Justifying Isaac: Is There a Reasonable Condition wherein Isaac Might Surrender His Life to an Alleged Divine Command?

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Contents

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NOTE: Underlying this particular essay are some important reflections on the nature on Divine Authority. While the conclusion is somewhat tentative, there are other implications which are only hinted at in this text. Also, there are some fairly intense criticisms of the Kierkegaardian position. Nevertheless, I am an admirer of Kierkegaard. He has written some remarkable books.

Introduction

The *Aqedah*[1] (the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22), as it is referred to in the Jewish tradition, has occupied a major place in ethical debate.[2] Indeed, one may currently choose to purchase from at least 10,517 related books. The primary focus of this corpus is on Abraham's conduct: 'Was the patriarch justified in attempting to sacrifice his innocent son?'[3] But this almost exclusive focus is unfortunate, because while Abraham's position is of considerable interest, Isaac's may be the more fascinating (and more relevant). It is unlikely that the average individual will find himself challenged by an alleged divine command to kill an innocent child. Yet, there is a sense in which the average individual may likely be challenged by a third party attempting to impose an alleged divine command upon his[4] life.

This second challenge takes many forms. It may come as an evangelical fundamentalist demanding that one must surrender his life to a particular religious ideal; it may come as a radical Islamic cleric demanding that one must surrender his life for the sake of Jihad. But the issue was especially critical for the 59 innocent Muslims who died on September 11, 2001.[5] Given the choice to resist, were they morally obligated to surrender? Consider the dilemma faced by Rahma Salie, a twenty-eight-year-old devout Muslim, and a passenger on American Airlines Flight #11.[6] Rahma was seven months pregnant.

If, in the interest of philosophical discovery, one grants Isaac a certain degree of autonomy, then the *Aqedah* offers a stimulating set of new problems. Moreover, this grant may be justified for other reasons. While many have assumed that the Isaac of the *Aqedah* was a young child, the biblical account does not reveal his age. The Jewish scholar Jon Levenson argues that Isaac 'must have been thirty-seven at the time of his being bound on the altar for sacrifice' (Levenson: 133). Certain rabbis propose an alternate *Midrashic* calculation of

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[1] Cf. Genesis 22:1-19.

[2] In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in divine command theory. Robert Merrihew Adams' essay, 'A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness,' has sparked considerable debate. Others, including Philip Quinn and Richard Mouw, have contributed to the growing dialogue.

[3] A comprehensive review of the current corpus on the subject, using a combination of Boolean perimeters and physical inspection, yields a surprising number of printed works: in the Library of Congress 84, in the British Library 369, in the Questia Scholar's Database 3,434, and in the Google Scholar's Project 4,168. Apart from these archived resources, one may currently choose to purchase from at least 10,517 related books (see Appendix C).

[4] I will use the masculine gender in this paper as an inclusive term for both genders. This is done only to avoid cumbersome prose.

[5] Cf. Islamic Circle of North America and the Newsday Victims Database for a relatively complete list of Muslim victims in the attacks. Also, see 'Muslim Victims of September 11th Attack', http://islam.about.com/blvictims.htm.

[6] Flight #11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

twenty-six.[1] And there is a pre-rabbinic account that places Isaac at fifteen.[2] Furthermore, the *Midrash,* which eloquently describes a tension between Isaac's fear and his obedience, claims definitively that he voluntarily participated in the ordeal:

> Rabbi Isaac said: At the moment that Abraham sought to bind his son Isaac, he said to him, "Father, I am a young man and I am fearful that my body will tremble out of fear of the knife and I cause you sorrow, so that the slaughter will be rendered unfit and this will not be accredited to you as a sacrifice. Therefore, bind me very tightly" (Gen. Rab. 56:8).

In the same way that philosophers have challenged Abraham to justify his attempt to sacrifice Isaac, this paper will challenge Isaac to justify his submission to Abraham's claim. The project requires us to address an autonomous 'Isaac', not unlike the 'Isaac' of the *Aqedah*, as defined in the *Midrash*.[3] Accordingly, we might note two other characteristics: (1) that he considers Abraham's claim credible enough to deserve consideration, and (2) that he embraces the model of 'God as Good' (YHWH), in keeping with the Jewish tradition and the text itself.

Of this Isaac, one must ask, 'Is there a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might surrender his life to an alleged divine command?' I will argue in the affirmative, but that such a condition is just possible, and that it involves extreme risks. The argument will examine the respective positions of two thinkers: Immanuel Kant and Soren Kierkegaard. Then, it will attempt to resolve certain difficulties with each thinker's position by arguing for an epistemological reversal of responsibility.

Reasonable

At the outset of this investigation, it will be helpful to clarify the task before us. The aim of this paper is strictly limited to answering the question, 'Is there a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might surrender his life to an alleged divine command (ADC)[4]?' It is not to answer the question, 'Is there a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might *refuse* to surrender his life to an ADC?' Moreover, the aim of this paper is not to answer the question, 'Is there a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might obey an ADC that demands the life of another innocent person (Abraham's case)?' Indeed, this paper's task may be succinctly expressed by resorting to one of the simplest conditional expressions:

WHEREIN:

P   = ?

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[1] Cf. Rab. 56:8; also, see Rab. 54:6.
[2] Cf. Jub. 17:15-16; also see E. Nestle, 'Wie alt war Isaak bei der Opferung?', ZAW 26, 1906, pp. 281-82.
[3] There is an interesting parallel to Isaac's dilemma told of Rabbi Samuel and his son, Yehiel. In this medieval account, choosing to resist a forced conversion to Christianity, Yehiel 'offered his throat for slaughter by his father'. Whereupon, the father recited the appropriate blessings for cattle and foul, and the son responded with "Amen"'. Cf. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*; also, Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, p. 22.
[4] Hereinafter, ADC shall refer to an alleged divine command, while a DC shall refer to an authentic divine command.

Q = Isaac may reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life

FORM:

P → Q

INSTANCE:

If P, then Isaac may reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life.

So then, the task is to solve for proposition P. But before one can attempt to solve for P, one must recognize the implied standard in proposition Q. If this standard is not clarified, one cannot determine P. The standard in Q is reflected by the modifier 'reasonable'. Isaac is being asked to justify his decision with a condition that is reasonable, but this task requires clarity as to the precise meaning of this modifier. And to date there is no completely formal theory of inductive inference that defines the concept 'reasonable'. C.S. Evans contends that 'most sociologists argue, with a good degree of plausibility, that by and large what counts as "reasonable" is what is accepted as reasonable in a society by those with power and authority to shape the process of socialization'[1] (94).

J.R. Lucas discusses the problem in his essay, 'The Philosophy of the Reasonable Man', raising the question, 'What are the cannons of being reasonable?' (97). Lucas emphasizes the difficulties with formalizing a standard. He points to the work of others, including Rudolf Carnap, Carl Gustav Hempel and David Pole, but concludes that 'the program of the formalizers loses its spell' upon closer examination (99). He then offers a compromise in the form of a sociological standard,[2] but concedes that it is a 'partial and inadequate attempt' (100).[3] Notwithstanding these difficulties, this paper's thesis addresses extreme ethical issues and, as such, its use of the word 'reasonable' must communicate with a measure of perspicuity. Somehow, a working definition must be developed. Hence, it may be helpful now to consider a particular essay by Immanuel Kant from which a definition might be adopted.

