***Philosophical Crumbs*** by Kierkegaard as Johannes Climacus

On the title page Climacus outlines the questions he sets out to answer in the book; “Can an eternal consciousness have a historical point of departure; could such a thing be of more than historical interest; can one build an eternal happiness on historical knowledge?” (p.83)

Chapter I – Thought Project

Climacus begins by asking **the extent to which the truth can be taught**. Starting from the Socratic position as outlined in Plato’s *Meno* Climacus notes that Socrates concluded that “all learning and seeking are merely recollection” (p.88). From this point of view, “every temporal point of departure is *eo ipso* contingent, something vanishing, an occasion; the teacher is no more significant, and if he presents himself or his teachings in any other way, then he gives nothing, but removes” (p.89). In this case, learning the truth from a teacher, *any* teacher, is something that is only of historical interest; i.e. not particularly significant, “because the truth in which I rest was within me and came to the surface by itself.” (p.90)

“If the situation is to be different, then the moment in time must have decisive significance so that I could not for a moment forget it, neither in time nor in eternity, because the eternal, which did not exist before, came to be in this moment.” (p.91) What would have to be true if this were the case?

First, concerning **the prior state**; “If the moment is now to have decisive significance, then the 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… He is thus in a state of error.” (p.92)

Second, **the teacher**. If the teacher is to remind the learner of anything and if the learner is in error, the teacher can only contribute to the learner’s remembering that he or she is actually in error. “But this recollection precisely excludes the learner from the truth even more than when he was ignorant of the fact that he was in error. In this way, the teacher actually thrusts the learner away, precisely by reminding him, as he turns inward and discovers, not that he already knows the truth, but that he is in error.” (p.92) This largely corresponds to the Socratic model above because the teacher, whoever he or she is, “even if he is a god, is only an occasion; because I can discover my own error only by myself. Only when I discover it, and not before, has it been discovered, even if the whole world knew it.” (p.92)

To obtain the truth, the learner must receive not merely the truth, “but also the condition for understanding it; because if the learner had himself the condition for understanding the truth, then he would need only to recollect it” (p.92). To impart the *condition* for understanding the truth would require transforming (i.e. recreating) the learner. “But no human being can do this. If it is to happen, then it must be done by the god himself.” (p.93)

So, the learner has been created by God and given the condition for understanding the truth by Him, but if the moment is to have decisive significance, the learner must have been deprived of this condition (or learning would merely be recollection). “This could not have been brought about by the god (because that would be a contradiction), nor could it have happened by accident (because it is a contradiction to say that the lower could overcome what is higher); he must have then been responsible himself for having lost it.” (p.93)

By summary of this we have: “The teacher is thus the god himself, who functions as an occasion, and occasions the learner’s recollection that he is in error, and this is through his own fault. But this condition, to be in error and to be this through one’s own fault, what should we call it? Let us call it sin.” (p.93)

It appears that this learner is free. He, at least, is in error through his own fault. However, “he is not free, but bound and exiled, because to be free of the truth is to be exiled from it, and to be exiled through one’s own act is to be bound.” (p.93) Since he has bound himself, can he also not free himself? Well, he must *will* it himself, but again, Climacus relies on the supposition that the moment must be decisively significant as an escape clause. If the learner could free himself, the moment wouldn’t be decisively significant, hence “according to our hypothesis, he is unable to free himself.” (p.95)

Back to the teacher; “What should we now call such a teacher who gives him the condition again and, with it, the truth? Let us call him a saviour, because he liberates the learner from his bondage, saves him from himself; a deliverer, because he delivers from bondage one who had bound himself, and no one is so terribly bound, and no bondage so impossible to escape, as that in which the individual places himself! And yet we still have not said enough, because the learner is guilty of having chosen bondage, and this teacher who gives him the condition and the truth is then himself an atonement that removes the wrath that lay over the guilty one.” (p.95)

Finally, Climacus turns to the moment itself. “Such a moment is unique. It is, of course, brief and temporal, as moments are, ephemeral, as moments are, passed, as moments are, in the next moment, and yet it is decisive, and yet it is filled with eternity. Such a moment must have a special name. Let us call it: the fullness of time.” (p.95)

Third, **the disciple**. The change that takes place in the learner is too important to merely say that something has changed within him while he remains essentially the same. What we have now is “a qualitatively different person” and the change is “*conversion*” (p.96). The change takes place in the learner with a certain amount of sadness “over the fact that he had remained for so long in the earlier state.” (p.96) This, we will call *repentence*. Given that the conversion is like the change from not being to being and this change we call birth, Climacus also terms the change a *rebirth*.

