results in viewing Christian doctrines as preposterous and irrational, whereas the passion of faith gives rise to viewing those doctrines as reasonable. On one view, unknowable religious mysteries are not problematic in the sense of being a sign of falseness or irrationality; reason is a limited tool, and we shouldn't expect to comprehend everything. On the other view, the mysteries make it unlikely the beliefs are true, and it is irrational to accept them. The difference between these epistemic positions is not due to one of them having more or less evidence than the other; the difference is due to different passions, not different evidence. Given this, it is clear that according to Climacus any change from one position to the other must be a case of radical conversion; Climacus is clear that one is not going to become a Christian on the basis of evidence or reason. Passions, not reason nor evidence, enable us to see that our previous way of looking at things is in error, and give rise to a new set of beliefs. But even though radical conversion is brought about by passions, these changes are not irrational in any objective sense. Rationality and epistemic judgments depend on the person and the epistemic situation. From the passion of offense, becoming a Christian is irrational, but from the standpoint of faith, the change moves one from a poor epistemic position to a good one. The appropriate passion helps us correct previous errors in judgment. We should not expect reason to do what it is unable to do.

#### *Plantinga*

Unlike Kierkegaard, Alvin Plantinga is one of the most influential analytic philosophers of religion. Throughout his career he has investigated the rational basis of religious belief, and has argued for the rationality of religious belief against various objections. Along with Wolterstorff, Plantinga was a main developer of what has come to be known as Reformed epistemology. In developing Reformed epistemology, Plantinga argues against evidentialism: "Evidentialism is the view that belief in God is rationally justifiable or acceptable only if there is good *evidence* for it, where good

evidence would be arguments from other propositions one knows."<sup>24</sup> In these discussions Plantinga limits the required evidence to propositional evidence, evidence that can be expressed by propositions: "This evidence would be *propositional* evidence: evidence from other propositions, and it would have to come in the form of arguments."<sup>25</sup> One motive for evidentialism is what Plantinga calls classical foundationalism, which he characterizes as holding that in order for religious belief to be justified, it has to be basic (self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible) or derivable in some way from basic beliefs. Religious belief may be classified as irrational or absurd according to evidentialism and classical foundationalism, because religious beliefs are not basic nor are they supported by basic beliefs. However, Plantinga rejects classical foundationalism and claims that many religious beliefs are basic for many rational people; thus these beliefs are justified without being supported by argument. Instead of being absurd, religious beliefs can be rational.

Theologians in the Reformed tradition are suspicious of natural theology, and although his views have evolved, throughout Plantinga's work we find him not looking to argument and natural theology to ground rational religious belief. Any argument for theism can be resisted by rational people, and there is no argument for the existence of God that all rational people must accept. Put another way, Plantinga and the Reformed tradition are very skeptical of positive apologetics, which is the attempt to prove some central tenets of the Christian religion. This is similar to Kierkegaard's idea that one does not become a Christian by reasoning and evidence.

Although Plantinga is skeptical of arguments and propositional evidence for religious belief, this does not mean that he thinks religious belief is groundless, unwarranted, irrational, or without evidence. This is because Plantinga distinguishes between propositional and nonpropositional evidence, and he holds there can be nonpropositional evidence for religious belief, even if there is no propositional evidence. Plantinga argues we have a cognitive faculty, which following Calvin he calls the *sensus divinitatis*, that produces religious beliefs in various circumstances. For example, when I look at the Grand Canyon or a majestic mountain range, the *sensus divinitatis* may produce in me the belief that God is glorious. What is important is that although the resulting religious beliefs are not based on propositional evidence, they are supported by a form of nonpropositional evidence. We do not need propositional evidence to support belief in God, because we have nonpropositional evidence; it is this nonpropositional evidence that supplies warrant and results in religious belief being rational. In contrast to evidentialism, Plantinga holds that religious belief can be warranted and rational without being based on propositional evidence.

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<sup>24</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 70.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

Kierkegaard also recognized the importance of nonpropositional evidence and argued that understanding cannot be reduced to understanding propositions. In *Fear and Trembling* he says: "Even if one were able to convert the whole content of faith into conceptual form, it does not follow that one has comprehended faith, comprehended how one entered into it or how it entered into one."<sup>26</sup> Without the proper passions we may be able to have a certain intellectual understanding of Christianity, but we won't understand what it means to be a Christian. Rational decisions and beliefs are based upon much more than our beliefs about certain propositions.