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[1] Cf. Michel Foucault's thinking, in particular, see his 'Afterword' that appears at the end of Dreyfus and Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.*

[2] Lucas presents three propositions: (1) 'A great many people are sometimes able to say that one argument is reasonable and another is not, or that one argument is more reasonable than another'. (2) 'The judgments of different people on the same arguments…tend to coincide, though they are far from completely coinciding'. (3) 'With persons, being reasonable turns out in fact to be a dispositional rather than an episodic quality' (100).

[3] Lucas' standard has merit, but it also has problems. For if one bases their notion of 'reasonable' on the opinion of a select group of individuals, one risks engaging in a common validation error: Sample Selection Distortion. Uneven sample selection can skew results. And history is replete where large segments of the population violently disagree on fundamental issues. I have written elsewhere on this error in my work, 'The Fundamentals of Experimental Design'. Also see G.L. Patzer's book, *Experiment-Research Methodology in Marketing: Types and Applications*, and W.G. Cochran and G.M. Cox's work, *Experimental Designs.*

Kant

In his *Concerning the Guiding Thread of Conscience in Matters of Faith*, Kant specifically addresses the *Aqedah,* as he examines the hypothetical consequences of a grand inquisitor who condemns a heretic to death. Kant claims that condemning a man to death for the sake of one's faith is morally indefensible. Kant's claim deserves analysis, but the following strictures must be noted:

(1) While much of this discussion will involve Abraham's dilemma, it is still directly relevant to Isaac's dilemma. (2) Moreover, this analysis of Kant is narrowly focused on a single essay, *The Guiding Thread.* (3) And this analysis is *most definitely not an attempt* to represent the full Kantian (particularly post-1770) position. (4) *The Guiding Thread* is chosen because it expressly refers to Abraham, and because it suggests a way forward for this paper's discussion. (5) Kant's most forceful argument from *The Guiding Thread* is expressed in the following passage:

> That God has ever manifested this awful will is a matter of historical documentation and never apodictically certain. After all, the revelation reached the inquisitor only through the intermediary of human beings and their interpretation, and even if it were to appear to him to have come from God himself (like the command issued to Abraham to slaughter his own son like a sheep), yet it is at least possible on this point that error has prevailed. Then the inquisitor would risk the danger of doing something which would be to the highest degree wrong (6.187).[1]

Essentially, Kant[2] is arguing that Abraham cannot be certain that a particular command is from God, while he can be certain that killing an innocent child is wrong. A detailed textual analysis of *The Guiding Thread* allows for a deductive construction of the Kantian position. This construction is necessary so that Kant's propositions regarding Abraham may be (at least roughly) translated to Isaac.

WHEREIN:

KNP = Abraham cannot be certain that God has commanded him to kill an innocent child[3]

KNQ = Abraham ought not to kill an innocent child

FORM:

1. KNP → KNQ
2. KNP

3. ∴ KNQ (MODUS PONENS)

INSTANCE:

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[1] This paper is employing the numbering system adopted by the Cambridge Text.
[2] My references to Kant in this paper will refer only to the 'Kant' of the essay, *Concerning the Guiding Thread of Conscience in Matters of Faith.*
[3] This paper will let 'KN' signify Kant's position, in order to distinguish the various Kantian propositions from the Kierkegaardian propositions.

1. If Abraham cannot be certain that God has commanded him to kill an innocent child, then Abraham ought not to kill an innocent child.
2. Abraham cannot be certain that God has commanded him to kill an innocent child.
3. Therefore, Abraham ought not to kill an innocent child.

Kant's position will be contrasted later in this paper with Kierkegaard's, but it may be useful to examine a more recent critic of Kant in the hopes of drawing out particular nuances useful to this discussion. Phillip Quinn, in his *Religious Obedience and Moral Autonomy*, argues that while Kant's claim is 'bound to be attractive to many contemporary philosophers', it is a claim that 'Abraham, and other theists, need not accept' (59). Three inductive propositions summarize his counter:

(P1) 'Abraham can reasonably judge that, in cases of conflict of duties, his actual duty is to obey God's commands'. (P2) 'Abraham might have very good reasons, at least, it seems, in terms of the evidential canons of his theistic conceptual framework for believing that God has given him a command'. (P3) 'Hence, he might be certain that God has said to kill Isaac, and dubious about the claim that one ought not to kill an innocent child' (59-61).

Quinn concludes, 'it is fairly clear that this Abraham is no knight of faith; he is a moral rationalist who disagrees with Kant about the probative force of various sorts of evidence' (59). He claims that Abraham is at least 'logically consistent', and that there is no argument that shows it is impossible for God to command someone to kill an innocent child.

The weakness of Quinn's position is not readily apparent. Formally, one might construct a valid argument from his various statements. Clearly, if Abraham has a sufficient reason to trust a DC,[1] then Abraham has sufficient reason to obey the DC. But such careful structuring of deductive propositions hardly yields a philosophic gain. Two observations are in order:

1. Quinn's most significant problem is with the circular nature of P2 and P3. He supports P3 (his conclusion) by referencing a 'theistic conceptual framework' in P2. In effect, he says 'Abraham might know that he has a *present* command from God because Abraham already knows that he has a *prior* command (or set of commands) from God'.

2. The question follows, 'How did Abraham come to know the prior commands of God that formed his "theistic conceptual framework"?' Is one to believe that Abraham came to know that the prior command was authentic by a command that was given even prior to

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[1] As stipulated earlier, in this paper an ADC shall refer to an alleged divine command, while a DC shall refer to an authentic divine command.

it? If yes, then the loop is endless. If no, then the claim is pointless. In either case, the argument is fatally flawed.[1]

Quinn might have achieved more had he argued against two other more vulnerable points in Kant's position: namely, that (1) the warrant for Kant's claim is a dubious assertion, and that (2) the application of Kant's claim implies a semantic contradiction. Both problems should be briefly examined – not to refute Kant, but rather to suggest a solution for proposition P.

Assertion

Kant warrants his argument with the following assertion: 'It is a moral principle, requiring no proof, that *we ought to venture nothing where there is a danger that it might be wrong (quod dubitas, nec feceris! Pliny)*' (6:186). This declaration is bold, but fraught with difficulty.

First, Kant's quotation of Pliny is taken out of context. The quote is from *Epistles 1:18*, where Pliny is answering a client who has asked to postpone a court hearing. The client is frightened because of a foreboding dream. Pliny encourages the client to give the dream a positive interpretation and relates a similar event from his own life:

> See then if you can follow my example, and give a happy interpretation to your dream; but if you still think there is more safety in the warning given by all cautious folk, 'When in doubt, do nothing,' you can write and tell me.[2]

As Allen Wood and George di Giovani note, Pliny was not referencing a moral issue.[3] And the concepts of 'right and wrong' as used by Kant in this instance do not directly correlate with the meaning of 'When in doubt, do nothing'. And while a moral dilemma could be defined as a choice between 'action a' or 'no action', it is often defined as a choice between 'action a' or 'action b'.

Second, and this point is more significant, Kant's warrant is an idealization that collapses under moral pressure. One may posit a scenario wherein a choice must be made between two alternatives, neither of which is clearly right.