Is it conceivable to talk about being born here? Climacus answers this by noting that birth is only conceivable to one who has been born. “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.” (p.97) The fact that the non-being contains more being than the non-being that precedes birth should not distract us in any way. So, the only person who can conceive of what Climacus is talking about is one who has been reborn.

Similarly; “A person becomes conscious in *the moment*, that he was born, because his prior state, to which he must not cling, was precisely one of non-being. He becomes conscious in *the moment* of being born again, because his prior state was one of non-being. If in either case his prior state had been that he did exist, then the moment would not have received decisive significance” (p.98).

Chapter II – The God as Teacher and Saviour

For Socrates teaching was insignificant. Life and its circumstances resulted in him becoming a teacher and he merely became the occasion for someone else to learn something. This is why he wouldn’t charge for his teaching.

So God is the teacher. But God needs nothing, so how is he moved to teach? Through love. “For love does not satisfy itself through something external, but through something internal.” (p.100) In that love is his reason, it must also be the goal, “because it would be incoherent for the god to have a motive and a goal that did not correspond to it. The love must thus be for the learner, and the goal must be to win him, because only in love are the different made equal” (p.101).

The problem with this love is that it is fundamentally unhappy because the two parties are so, and must remain, unequal. “The unhappiness of this love does not lie in the fact that the lovers cannot be united, but in that they cannot understand each other. And this grief is infinitely greater than that of which people normally speak, because it aims at the heart of love and injures for an eternity, unlike the other, which touches only the external and the temporal.” (p.101)

Climacus illustrates this with the example of a king and a peasant girl.

There are two options; by elevating the learner or lowering God. The former won’t work because while drawing the lesser up, bathing her in magnificence “might have satisfied the girl. It could not satisfy the king though, because he does not wish his own glorification, but the girl’s. This was why his sorrow that she did not understand him was so heavy. Even heavier still, though, would be his sorrow at deceiving her.” (pp.104-5)

This leaves only the second option. “But the most lowly is precisely he who must serve others. Thus the god will reveal himself in the form of a *servant*.” (p.106) This explains why God doesn’t overtly appear. We look but don’t see him because we are looking for a magnificent being, not an ordinary human. Now, God doesn’t want to play at being equal to us; “the servant form was not a costume. The god must, therefore, suffer everything, endure everything, hunger in the desert, thirst in anguish, be forsaken in death, absolutely equal to the lowest” (p.107).

For God to reveal himself any other way would have been a deception. The revelation would either have “had to undertake a transformation of the learner and hidden from him that this had been necessary (but love does not alter the beloved, rather it alters itself), or it would have had to allow him to remain ignorant of the fact that the whole understanding was an illusion. (This is the untruth of paganism.)” (pp.107-8) This is also why Jesus didn’t perform miracles on demand. Love requires equality.

Chapter III – The Absolute Paradox

First, Climacus praises paradoxes as the “passion of thought… Thus it is also the highest passion of the understanding to desire an obstacle, despite the fact that the obstacle in one way or another may be its downfall. This is the highest paradox of thought, to want to discover something it cannot think. This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought, also in the thought of the individual, to the extent that in thinking he transcends himself.” (p.111)

Climacus makes the bold assumption that we know what a human being is. The problem is that understanding stops here “because now the paradoxical passion of the understanding that wills an obstacle and wills, without really understanding itself, its own annihilation, is awakened.” (p.112) Here, Climacus seems to be saying that the understanding deliberately throws up an obstacle to itself and it is unable not to do this because it is the nature of passionate thought; i.e. to go to the extremes of what it knows and look for something it cannot think. At every turn, we come across something we cannot think. This something is ourselves; “he who believed he knew himself is no longer certain whether he is a stranger creature than Typhon, or whether there is not in his being a milder and more divine part.” (p.112) It turns out we cannot back up the assumption we began with.