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga applied his more fully developed epistemological ideas to Christian belief. According to Plantinga, a very rough characterization of warrant is that a belief is warranted if it is formed by a properly functioning cognitive faculty that is aimed at truth in an appropriate environment. Thus, warranted beliefs are the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties. A consequence of this is that religious beliefs produced by the *sensus divinitatis* are warranted if God exists. The reason for this is that God gave us the *sensus divinitatis* in order that we might have true beliefs about him; when working properly in an appropriate environment, it will lead to true beliefs about God. God has given us a cognitive faculty that can reliably produce beliefs about him, and thus beliefs based on this faculty are warranted and rational.

It is worth noting that Plantinga views the *sensus divinitatis* as one of our standard cognitive faculties. In general, beliefs produced by our cognitive faculties are not based on evidence or argument, but are still considered to be part of the deliverances of reason. For example, according to Plantinga the deliverances of reason include, among others, the results of cognitive faculties that produce *a priori* beliefs, beliefs about the external world, and memory beliefs. Since the *sensus divinitatis* is a natural cognitive faculty, the beliefs it produces can be said to be part of the deliverances of reason:

[A] capacity to apprehend God's existence is as much a part of our natural noetic equipment as is the capacity to apprehend perceptual truths, truths about the past, and truths about other minds. Belief in the existence of God is in the same boat as belief in other minds, the past, and perceptual objects; in each case God has so constructed us that in the right circumstances we form the belief in question. But then the belief that there is such a person as God is as much among the deliverances of reason as those other beliefs.<sup>27</sup>

Belief in God is based on reason, and is not a baseless or an arbitrary leap without evidence.

According to Plantinga's model, as a result of nonpropositional evidence, belief in God could be warranted for some and not warranted for

<sup>26</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>27</sup>Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 90.



others, even though they have the same propositional evidence. The *sensus divinitatis* works to various degrees in different people; in some it may work well, and in others it may not work at all. Some will have a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis*, resulting in warranted belief in God, while those whose *sensus divinitatis* is not working may have no rational reason to form belief in God. Plantinga also argues that if God exists, belief in God can be warranted (and will be warranted in the case where the relevant faculty is working properly in the right circumstances), whereas if God does not exist, it probably is not warranted. Thus one's view about the warrant and rationality of religious belief will depend on whether one thinks God exists. From some epistemic situations or perspectives, religious belief will be warranted and rational, yet other epistemic situations will judge it irrational. This coincides nicely with Kierkegaard's view that when assessing the rationality of a belief we need to ask from whose perspective we are judging. Plantinga and Kierkegaard appear to agree that religious belief will be irrational or unreasonable from the perspective of the non-religious, but rational from the perspective of a Christian.

In spite of this agreement, it appears that Plantinga's views about the reasonableness or justification of religious belief are quite different from those of Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus. Although Climacus and Plantinga both agree that religious belief is reasonable from the perspective of a religious person, they differ on why this is so. Plantinga says a person with a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis* will have religious beliefs that are based on reason; Climacus says differing passions instead of differing cognitive faculties account for the different religious beliefs. Plantinga gives us an account of reason which applies to both believers and non-believers; if the *sensus divinitatis* is not working in non-believers, they are in the unfortunate situation of lacking a cognitive faculty that believers have; they are cognitively hindered, and don't have the full complement of operating cognitive faculties that humans are supposed to have. Thus their lack of belief is understandable because it is simply a case of them having to form beliefs without some of their faculties of reason working correctly. In contrast to this, Climacus does not account for the differences between them by the non-believers being cognitively deprived; the difference between believers and non-believers is not due to different evidence, propositional or nonpropositional, but is due to different passions. For example, Climacus writes that the contemporary disciple had no real advantage over us, even though they could see and experience life with Jesus on a daily basis. These contemporaries had an enormous amount of nonpropositional evidence about Jesus, but this does not produce faith. According to Climacus, the difference between the believer and non-believer is not ultimately based on evidence; thus he would reject Plantinga's view that the difference between believer and non-believer is due to nonpropositional evidence. Differences in reasoning are not the basis of the difference between them. Climacus gives us a very different picture, one in which the passions move us from the one epistemic state

to the other. Climacus does not give us an account of nonpropositional evidence, and for him radical conversion is not based on reason.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean it is unreasonable, because there is a difference between being beyond reason and being contrary to reason. For Climacus, reason is not always suited to neutrally choose between positions; reason always works within a framework or perspective. To go beyond that framework, one needs the passions.