(action a) v (action b)

In this case, by applying Kant's maxim, one might determine it is better to do nothing at all. But this does not prepare one for the moral dilemma wherein doing nothing seems clearly

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[1] Quinn might counter that the 'theistic framework' does not imply a prior revelation, but only a system of generally accepted propositions. However, if he is using these propositions as a means of evaluating the truth of an ADC, then he is necessarily ascribing them with ultimate authority. This implies a fallacy, the nature of which will be discussed later in this paper.
[2] Cf. Pliny the Younger 'Epistles', 1:18, in *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, Radice, B. (tr.) Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 55.
[3] Cf. Kant, I., *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: and Other Writings*, Wood, A.W. and di Giovanni, G. (ed. and tr.), with introduction by Robert Merrihew Adams, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 221.

wrong, while doing something forces one to choose from dubious moral alternatives (either 'action a' or 'action b').[1]

1. $(\neg \text{action}) \lor (\text{action a}) \lor (\text{action b})$[2]
2. $\neg(\neg \text{action})$ – because one is certain this is wrong
3. $\neg(\text{action a})$ – because one is not certain that this is right
4. $\neg(\text{action b})$ – because one is not certain that this is right

5. $\therefore$ fallacy

The net result is a fallacy. Had Quinn drawn out this weakness, he might have been able to challenge Kant on another more dangerous front. For despite the problems just described, Kant continues to assert, 'With respect to the action that I want to undertake, however, I must not only judge, and be of the opinion, that it is right, I must also be certain that it is' (6:186).

Contradiction

Even if one grants Kant his warrant, more problems ensue. Kant says that it is certainly wrong to kill Isaac. Yet he concedes that he could be in error, 'that to take a human being's life because of his religious faith is wrong is certain, unless (to allow the most extreme possibility) a divine will made known to the inquisitor in some extraordinary way, has decreed otherwise' (6:187). This ambiguity underscores the following problem.

Kant cannot be certain that a particular action is wrong, while at the same time qualifying his certainty with an exception clause ('unless a divine will made it known…'). In effect, he claims the following:

P1 - It is certain that (action a) is wrong
P2 - It is possible that (action a) is right

Which is a contradiction[3]

One might counter, on Kant's behalf, that 'action a' is certainly wrong and that even if God commanded 'action a', it (and God) would still be wrong. On the other hand, with even more nuance, one might allow for different categories of 'wrongness' (as Robert Merrihew Adams has done in his *A Divine Command Metaethics as Necessary A Posteriori*). But Kant does

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[1] This discussion is constrained (because of its word limitation) to Kant's *Concerning the Guiding Thread of Conscience in Matters of Faith*. One might assume that broadening this analysis to include Kant's other work could resolve this dilemma, but this is not the case. For example, Abraham could still be considered an autonomous moral agent, despite his submission to a DC. As the (somewhat pro-Kantian) James Rachels admits, 'if we learn that God (i.e. some being that we take to be God) requires us to do a certain action, and we conclude on this account that the action is morally right, then we have *still* made at least one moral judgment of our own, namely that whatever this being requires is morally right' (59). Moreover, Abraham might comply with the reciprocity test by suggesting that he himself would surrender his life were he in Isaac's position, which suggests that even if one works within the constraints of Kant's own system, one is unable to dismiss easily the problems that arise in his comments on Abraham.
[2] One could argue that doing nothing is still making a choice (and thus it could be represented as an 'action c' in the diagram).
[3] These problems deserve their own paper. In the interest of the primary objective, the issue has been only lightly treated.

not argue for either proviso; he clearly says that 'action a' is wrong unless a divine will 'has decreed otherwise'.

Nuance

It must be remembered that this critique of Kant and Quinn is narrowly focused in an effort to solve for proposition P, and thus address this paper's thesis. To this end, Quinn must be acknowledged for at least identifying the central issue: 'What does seem to threaten the position of the Kantian theist is not a matter of the logic of the concepts of moral agency… but rather of certain possible questions of facts and evidence' (57). Herein, Quinn correctly surmises that a response to Kant must be of an epistemological nature.

Furthermore, Kant cannot be so easily dismissed, for the problems with his warrant might be resolved with a more nuanced conception of certainty. Indeed, by carefully restructuring Kant's claim, one may develop a more forceful argument.

WHEREIN:

KNP = Abraham can be *more certain* that it is wrong to kill an innocent child than
        he is that God commanded him to kill an innocent child
KNQ = Abraham ought not to kill an innocent child

FORM:

1. KNP → KNQ
2. KNP

3. ∴ KNQ (MODUS PONENS)

INSTANCE:

1. If Abraham can be more certain that it is wrong to kill an innocent child than
   he is that God commanded him to kill an innocent child, then Abraham ought
   not to kill an innocent child.
2. Abraham can be more certain that it is wrong to kill an innocent child than he
   is that God commanded him to kill an innocent child.
3. Therefore, Abraham ought not to kill an innocent child.

The change in this argument occurs with KNP. In a meta-ethical sense, the term 'certainty' is being employed as less than an absolute quantity. This allows Kant to claim an epistemological differential between degrees of certainty – at which point the argument grows in force.

Equation

This differential implies measurement, this measurement implies an equation, this equation implies a condition – and this condition will be important in the attempt to solve for

proposition P. Kant suggests what this paper shall hereafter term as a 'quantified certainty equation' (QCE). This QCE is essentially a formula for risk analysis.

SHOULD ABRAHAM SACRIFICE ISAAC?

WHEREIN:

KNP = X > Y
KNQ = Abraham should not sacrifice Isaac

X = The *quantity* of certainty in 'it is wrong to sacrifice Isaac'
Y = The *quantity* of certainty in 'God said to sacrifice Isaac'

FORM:

1. KNP → KNQ
2. KNP

3. ∴ KNQ

INSTANCE:

1. If X > Y, then Abraham should not sacrifice Isaac.
2. X > Y
3. Therefore, Abraham should not sacrifice Isaac.

Essentially, if the quantity of certainty in 'it is wrong to sacrifice Isaac' is greater than the quantity of certainty in 'God said to sacrifice Isaac', then Abraham should not sacrifice Isaac. The QCE allows one to base a moral decision upon risk management principles, with the primary risk being of an epistemological nature, and it has significant implications for this paper's investigation of Isaac.

SHOULD ISAAC SURRENDER HIS LIFE?

WHEREIN:

KNP = X > Y
KNQ = Isaac should not surrender his life

X = The *quantity* of certainty in 'I should protect my life'
Y = The *quantity* of certainty in 'God said to surrender my life'

FORM:

1. KNP → KNQ
2. KNP

3. ∴ KNQ

INSTANCE:

1. If X > Y, then Isaac should protect his life.
2. X > Y
3. Therefore, Isaac should protect his life.

From this line of reasoning, one must allow for the *opposite* formulation[1] – and this *is the primary value* of Kant's QCE.