So, our understanding runs up against this thing we don’t know. “But what is this unknown thing against which the understanding, in its paradoxical passion, collides…? It is the unknown. But this cannot be another person, to the extent that he knows what a person is, nor can it be any other thing he knows. So let us call this unknown God.” (p.113) There would be no sense in trying to prove this thing (God) exists because if God doesn’t exist, it would be impossible to prove he does, and anyway, what led us to desire the proof in the first place was the discovery of the thing we are trying to prove; i.e. God.

Climacus makes a couple of extra notes about proving God’s existence next. First, one can’t prove God exists from his works. “One cannot prove God’s existence by the order of things. If I tried, I would never finish, but would have to live *in suspenso*, in case something so terrible should happen that my little proof would be ruined.” (p.115) Second, how would God’s existence emerge from the proof, anyway? Being only appears when one is not engaged with proving it. While one is in the process of proving something, it doesn’t exist; “as long as I am engaged with the proof (i.e. so long as I am in the process of proving it), being does not appear, if for no other reason, than because I am in the process of proving it. As soon as I let go of the proof though, existence is there. But that I let go, this is also something, that is my *Zuthat* [contribution]. Should this not also be taken into account, this little moment, however brief it may be? It does not need to be long, because it is a leap. However brief this moment is, whether it is right now, this instant, it must also be taken into account.” (pp.115-6) Letting go of the proof should also count for something, and if God exists only after such letting go, then this is more decisive than the proof itself.

By way of a quick summary, so far we have; “The paradoxical passion of the understanding is constantly running into this unknown, which certainly exists, but is also unknown, and to this extent, does not exist. The understanding cannot come any further than this, but its paradoxical character cannot help but bring it to this point and preoccupy itself with this limit” (p.117).

What can we say about this unknown thing then? Well, “it is the absolutely different for which one has no distinguishing mark. Defined as the absolutely different, it would appear to be on the way to being revealed, but this is not so, because absolute difference cannot even be thought [by the understanding]” (p.117).

If God is absolutely different from human beings, “this cannot have its basis in what human beings owe to God (for to this extent they are related), but in what they are themselves responsible for, or what they have themselves earned. What then is the difference? What else could it be but sin, since the difference, the absolute difference, is something human beings have themselves earned? We expressed this above by saying that the human being was in error, and was such through his own fault” (p.119).

We now find the paradox has a “double character through which it shows itself to be the absolute negatively by emphasizing the absolute difference of sin, and positively by wanting to annul this difference through absolute likeness.” (p.119)

This absolute paradox (emphasising the difference in sin, but wanting to annul the difference in likeness) crushes the understanding which cannot stand up under this weight. But, recall that the “paradoxical passion of the understanding is [also] to will its own annihilation… thus they have an understanding, but this understanding is present only in the moment of passion.” (p.120)

Climacus draws an interesting analogy with this and romantic love. “Self-love lies at the foundation of love, but the height of its paradoxical passion is precisely to will its own downfall [through loving another]. This is also what love desires, and thus these two forces understand each other in the moment of passion, and this passion is precisely love… Self-love has indeed been conquered. Despite this, however, it is not destroyed, but rather taken hostage, and is romantic love’s *spolia opima* [spoils of war]. It can come to life again though, and this is the temptation of romantic love. Thus it is also with the relation between the paradox and the understanding, only this passion has another name, or more correctly: we must find another name for it.” (p.120)

*Addendum – Offence at the Paradox*

“If the paradox and the understanding come together in the mutual understanding of their difference, then the encounter is happy like romantic love’s understanding, happy in the passion to which we have not yet given a name, and will not give a name until later. If the encounter is not one of mutual understanding, then the relationship is unhappy, and this… we could refer to more specifically as: *offence*.” (pp.120-1)

Offence is fundamentally passive but it contains an active element in that it cannot allow itself to be annihilated. The point of this is that anything that one says from offence (remember that offence is passive and so can’t come to any understanding itself) comes from the paradox, not the offence; “One who is offended does not speak with his own voice, but with the voice of the paradox” (p.122).