Plantinga does not specifically discuss the issue of radical conversion. Since Plantinga usually uses the term "evidence" to refer only to propositional evidence, and much belief change is based on nonpropositional evidence, there will be many cases in which rational belief change is not a function of the previous beliefs and new evidence. Many belief changes typically involve nonpropositional evidence, and there is no way to reason to the new beliefs from the old using propositional evidence. However, these belief changes are based on reason, since they are the result of nonpropositional evidence. This indicates that in discussing Plantinga and radical conversion we should not use the term "evidence" to refer only to propositional evidence, and should use it in a broader sense that includes nonpropositional evidence. Plantinga claims that if we take "evidence" broadly, so that it includes doxastic evidence, then belief is always on the basis of evidence.<sup>29</sup>

However, even if we construe "evidence" broadly, there remains the issue of whether religious conversion is rational according to one's previous perspective; the issue of radical conversion is not settled by noting that beliefs are all based on evidence, broadly construed. Earlier we discussed how evidential relations are relative to a perspective or epistemic framework, and the later perspective seeing the religious beliefs as based on evidence does not imply that the earlier view will consider the conversion to be rational and based on evidence. In discussing Plantinga and radical conversion we should not focus on the term "evidence" and should instead characterize it in terms of whether the belief change is rational from the prior point of view. But before we discuss this, we need to first look at Plantinga's view of the passions, since for Kierkegaard it was the role of the passions in epistemology that brought about radical conversion.

#### *A Deeper Agreement*

So initially it looks as if Plantinga and Kierkegaard's Climacus view the basis of religious belief very differently; for Plantinga it is part of the deliverances of reason based on a cognitive faculty, and for Climacus it is based on passion. But this initial appearance of difference is deceiving. In

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<sup>28</sup>Of course, it is consistent with this position that as a result of the passions moving one to a new epistemic situation, one then has nonpropositional evidence that previously was lacking.

<sup>29</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 192.

chapter 9 of *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga discusses the relation of affection to the model of religious belief he presented. Although Plantinga does not discuss the relation between the *sensus divinitatis* and affections, he notes that there are two ways we can view the relation between beliefs produced by the Holy Spirit and our wills.

What is the relation between affection and belief here, between will and intellect? Which, if either, is primary? Is it that first one sees (i.e., comes to know or believe) that the great things of the gospel and God himself are lovely and amiable, and then comes to love them? Or is it rather that first one comes to love them, thus coming to see that the things in question are, indeed, worthy of love?<sup>30</sup>

Basically, we can view a change in affections as being based on a change in what we believe, or we can view what we believe as being affected by our affections. After much interesting discussion, Plantinga appears to think that neither the affections nor belief is primary, and both are dependent on each other:

There are certain things you won't know unless you love, have the right affections; there are certain affections you won't have without perceiving some of God's moral qualities; neither perceiving nor affection can be said to be prior to the other.<sup>31</sup>

Although a detailed discussion of how affection affects belief is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that having certain affections can blind us and prevent us from forming the beliefs we should. But in addition to this negative influence, the affections often function in a positive way. There are many cases where having the appropriate affections is necessary for holding certain beliefs; if we hold the wrong affections, we'll hold the wrong beliefs. One reason for this is that belief is not simply a passive affair, and affections can lead us to pay closer attention than we would have had we lacked the affections. For example, loving or hating someone may lead us to pay more attention to them than we would if we were indifferent towards them. With regards to religious beliefs, love of God may make us much more likely to accept certain beliefs, such as the Christian story. Plantinga has pointed out that it is unlikely that we will believe things such as that God is worthy of our love and worship, or that it is proper to love God, unless we do love him. So we see that without the appropriate affections our reason may not work the way it was designed to work. Even if our cognitive faculties are designed to produce certain religious beliefs in certain circumstances, they will not function properly if we do not have the right affections. Since Plantinga thinks neither reason nor the affections are more fundamental than the other, both our reason and affections must change in order for there to be conversion. Without the appropriate affections, any nonpropositional evidence will be ineffectual.

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<sup>30</sup>Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 295.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 303–304.