1. If Y > X, then Isaac should surrender his life.
2. Y > X
3. Therefore, Isaac **should surrender his life.**

Implications

Immanuel Kant's *Concerning the Guiding Thread of Conscience in Matters of Faith* implies a way to solve for proposition P. In sum, Kant argues that Abraham cannot be certain that a particular command is from God, while he can be certain that killing an innocent child is wrong. This argument is based on a dubious warrant, namely, 'that we ought to venture nothing where there is a danger that it might be wrong.' And this warrant is an idealization that collapses under moral pressure. For one may posit a scenario where a choice must be made between two alternatives, neither of which is clearly right. Moreover, Kant engages a semantic contradiction: on the one hand claiming that a certain action is wrong, while on the other conceding it is possible that the same action is right. But these problems may be resolved with a more nuanced conception of certainty. A careful restructuring of Kant's claim yields a forceful argument. This restructuring allows one to claim an epistemological differential between degrees of certainty. This differential may be expressed as a QCE. Based on this equation, one must allow for the following condition: 'If Isaac can be more certain in the proposition, "God said to surrender my life" than he is in the proposition, "I should protect my life", then Isaac should surrender his life'. This allows for certain observations:

1. As emphasized earlier, the point of this paper is not to refute Kant or to set out his full position, but only to solve for proposition P. And the implications of Kant's essay, *The Guiding Thread*, suggest a provisional definition for this paper's use of the word 'reasonable': Hereinafter, a 'reasonable condition' will be considered a condition wherein Isaac's certainty that God said to surrender his life is greater than Isaac's certainty that he should protect his life. This condition may be referred to as *'certain enough'*.

2. With this new definition, one might supply the missing proposition P, which leads to a new level in this paper's conditional expression:

   WHEREIN:

   P = Isaac may be certain enough that God has commanded him

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[1] There is something of a semantic paradox, here, in that one could structure this argument with a $\neg$ P, formulation. For the sake of clarity, it has been set down in this form.

Q = Isaac may reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life

FORM:

P → Q

INSTANCE:

If Isaac may be certain enough that God has commanded him, then Isaac may reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life.

3. While Kant's QCE does imply this 'reasonable condition', it is doubtful that Kant ever considered such a condition as more than remotely possible.[1] For if Kant finds the content of an ADC morally unacceptable, he is prepared to deny the authenticity of the source, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.[2] In this way, Kant judges the legitimacy of the source (God) by the rationality of the content (command).

4. Kant's extreme reservation regarding the possibility of proposition P cannot be avoided in this discussion. If P is not supported by a plausible condition, then it cannot be used to support Q. Moreover, a vital question underscores P. *By what criteria can one evaluate an ADC?* In the absence of a suitable criterion, one might never be able to arrive at P.

This need for a criterion leads to a brief discussion of Kierkegaard – for while Kierkegaard has stressed the serious dangers of applying such a criterion, he has attempted to do so in *The Book on Adler.*

Kierkegaard

In Kierkegaard's *The Book on Adler*,[3] the Danish philosopher attempts to evaluate an ADC as purported by his contemporary, A. P. Adler (see Appendix A).[4] This evaluation affords us an opportunity to consider Kierkegaard's criterion for evaluating an ADC. But because of this paper's severely limited scope, the following discussion must be constrained by four strictures:

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[1] Though, he did most certainly consider it possible. One only need be reminded of his claim, 'that to take a human being's life because of his religious faith is wrong is certain, *unless (to allow the most extreme possibility) a divine will made known* to the inquisitor in some extraordinary way, has decreed otherwise' [italics mine] (6:187).

[2] The extremism of Kant's position is captured with this protest: 'That I ought not kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God – of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even if this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.' Cf. *The Conflict of the Faculties,* p. 238.

[3] While scholars have largely overlooked this narrowly focused, posthumously published work, it deserves more attention. Kierkegaard himself calls it 'a navigation mark by which one steers' (XIII.494). And he refers to one of its essays as 'very significant. It contains the key to the greatest potentiality of all my writing…' (VII.6447 [Pap.X.a.551]).

[4] One might expect this discussion to rely upon Kierkegaard's earlier work, *Fear and Trembling,* but while *Fear and Trembling* implies the problem, it is only in *The Book on Adler* that Kierkegaard grapples with a solution.

(1) The point of this brief review is not to pit Kant against Kierkegaard, although the two most definitely represented contrary positions.[1] (2) Instead of resorting to lengthy quotations and explanations, this paper will provide a succinct overview of the Kierkegaardian position, while supporting that overview with extensive appendices.[2] (3) In order to simplify analysis, one must cut through Kierkegaard's notoriously convoluted writing style (his use of indirect communication, pseudonyms, and parables), and structure a clean deductive argument.

Background

In 1843, Danish theologian and pastor A. P. Adler published the controversial book *Nogle Praedikener* (Some Sermons), in which he claimed, 'The *Savior* commanded me to get up and go in and write down' a special revelation regarding spirit and the origin of evil (Adler, 1843: 3,4). Adler's claim was challenged by the Royal Danish Chancellery, and on January 19, 1844, he was dismissed from his pastorate of the Hasle and Ruthsker parishes.[3] But before his dismissal, Adler sent a copy of his *Some Sermons* to his contemporary (and fellow alumni), Soren Kierkegaard, who not only read *Sermons* but also purchased Adler's next three books on their (simultaneous) day of publication.[4]

On April 29, 1845, Dean Steenberg of the Royal Danish Chancellery wrote a letter challenging A. P. Adler's revelation claim. Adler's reply to Steenberg consisted of four main points (See Appendix A). Kierkegaard[5] carefully analyzed Adler's replies, comparing them against Adler's earlier claims, and finding them wholly unsatisfactory. His critique, as presented in 'Adler's Own Shifting Point of View' has been described as the epitome of qualitative dialectic[6] (Hohlenberg: 196).

Criterion

A careful review of the Kierkegaard's argument in *The Book on Adler* yields a distinct observation: Kierkegaard completely ignores the content of Adler's claim, focusing only on two points: (a) what is said about the claim and (b) what this implies about Adler. In the beginning of his critique, Kierkegaard declares he will argue 'only *e concessis*',[7] and that his argument 'neither flatly affirms nor denies' the content of the claim, itself (VIIB.235/93). Further, he announces that he will employ a criterion of *sibi constans*[8] – that his inquiry

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[1] L. E. Goodman argues that Kierkegaard's 'target' in *Fear and Trembling* is 'Kant in the guise of Abraham.' Goodman claims that 'the reference in the opening lines of *Fear and Trembling* to the philosophical doubt' of 'every *Privatdocent*, tutor and student, every crofter and cotter in philosophy' is a veiled reference to Kant. For Kant earned his living as a *Privatdocent* before attaining a professorship in *Konigsburg* (Goodman: 25).
[2] My earlier essays on Kierkegaard constrain this discussion, as I may not borrow too liberally from this prior material. Otherwise, this paper might have included a longer discussion of Kierkegaard.
[3] On September 13, 1945, Adler's dismissal was termed an honorable discharge (with a pension), apparently in response to a letter written July 5, 1845, in which Adler seemed to soften his position on the 'revelation'.
[4] June 12, 1846.
[5] I will not use the pseudonym Petrus Minor, as I do not believe it has the same significance as those in Kierkegaard's earlier books. In this decision, I agree with Stephen N. Dunning's comments (19).
[6] Also, see the epigraph in Fabro's translation.
[7] The Latin term *e concessis* denotes 'on the basis of the other's premise'.
[8] The Latin term *sibi constans* denotes 'steadfast agreement, consistency'.