At this point, Climacus takes time to equate the moment with the paradox; “If we posit the moment, then we get the paradox, because, in its most abbreviated form, the paradox could be called the moment. It is with the moment that the learner comes to be in error. The person who knew himself becomes confused about himself, and instead of self-knowledge he receives sin-consciousness, etc., because as soon as we assert the moment the rest follows of itself.” (p.122)

Now, we have seen that from the Socratic perspective the moment lacks significance. In fact, it does not exist, has not been, and will not come. The learner has the truth with him or her and the moment is a jest. This is precisely what offence says; “The expression of offence is that the moment is foolishness, the paradox is foolishness, which is really the claim of the paradox that the understanding is the absurd, but which resonates within, and thus appears to come from, the offence.” (p.123)

Chapter IV – The Situation of the Contemporary Disciple

The God cannot send someone in his place to convey the teaching because the “god’s presence is not incidental to his teaching, but essential” (p.126). So, the God appears on Earth as a servant and wherever he goes “a crowd flocks around him, curious to see, curious to hear, greedy to be able to tell others that they have seen and heard him. Is this curious mob the learner? Not at all.” (p.127) The learner is the one who sees in the teacher the occasion of the eternal and understands that “*the moment* is actually decisive for eternity!” (p.128)

But how can the learner come to “an understanding with this paradox, because we do not say that he should understand the paradox, but understand only that it is the paradox? We have already shown how this happens. It happens when the understanding and the paradox meet happily in the moment; when the understanding sets itself aside and the paradox gives itself; and this third thing, in which this happens (because it happens neither through the understanding, which is excused, nor through the paradox which offers itself – but *in* something), is the happy passion we will now give a name, even if the name is not really important to us. We will call it: *faith*.” (pp.128-9)

The significance of *the moment* and the fact that it deals only with the eternal means that “the historical, in the concrete sense, is unimportant here. We can allow ignorance to come into play and to destroy one piece of historical knowledge after another; if only the moment remains as the point of departure for the eternal, the paradox will be there.” (p.129) This means that being contemporary with the teacher confers no direct benefits. Climacus considers three contemporaries of the teacher. The first records every single thing the teacher did, following him as much as humanly possible. The second records every word of instruction the teacher uttered. The third lived overseas and only saw the teacher when he was on his deathbed. The third person has just as much chance to be a true disciple as the other two; in fact, probably a greater chance. “For the first contemporary, the teacher’s life was merely a historical event; for the second, it was an occasion for an increase in his self-knowledge, and he would thus be able to forget the teacher (see Chapter I); for in relation to an eternal knowledge of oneself, knowledge of the teacher is only accidental and historical knowledge, a matter for memory.” (p.130)

The disciple’s relation to the teacher is expressed in “this happy passion we call faith, the object of which is the paradox; but paradox precisely unites contradictories, is the eternalizing of the historical and the historicizing of the eternal. Anyone who understands the paradox in any other way may retain the honour of having explained it, which honour is won through an unwillingness to be content with understanding it.” (p.131)

Belief “is not a kind of knowledge; because all knowledge is either knowledge of the eternal that excludes the temporal and the historical as unimportant, or it is purely historical knowledge. No knowledge can have as its object the absurdity that the eternal is the historical. If I know the teachings of Spinoza, then in that moment in which I know them, I am not concerned with Spinoza, but with his teachings, while at another time I may be concerned with him historically. The disciple, on the other hand, relates, through faith, to the teacher in such a way that he is eternally concerned with his historical existence.” (p.131) This means that the teacher is essential for faith; indeed, “the object of faith is not *the teaching*, but the *teacher*... But in order for the teacher to be able to give the condition, he must be the god, and in order to ensure that the learner receives the condition, he must be a human being. This contradiction is the object of faith and the paradox, the moment.” (p.131) Faith is not therefore an act of will because “all human willing is efficacious only within the condition” (p.132) and this condition can only be given by God.