We can now return to the topic of radical conversion. There are at least two ways the *sensus divinitatis* may fail to produce religious beliefs. In one type of case the *sensus divinitatis* may simply not operate correctly, and as a result these people may not believe because they lack the non-propositional evidence for the religious beliefs. They may even say they would believe if they had an operating *sensus divinitatis*. If conversion occurs here it would be ordinary, not radical, because the prior epistemic state supported conversion given the evidence provided by an operating *sensus divinitatis*. In these cases people fail to believe because they lack certain nonpropositional evidence, but they agree it would be reasonable to believe if they had that evidence.

But there are other ways the *sensus divinitatis* may be ineffectual that are very different from the above situation. Recall that both proper affections and a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis* are required to have faith. This raises the possibility of a lack of faith being due to improper affections instead of a malfunctioning *sensus divinitatis*. Some may judge it unreasonable to hold religious beliefs, even if their *sensus divinitatis* is functioning properly. Having the wrong affections may result in holding that reason requires us to ignore the *sensus divinitatis*, and to consider any nonpropositional evidence associated with it to be misleading. A clear example of this is given by Thomas Nagel. Nagel writes:

My instinctively atheistic perspective implies that if I ever found myself flooded with the conviction that what the Nicene Creed says is true, the most likely explanation would be that I was losing my mind, not that I was being granted the gift of faith. From Plantinga's point of view, by contrast, I suffer from a kind of spiritual blindness from which I am unwilling to be cured. This is a huge epistemological gulf, and it cannot be overcome by the cooperative employment of the cognitive faculties that we share, as is the hope with scientific disagreements.<sup>32</sup>

In this passage Nagel indicates that even if he had the sort of doxastic evidence provided by the *sensus divinitatis*, he would judge the religious beliefs unreasonable. Nagel thinks it would not be right for him to form religious beliefs based on the sort of evidence the *sensus divinitatis* gives, and his epistemic views prevent him from forming religious beliefs on the basis of the *sensus divinitatis*.

Now suppose that the *sensus divinitatis* operates in Nagel and he goes against his previous commitments and becomes a Christian, believing the Nicene Creed. This is warranted on Plantinga's model, even though these beliefs are unreasonable from Nagel's previous perspective. Clearly this would be a case of radical conversion, because Nagel's new religious beliefs would be unreasonable from the perspective of his old beliefs, even given the new nonpropositional evidence. We thus see that because the

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas Nagel, "A Philosopher Defends Religion," review of *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, by Alvin Plantinga, *New York Review of Books*, September 27, 2012, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/sep/27/philosopher-defends-religion/>.

affections play a fundamental role in Plantinga's epistemology, as they do in Kierkegaard's, instances of radical conversion will be rational.

The relation between the affections and the passions is not clear, and many identify them and use the terms interchangeably. I think it very plausible that Kierkegaard and Plantinga are talking about the same thing when they use the terms "passions" and "affections." Given this, we see that Plantinga's position is very similar to that of Kierkegaard's Climacus; both hold that our affections or passions play a fundamental role in what we believe. So in spite of it looking as if Plantinga and Kierkegaard's Climacus have radically different views about the basis of religious belief, it turns out that initial appearances are deceptive and their views have much in common. The difference between Plantinga and Climacus may be more a difference in emphasis than a substantive difference. Plantinga thinks that neither reason nor affection is more basic than the other; if we lack either the proper affections or the proper beliefs, we will lack faith. Throughout *Warranted Christian Belief* Plantinga tended to focus on how religious belief could be warranted. Although he discussed the affections, this was not emphasized as much as belief formation. In contrast to this, Climacus emphasized the role of the passions in conversion. Climacus is clear that without the appropriate passion we will lack faith, but he says little about the basis of the passion of faith. Evans argues that "it is clear that Kierkegaard does think therefore that to be a Christian one must believe certain things. He simply does not think that those beliefs can be held in a detached, intellectual manner."<sup>33</sup> In his discussion of responding to the moment, Climacus focusses on the passion of faith instead of our mind coming to see things differently. Thus we see that even though they may emphasize different aspects of conversion, the important thing is that both Plantinga and Kierkegaard realize that our passions and affections play a crucial role in radical conversion.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Evans, "Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge," 202.

<sup>34</sup>I would like to thank Stephen Evans, Bas van Fraassen, Matt Frise, and Alvin Plantinga, for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.