'pays close attention to whether it can hear from Adler's own utterances that he does not understand himself, is not in agreement with himself (*sibi constans*) and with his statements about himself' (VIIB.235/93). Thereafter Kierkegaard employs a nuanced version of this criterion:

1. If the bearer of an ADC (Kierkegaard calls this person an apostle) is inconsistent between his initial claim and his subsequent claims, the bearer of an ADC (in particular his authority) may be doubted.

2. If the bearer of an ADC may be doubted, then the authenticity of his initial claim may be doubted.

Kierkegaard carefully studies Adler's initial claims and his subsequent defenses, searching for any inconsistency that might signal a lack of authenticity. With this method, he eventually rules that Adler's 'explanation is not an extended predicate' but a new position[1] (VIIB.235/104), and that Adler's claims and his defenses may be 'identified as his own productions' (VIIB.235/114).

Limitations

At first, Kierkegaard's criterion seems promising. After all, one might expect a certain internal consistency for an ADC. Indeed, this might be the one standard by which an ADC could be evaluated.[2] Nevertheless, Kierkegaard is not demanding consistency within the content, but rather consistency between the ADC and its bearer. This is problematic. For at best, Kierkegaard's method can only yield a tepid evaluation. This is because he proposes a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* condition. And so his method emphatically cannot be used to determine if a particular ADC is true. To illustrate this point, one might attempt to apply the criterion to a contemporary claim. Consider the following parallels:[3]

1. In 1843, A. P. Adler claimed that he received a revelation. In 1984, Daniel Lafferty claimed that he received a revelation.

2. Like Adler, Lafferty was a Churchman. While Adler was a pastor in the Church of Denmark, Lafferty was a leader in a group called 'The School of the Prophets'.

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[1] Kierkegaard declares that 'it is inconceivable that Adler has been able to write the first and second replies… unless he first must somehow have forgotten what was in the preface to the Sermons' (VIIB.235/115).
[2] However, this approach could still set up an external standard and thus a contradiction of KGO. For the notion of consistency itself would necessarily be defined by the ultimate authority (Appendix B).
[3] Cf. Griggs, B., 'If God Asked Me to, I'd Kill You Right Now,' *The Salt Lake Tribune*, August 19, 2000.

3. Adler obeyed his revelation, faithfully writing down 'the words of Jesus' and then risking his career to publish them. Lafferty obeyed his revelation, slashing the throat of his sister-in-law and her fifteen-month-old baby.

4. Adler conceded that his earlier words were 'reference points' and promised, in the future, to work out his ideas 'over a longer time' and in a more 'appropriate' way (Adler, 1845: 24). But Lafferty, some sixteen years after the crime, *stands firmly by his claim*, declaring 'I'm not going to offend God by saying something inappropriate like, "I wish I'd never done it… I'll never say I'm sorry"'.[1]

This parallel example offers a test case for Kierkegaard's criterion. One need only construct a comparison argument to illustrate the danger of applying Kierkegaard's method as a necessary condition.

FOR A.P. ADLER:

1. If and only if Adler's ADC satisfies the criterion of *sibi constans*, then Adler's ADC is true.
2. Adler's ADC does not satisfy the criterion of *sibi constans*.
3. Therefore, Adler's ADC is not true.

FOR DANIEL LAFFERTY:

1. If and only if Lafferty's ADC satisfies the criterion of *sibi constans,* then Lafferty's ADC is true.
2. Lafferty's ADC satisfies the criterion of *sibi constans*.
3. Therefore, Lafferty's ADC is true.

Clearly, Kierkegaard never intended his modest reflections on Adler to result in such a gross application. Still, for the purposes of this discussion, it must be asked: If Kierkegaard's criterion cannot be used as a sufficient condition, what can be determined by utilizing it as a necessary condition?

FOR DANIEL LAFFERTY:

1. If Lafferty's ADC fails to satisfy the criterion of *sibi constans*, then Lafferty's ADC may be doubted.
2. Lafferty's ADC does not fail to satisfy the criterion of *sibi constans*.
3. Therefore, _____?

The point is only this: Kierkegaard's method of *sibi constans* offers little to no assistance in evaluating an ADC from the likes of Daniel Lafferty. And it offers even less assistance for one in Isaac's position. Indeed, any religious lunatic who remains consistent in his radical claims might satisfy Kierkegaard's criterion.

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[1] Indeed, Lafferty says that he mistrusts 'the institutional church,' that the killings were necessary, and that if you become a 'child of God', these actions will 'make sense to you some day'.

Implications

Kierkegaard's *The Book on Adler*, represents an attempt to discover a reasonable way to determine if a given ADC is authentic. Kierkegaard attempts to evaluate the bearer of an ADC (A. P. Adler), noting that if the bearer of an ADC represents limited authority (and thus limited attributes), then there is a possibility of error on the bearer. And, if there is a possibility of an error on the bearer of an ADC, then the bearer can be externally evaluated. Hence, Kierkegaard determines that if a bearer of an ADC is inconsistent between his initial claim and his subsequent claims, the bearer of an ADC may be doubted. And if the bearer of an ADC may be doubted, then the authenticity of his initial claim may be doubted. Kierkegaard's method, while initially promising, proves to be a disappointment. At best, it provides only a tepid conclusion, offering a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Moreover, it could hardly help one in Isaac's position to evaluate an ADC that demands his life. Nevertheless, further reflection on the argument does yield certain helpful observations:

1. While Kierkegaard's criterion proves to be inadequate, one should not summarily dismiss his approach. The more fascinating aspect of Kierkegaard's attempt to evaluate Adler's claim is that he 'completely ignores the content' of the claim. This is in stark contrast to the Kantian approach.

2. Kierkegaard exhibits enormous respect for the concept of ultimate authority. Indeed, this is a key theme that runs throughout his corpus. Kierkegaard himself declares that his essay on authority is 'very significant. It contains the key to the greatest potentiality of all my writing…' (VII.6447[Pap.X.a.551]).

3. Kierkegaard begins his critique on Adler with a simple warrant: that ultimate authority is self-attesting. He does not argue for this warrant. He seems to hold it as self-evident. Nevertheless, a forceful (if dense) argument can and should be constructed, because this warrant is essential for one in Isaac's position:

WHEREIN:

KGM = An ADC is possibly authentic
KGN = An ADC could be supported by ultimate attributes
KGO = An ADC's highest endorsement could only come from itself
KGP = An ADC cannot be externally refuted

FORM:

1. KGM → KGN
2. KGN → KGO
3. KGO → KGP
4. KGM → KGP (HYPOTHETICAL SYLLOGISM)
5. KGM

6. ∴ KGP (*MODUS PONENS*)

INSTANCE:

1. If an ADC is possibly authentic, then an ADC could be supported by ultimate attributes.
2. If an ADC could be supported by ultimate attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.), then an ADC's highest endorsement could only come from itself.
3. If an ADC's highest endorsement could only come from itself, then an ADC cannot be externally refuted.
4. If an ADC is possibly authentic, then an ADC cannot be externally evaluated.
5. An ADC is possibly authentic.
6. Therefore, an ADC cannot be externally evaluated.