“How then does the learner become a believer or disciple? When the understanding is excused and he receives the condition. When does he receive it? In the moment. What does this condition determine – his understanding of the eternal. But such a condition must be an eternal condition. – Thus in the moment he receives the eternal condition, and he knows that he has received it in the moment because otherwise he merely recollects that he has had it from eternity.” (p.133)

*Interlude – Is the past more necessary than the future?*

*or*

*Has the possible, by having become actual, become more necessary than it was?*

*Becoming*

Climacus asks here what the change of *becoming* is. All other change presupposes “that the thing that undergoes the change exists” (p.141) This is not the case with becoming because “if the thing that comes into existence does not remain unchanged in the change of becoming, then the thing that comes into existence is not this becoming, but another” (p.141) and what we have is an instance of transition from one genus to another; not becoming. In a good analogy, Climacus asks; “If a plan is altered in its realization, then it is not this plan that is realized. If, on the other hand, it is realized without alteration, then what is this change?” (p.141)

The solution he hits on is that the change “is not in essence, but in being. It is a change from not being to being. But this non-being, which the thing that comes to be leaves behind must also have some sort of being, otherwise ‘that which comes to be would not remain unchanged in this coming to be’, unless it had not existed at all, in which case the change of becoming would again for another reason be absolutely different from every other change, because it would not be a change at all, because every change always presupposes a something. But the sort of being that is nevertheless non-being is precisely possibility, and a being that is being is precisely actual being, or actuality, and the change of becoming is thus the transition from possibility to actuality.” (p.141)

What about *necessary*. Necessity cannot come to be. “Becoming is a change, but the necessary can in no way be changed because it always relates to itself and relates to itself in the same way. All becoming is a *suffering*, and the necessary cannot suffer, cannot suffer the suffering of actuality, which is that the possible (not only the possibility that is excluded, but also the possibility that is accepted) shows itself to be nothing the instant it is actualized, because possibility is *annihilated* by actuality. Everything that comes to be shows precisely with this becoming that it was not necessary, because the only thing that cannot come to be is the necessary, because the necessary *is*.” (p.142)

So, possibility and actuality are not different in essence, but in being; the former being not-being, the latter being. This shared essence is precisely *becoming*. Necessity, on the other hand, “is not a determination of being but of essence, in that it is the essence of the necessary to be” (p.142). Therefore, being completely different in essence from possibility and actuality, necessity cannot be their unity – the traditional position.

This means that the change of becoming is actuality and, given that necessity plays no role here, “the transition takes place with freedom… All becoming occurs freely, not necessarily; nothing that becomes comes to be from a logical ground, but everything because of a cause. Every cause terminates in a freely acting cause. The illusion created by the intervening causes is that the becoming appears necessary; their truth is that, as having themselves come to be, they definitively point back to a freely acting cause.” (p.143)

*The Historical*

Everything that has come to be is historical. In this sense, nature has a history, although it doesn’t have a dialectical relationship with time. The eternal doesn’t have a history. It is “the only thing that is and yet absolutely without a history.” (p.143) Becoming, on the other hand, can “contain a redoubling—i.e. the possibility of another becoming within its original becoming. Here is the historical in the stricter sense which is dialectical with respect to time. The becoming that is here the same as the becoming of nature is a possibility, a possibility that is nature’s whole actuality. But this genuine historical becoming takes place within a becoming, this must be remembered. The more specific historical becoming comes to be through a relatively freely acting cause, which always definitively points back to an absolutely freely acting cause.” (pp.143-4)

*The Past*

“What has happened has happened and cannot be undone; thus it cannot be changed” (p.144), however, as is clear from our earlier discussions, this is not the immutability of necessity. From the fact that the past is actual and cannot be otherwise, it doesn’t follow that it was necessary. Likewise, the future hasn’t happened yet, but this doesn’t make it *less* necessary than the past. “If it were possible at any point to speak of the appearance of necessity, then it would no longer be possible to speak of ‘the past’ and ‘the future’.” (p.144)

*The Apprehension of the Past*

Nature only has immediate existence. On the other hand, “[w]hat is dialectical with respect to time has an internal duplicity in that, after having been present, it can exist as past.” (p.145) Whatever is historical is certain because it happened, but also contains uncertainty because, as becoming, it didn’t have to be. This is what Climacus calls the *duplicity* of becoming.