4. KGO and KGP are further substantiated in Appendix B. But, they may be briefly supported as follows: (P1) If one attempts to evaluate an ultimate authority claim with an external standard, one is necessarily establishing the external standard as an (competing) ultimate authority claim. (P2) If one establishes the external standard as an ultimate authority claim, then one is evaluating an ultimate authority claim with another ultimate authority claim. (P3) If one is evaluating an ultimate authority claim with another ultimate authority claim, one is arguing with a proposition that assumes the conclusion (there can only be one ultimate authority). (P4) If one is arguing with a proposition that assumes the conclusion, then one is committing the fallacy of *petito principii.*

The point of this argument is simple: If ultimate authority (God) potentially issues a claim (divine command), then the content of that claim (ADC) cannot be used to invalidate the source. Because to do so is to elevate the one evaluating the content (Isaac) to the level of the one who issued the content (God) or, at the very least, to elevate the standard by which the content is being evaluated to the level of the content itself. This is a dangerous move. And it has significant implications for one in Isaac's position. It means that Isaac cannot dismiss an ADC just because he finds the content morally challenging.[1]

Accountability

This new understanding of ultimate authority brings further nuance to this paper's concept of a 'reasonable condition', for it balances the Kantian position, suggesting a logical basis for Isaac to obey a DC that overrides his ethical understanding. However, it also introduces *extreme risks*. And these risks must now be especially considered as they relate to the notion of a 'reasonable condition'.

It was earlier decided that a 'reasonable condition' is considered a condition wherein Isaac's certainty that God said to surrender his life is greater than Isaac's certainty that he should protect his life. Upon further reflection, one may note that this condition depends upon risk

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[1] This paper examines issues closely related to the Euthyphro Dilemma, but because of the strict limitations of my objective, and because Isaac has already embraced the model of 'God as Good', I have chosen to resist introducing Plato's work into this discussion.

management principles. One is attempting to minimize the risk of choosing an unethical action. Hence, one is attempting to measure the differential between the certainty of the command and the certainty of its ethic. But, underlying this measurement is another: Isaac must weigh the risk of disobeying the present ADC (surrender your life) against the risk of disobeying *his understanding of* an earlier ADC (human sacrifice is wrong).[1] This is a precarious position. Clearly, there is a truth at stake (the Isaac of this discussion is a philosophic realist), and clearly, there is a life at stake (his own).

However, Isaac might hold that there is more than his life at stake. Right or wrong, he has embraced a particular Faith, and so he is operating from a certain predisposition. The Isaac of this paper deems that he is *personally* accountable to obey any command that he actually knows is from God. Isaac does not separate the concept of command from the concept of accountability. Drawing upon his model of 'God as Good', Isaac may consider that the notion of 'good' implies ultimate virtues, especially ultimate justice. The notion of 'God' implies ultimate attributes including ultimate knowledge (omniscience) and ultimate power (omnipotence). Isaac may then infer three inductive propositions: A just God may hold an individual accountable to the consequences of disobeying his DC. (2) An omniscient God would know that the individual is 'certain enough' to comply with his DC. (3) An omnipotent God is powerful enough to punish the individual for disobedience to his DC. In view of these propositions, Isaac must balance the risks of epistemological error with the risk of willful disobedience.

This simple reasoning underscores Isaac's need to know. Indeed, for Isaac's decision to be reasonable, Isaac must be *certain enough* that God has commanded him. But how is Isaac to obtain such certainty? In the absence of a satisfactory answer to this question, a decision by Isaac to obey any ADC (but especially one that demands his life) seems unreasonable. This dilemma leads to a discussion of epistemological reversal. For drawing from this same understanding of accountability, and moving in the opposite direction, one might reason that the concept entails certain obligations on the part of God.

Reversal

The primary epistemological emphasis in the historic discussions of the *Aqedah* is upon Abraham's capacity to know. Thus far, this paper has reversed the existential emphasis from Abraham to Isaac. Now, it will reverse the epistemological emphasis from Isaac to God. Indeed, in the same way that Robert Merrihew Adams has attempted to resolve certain divine command theory issues with his argument from the nature of a *loving* God, one might attempt to resolve the more fundamental divine command theory issue (determining the

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[1] This point may be argued. Levenson argues that Abraham might have considered human sacrifice as a 'normal' demand from God (cf: *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*), but his contention may be forcefully debated. Moreover, the point is assumed here only for the sake of the illustration.

authenticity of an ADC) with an argument from the nature of a *good* God. With this change in mind, one might return to this paper's primary deductive expression, moving backwards to establish K through M.

WHEREIN:

M = God is good
N = God is just
O = God must help Isaac to know a DC for which Isaac is accountable
P = Isaac could be certain enough that God has commanded him
Q = Isaac could reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life

FORM:

1. $M \rightarrow N$
2. $N \rightarrow O$
3. $O \rightarrow P$
4. $P \rightarrow Q$

INSTANCE:

1. If God is good, then God is just.
2. If God is just, then God will help Isaac to know a DC for which Isaac is accountable.
3. If God will help Isaac to know a DC for which Isaac is accountable, then Isaac could be certain enough that God has commanded him.
4. If Isaac could be certain enough that God has commanded him, then Isaac could reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life.

Clearly, the most novel and perhaps most interesting aspect of this approach is its shift from the responsibility of Isaac to the responsibility of God. In order to analyze the force of the argument behind this shift, a new inferential tool has been developed.[1] It assigns a metric to the inferential leap from one proposition to the next, using a scale of 1 to 5 displayed in superscript as 'i1' through 'i5', with 'i5' representing the greatest differential. This tool yields the following analysis: proposition 1 $[M \rightarrow N]^{i1}$, proposition 2 $[N \rightarrow O]^{i2}$, proposition 3 $[O \rightarrow P]^{i3}$, proposition 4 $[(P \rightarrow Q]^{i1}$. Hence, the balance of this paper will especially focus on propositions 2 and 3. These propositions may best be examined through Isaac's (first-person) perspective. Moreover, one may begin by describing the 'type' of Isaac who would adopt them.

Predisposition

The Isaac of propositions M through Q is a rational thinker who has embraced a particular faith. Because of this faith, he cannot rule out the possibility of obeying a DC. But because of his rational orientation, he is predisposed *not* to obey an ADC. (1) He reasons that there are severe risks associated with obeying an ADC. (2) He reasons that he will *not* obey an ADC unless he is certain enough that the ADC is authentic. (3) Most importantly, he reasons
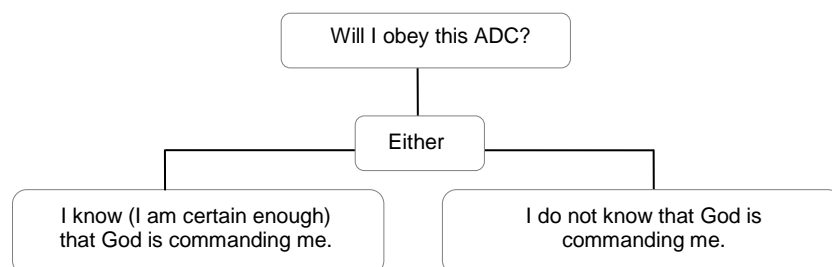
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[1] I am presently codifying the axioms with which one might determine the inferential soundness of an argument. For instance, when the progression from proposition to proposition ascends or descends with graduated consistency, the truth of the argument is more apparent. In a sense, this formulation requires a rethinking of the dualism between deductive and inductive reasoning.

that the God whom he is willing to trust would somehow help him to know that a DC to surrender his life is authentic. (4) He reasons that it is safer to put the locus of his faith on the proposition, 'God is good', than the proposition, 'I can discern (unaided) God's command'. (5) Furthermore, he reasons that he cannot be sure of points (3) and (4), and so with considerable trepidation, he generally gives more weight to points (1) and (2).

Isaac recognizes that he may be criticized for this pre-disposition – that the strictures of propositions M though Q could result in his failing to recognize a DC. Yet he reasons that his position reflects the most personal integrity, and he offers two observations in his defense: (1) If God commands him and he honestly fails to perceive it, and thus to obey it, then his primary error is one of benign misunderstanding, not of open rebellion. (2) But if God never commands him, then Isaac's predisposition against an ADC could help to protect him from being deceived by a fraudulent claim. Isaac infers that the emphasis in a relationship with a good God is predicated upon one's obedience to the command, not upon one's ability to decipher an ambiguous message. Furthermore, he reasons that this position protects him against a mistake with his foundational premise (M – God is Good). For if God is not good, then the truth of Isaac's position hardly matters; everyone is at the mercy of a tyrant. And if God is not (does not exist), Isaac will never receive an authentic DC. Thus if he is mistaken in his theology, then he is at least protected by his philosophy.

Challenge

It is this hypothetical Isaac who is now challenged with the existential dilemma of an ADC that demands his life. He has one primary question: 'Will I obey the ADC?' He has left only one primary sub-question: 'Is this command from God?'[1] He holds (at least) one primary fact: that he knows or does not know (to a greater or lesser degree) that the ADC is from God.

```
        ┌─────────────────────┐
        │  Will I obey this ADC?  │
        └─────────────────────┘
                   │
              ┌─────────┐
              │  Either  │
              └─────────┘
          ┌───────┴────────┐
┌──────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ I know (I am certain enough) │  │ I do not know that God is │
│ that God is commanding me.   │  │ commanding me.            │
└──────────────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
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[1] There might seem to be two vital sub-questions: (Sq1) 'Is the content of this command moral?', and (Sq2) 'is the source of this command God?' However, Isaac, as stipulated earlier in this paper, has already embraced the model of 'God as Good'. Moreover, he has determined that a reasonable condition is a condition wherein he is more certain that God has said to surrender his life than he is that he should protect his life. Thus, of these two sub-questions, Sq2 subsumes Sq1.

Isaac believes that God is good, and so he reasons that God is just. From this simple faith model, he embraces proposition 2 (If God is just, then God will help me to know a DC for which I am accountable). This proposition is inferred from two of its primary concepts: 'divine' and 'command'. Isaac holds that a command is a form of communication; it is of the imperative category, and it necessarily requires a transmitter and a receiver. He further reasons that the burden of the communication originates with the transmitter in that the transmission precedes the reception.[1] Indeed, the transmitter has at least two responsibilities: (1) to initiate the communication and (2) to encode the communication in such a way as to enable the receiver to receive. Hence, in a DC, God as communicator might well be expected to bear the same responsibilities. Furthermore, Isaac holds that the divine is good,[2] and in chain of reason that parallels the earlier discussion of accountability, he reasons that the notion of 'good' implies ultimate virtues, especially ultimate justice. The notion of 'divine' implies ultimate attributes including ultimate knowledge (omniscience) and ultimate power (omnipotence). If God is just, then God would not hold one accountable to a command that one does not know.[3] If God possesses ultimate knowledge, then God will know if a particular individual does not know his command. If God possesses ultimate power, then God is capable of communicating his command in such a way that a particular individual knows it is from him. Thus, the nature of the divine implies that the transmitter (God) has the intent and the capacity to communicate in a form that enables the receiver (Isaac) to know the command[4]. Therefore, unless God somehow helps Isaac to become certain enough that a particular ADC is authentic, Isaac will *not* obey it. But if to the contrary, God does somehow help Isaac to become certain enough that a particular ADC is authentic, Isaac will obey it – even if he questions the ethical content. Hence, Isaac adopts the following propositions:

Will I obey this ADC?

M → N

If God is good, then God is just.

N → O

If God is just, then God will help Isaac to know a DC for which Isaac is accountable.

---

[1] Elsewhere, I have written on the theory of communication, 'In communication, the communicator is a cause. The receiver's response is an effect (and then again, a cause). If the communicator has an objective for the nature of the effect, then the communicator must adapt her cause until her objective is achieved. A communicator can only inform or instruct' (Journals).

[2] It was established at the outset of this discussion that Isaac 'embraces the model of "God as Good" (YHWH), in keeping with the Jewish tradition and the text itself'.

[3] This moves the discussion from philosophy to theology, and it must be conceded that this point deserves more attention. It could be the focus of an entire paper. Nevertheless, the objective of the current discussion is not to prove that Isaac is right, but only to demonstrate that he is reasonable. And it would seem reasonable for Isaac to hold God to this view of justice.
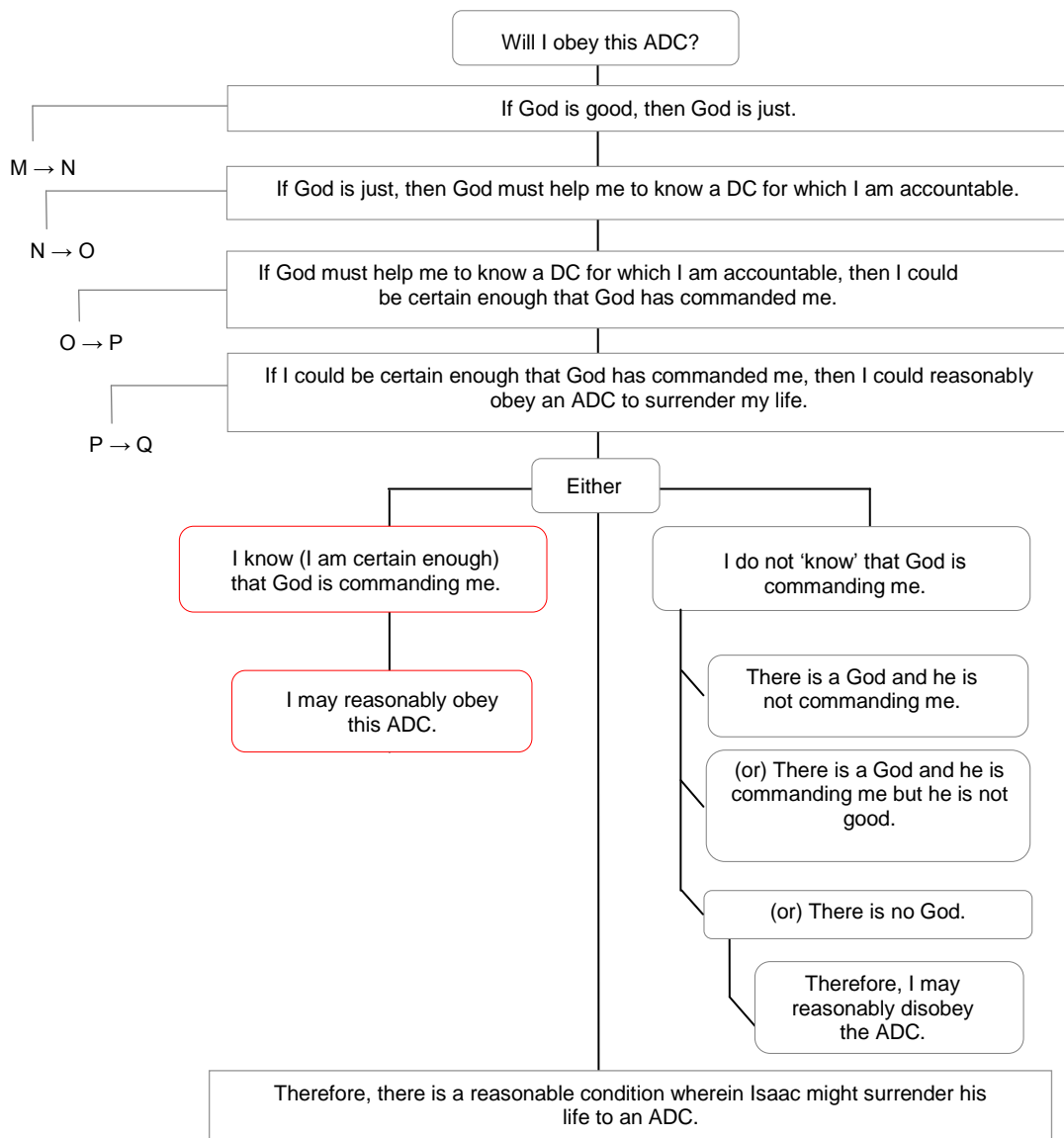
[4] One might wonder whether this proposition implies that God must guarantee that Isaac is not deceived by a fraudulent ADC, but nothing in this theory of communication necessitates this move. It is the absence of God's command, which serves as the corrective, and Isaac is predisposed NOT to obey an ADC.

Isaac may obey, *but not without considerably trepidation*. For Isaac does not believe that he can ever be absolutely certain that God has commanded him to surrender his life. Isaac is a finite being attempting to evaluate the infinite. Even if 'God' appeared to Isaac and commanded him, there remains the danger that Isaac is mistaken. Isaac could be hallucinating. Isaac could be deceived. Isaac knows that history is replete with dangerous fanatics who claimed to 'know' that they had a special revelation.[1] Moreover, Isaac is particularly susceptible to error, for Isaac is a 'second-generation' receiver; he did not receive a direct command. Hence, he is forced to evaluate the word of a third party. How can he be certain (enough) that Abraham is telling the truth? This is a serious challenge to Isaac's position, but Isaac does not believe that there is a distinct categorical difference between a first-generation and a second-generation receiver. He reasons that there are two related kinds of knowing: (1) knowing the source of the command and (2) knowing the content of the command. To be accountable for a command, Isaac must have both the source and the content made known. If a command is disassociated from the authority that issued it, then the command loses its authority. If Isaac knows the content but not the source, he is missing the reason to obey. If Isaac knows the source, but not the content, he is missing the instructions to obey. Hence, God must communicate in such a way as to enable Isaac to know, regardless of the command's medium, both the source and the content.