Apprehending the past from a great distance as it were, we can be mistakenly led to believe it was necessary. “(Distance in time occasions an intellectual deception, just as distance in space occasions a sense deception. The contemporary does not see the necessity of what comes to be, but when centuries lie between the becoming and the observer — then he sees the necessity” (p.146).

So, how is knowledge of the past even possible in the first place? “The historical cannot be sensed immediately because it has within it becoming’s *duplicity*. The immediate impression of a natural phenomenon or of an event is not an impression of the historical, because becoming cannot be immediately sensed, but only presence. But the presence of the historical has becoming within it, otherwise it is not the presence of the historical.” (p.147)

“Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive. This in itself shows that the historical cannot be the object of either, because the historical has within it the duplicity that is becoming’s. In relation to the immediate, becoming is namely a duplicity through which that which is most certain is made doubtful.” (p.147) Climacus is saying that what has happened can be immediately known (because we are in the realm of presence), but *that* it has happened cannot (because this is a becoming which cannot be known). And yet we do say we know what happened in the past. How? “This much is clear: the organ for the historical must be made in likeness to the historical itself, it must have something within it through which it constantly in its certainty cancels the uncertainty that corresponds to the uncertainty of becoming, which is twofold: the nothingness of non-being, and the annihilated possibility, which is, in addition, the annihilation of every other possibility. Such is precisely the nature of belief; because in the certainty of belief there is constantly present as cancelled the uncertainty that in every way corresponds to the uncertainty of becoming. Belief thus believes what it does not see; it does not believe that the star is; it sees that; but it believes that the star has come to be. The same thing is true in relation to an event. What has happened can be immediately known, but that it has happened cannot. It cannot even be known that it is happening, not even if it is happening, as they say, right under one’s nose. The duplicity of what has happened is that it has happened, wherein lies a transition from nothing, from non-being and from the manifold possible ‘how’.” (p.148)

Climacus now looks at Greek scepticism, which he holds “doubted not by virtue of knowledge, but by virtue of will (withheld assent…). From this it follows that doubt can be cancelled only through freedom, through an act of will… The Greek sceptic does not deny the correctness of sensation and immediate cognition. Error, he says, has a completely different source; it comes from the inferences I draw. If I can just refrain from drawing any inferences, then I will never be deceived… Therefore, the sceptic remains constantly *in suspenso*, and this condition was precisely what he willed.” (p.148). The purpose of this was to achieve peace of mind.

So, Greek doubt allowed the ‘knowledge’ gained from sensation and immediate cognition; it merely refused to draw inferences from it (a free act). Similarly, “belief is not a type of knowledge, but a free act, an expression of will. It believes becoming and has thus in itself cancelled the uncertainty that corresponds to the nothingness of non-being. It believes the ‘thus’ of that which has come to be and has therefore in itself cancelled the possible ‘how’, without denying the possibility of another ‘thus’, and yet the ‘thus’ of that which has come to be is the most certain for faith.” (p.149) Belief is therefore not an inference but a decision, and because of this, doubt is excluded.

I can immediately know something exists but to know that it is an effect is to have already made it “doubtful through the uncertainty of becoming. But if belief decides this, then doubt is removed; in the same moment the equilibrium and indifference of doubt is removed, not by knowledge, but by the will. Thus, from the perspective of approximation, faith is supremely disputable (because the uncertainty of doubt contains an equivocation that is strong and insurmountable — *disputare* is fundamental to it), and yet indisputable by virtue of its new quality. Belief is the opposite of doubt. Belief and doubt are not two different types of knowledge that can be determined in continuity with each other, because neither of them is a cognitive act; they are opposite passions. Belief is a sense for becoming and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that goes beyond immediate sensation and immediate cognition.” (p.150)

*Supplement – Application*

Climacus now applies what he has been discussing by returning to the presupposition that the God has been. This fact “cannot become historical for immediate sensation or cognition, no more for the contemporary than for one who comes later… It has no immediate contemporary because it is historical in the first sense (belief in the ordinary sense) and it has no immediate contemporary in another sense in that it is based on a contradiction (faith in the eminent sense)… Every time the believer allows this fact to be an object of belief, allows it to become historical in itself, he repeats the dialectical determinations of becoming.” (pp.152-3) The fact of the God appearing is a fact for faith alone.

Interestingly, Climacus claims that one cannot *believe* that there is a God. “Belief is not concerned with essence, but with being, and the acceptance that there is a God determines him eternally, not historically. The historical is that the god came to be (for the contemporary), that he has been present in that he has come to be (for one who comes later). But precisely herein lies the contradiction. No one can be immediately contemporary with this historical fact (cf. the preceding). It is an object of faith because it concerns becoming. The issue here is not the truth of the assertion that the god has come to be, but whether one will accept this, accept that the eternal being of God is inflected in the dialectical determinations of becoming.” (p.153)

Chapter V – The Disciple at Second Hand

Climacus first looks at differences among non-contemporaneous disciples. The first generation of secondary disciples are closer to the immediate certainty. However, we have already seen being “closer to it is surely a deception, because he who is not so close to an immediate certainty as to be immediately certain, is absolutely distanced from it.” (p.155) His greater certainty would only be from a historical perspective. The greatest advantage for this generation is that, being so near to the tremor, they become more aware of it, whether they end up believing or being offended.

The latest generation is far from the initial event but has the consequences. The problem is that if the initial fact was a paradox, then the consequences will also be just as paradoxical. The advantage of these consequences is that over time they help to make the fact seem more natural. Of course, this advantage is tempered somewhat by the fact that the consequences have been built up through successive steps, passing through the interpretative lenses of each intervening generation.

So, this fact is an absolute fact. That means that “every period is equally near to it” (p.163) and the passage of time doesn’t determine the relation of individuals to it. Nevertheless, it is also an historical fact. “The absolute fact is a historical fact, and as such an object of faith. The historical aspect should certainly be accentuated, but not in such a way that it becomes absolutely decisive for individuals” (p.163) or else it would then be an advantage to be contemporary.

The non-contemporaneous disciple then receives the condition from God, not from those who preceded him. If “the contemporary gives the condition to the one who comes later, then the latter will come to believe in him. He receives the condition from the contemporary, and in this way the contemporary becomes the object of faith for the one who comes later” (p.164).

If we consider this along with everything we have talked about to this point (especially, *the moment*) this means that “there is not and cannot be any talk of a disciple at second hand, because the believer (and only he is a disciple) constantly has the autopsy of faith and does not see through others’ eyes, but sees the same thing every believer sees — with the eyes of faith.” (p.165)

So, what can the contemporary do for the one who comes later? He can say that he believed this fact. This is quite different from stating something historical; “When I say: this or that has happened, then I am recounting something historical; but when I say ‘I believe and have believed, that this has happened, *despite the fact that it is foolishness to the understanding and an offence to the human heart*’, then I have in the same instant precisely done everything possible to inhibit others from determining their own views in immediate continuity with mine, to decline any companionship, in that each individual must conduct himself in precisely the same way.” (pp.165-6)

How is the credibility of the contemporary significant for the one who comes later? It isn’t. “If he wishes to believe… because many righteous people on the hill have believed… then he is a fool” (p.166)

So what is the relation of the one who comes later to the contemporary in brief? “[T]he one who comes later believes on account of (through the occasion of) the contemporary’s report by virtue of the condition he has himself received from the god. The contemporary’s report is the occasion for the one who comes later, just as immediate contemporaneousness was the occasion for the contemporary.” (p.167)

In conclusion then, “There is no disciple at second hand. The first and the last are essentially equal, except that the later generation has its occasion in the report of the contemporaries, while the contemporaries have their occasion in immediate contemporaneousness and thus are not beholden to any other generation for anything.” (p.168)

*The Moral*

Climacus summarises the whole work by noting that “here we have assumed a new organ: faith, and a new presupposition: the consciousness of sin; a new decision: the moment, and a new teacher: the god in time.” (p.173)