In this way, Isaac may consider that Abraham is only the medium through which God is speaking to him. For Isaac, this is more than an 'historic event' belonging to Abraham and being 'passed on' to Isaac. It is the present-tense experience of God communicating in such a way as to enable Isaac to know both the source and the content of the command. 'God has spoken' is more difficult to determine than 'God is speaking.' Isaac reasons that he can never determine (on his own) that 'God has spoken;' he can only know (with God's help) that 'God is speaking.' Abraham may relate the content of the command, but God must confirm the (divine) source of the command.[2] Thus, Abraham's experience is not that different from Isaac's. Even as God has spoken to Abraham, he must speak to Isaac. For while Isaac trust his father, he cannot be sure that the patriarch is not honestly mistaken. And Isaac deems that he has a higher obligation to obey God, than he does to obey Abraham – So whether or not the theology is right or wrong, this 'rational' Isaac is predisposed not obey Abraham's ADC unless God somehow helps him (Isaac) to be certain enough that its source is authentic. Hence, Isaac adopts the following propositions:

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[1] One might argue that these dangerous fanatics, by the very terms of this argument, might have been acting upon an authentic DC, but it is unlikely that all of them could have been doing so, because many of them violently disagreed with each other.

[2] This calls for an understanding of a second-generation ADC as being 'trans-tensual'. It is trans-tensual in the sense that there was an historic communication to Abraham, and yet there is a contemporary communication to Isaac.

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                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │   Will I obey this ADC? │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
         ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
         │              If God is good, then God is just.                 │
         └───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
  M → N
         ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
         │ If God is just, then God must help me to know a DC for which   │
         │ I am accountable.                                              │
         └───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
  N → O
         ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
         │ If God must help me to know a DC for which I am accountable,   │
         │ then I could be certain enough that God has commanded me.      │
         └───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
  O → P
         ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
         │ If I could be certain enough that God has commanded me, then   │
         │ I could reasonably obey an ADC to surrender my life.           │
         └───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
  P → Q
                              ┌──────────┐
                              │  Either  │
                              └──────────┘
   ┌──────────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────────────┐
   │ I know (I am certain      │              │ I do not 'know' that God │
   │ enough) that God is       │              │ is commanding me.        │
   │ commanding me.            │              └──────────────────────────┘
   └──────────────────────────┘                  ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                 │ There is a God and he is │
   ┌──────────────────────────┐                  │ not commanding me.       │
   │ I may reasonably obey     │                  └──────────────────────────┘
   │ this ADC.                 │                  ┌──────────────────────────┐
   └──────────────────────────┘                  │ (or) There is a God and  │
                                                 │ he is commanding me but  │
                                                 │ he is not good.          │
                                                 └──────────────────────────┘
                                                 ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                 │ (or) There is no God.    │
                                                 └──────────────────────────┘
                                                 ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                 │ Therefore, I may         │
                                                 │ reasonably disobey       │
                                                 │ the ADC.                 │
                                                 └──────────────────────────┘
   ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
   │ Therefore, there is a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might │
   │ surrender his life to an ADC.                                  │
   └───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Dangers

The preceding argument seems sufficient to establish an answer to this paper's primary question: 'Is there a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might surrender his life to an ADC?' Such a condition seems at least possible. It is possible that God is good. It is possible that a God who is good would somehow assist Isaac in knowing both the source and content of a command for which Isaac is accountable. Thus, it is possible that Isaac might have good reason to obey such a command. Moreover, if God is not good, Isaac's philosophy could at least help to protect (but not guarantee) Isaac against a fraudulent DC, for unless God truly assists Isaac in knowing that a particular ADC is authentic, Isaac will most definitely not obey it. While one may object that this approach could result in Isaac failing to recognize a DC, Isaac deems the approach prudent. It represents his honest effort to balance all of the

corresponding risks. Moreover, in this paper Isaac is only being asked to justify that very specific condition wherein he *chooses* to obey, rather than *refuses* to obey.

Nevertheless, in view of Isaac's dependence upon God's assistance, one must consider what it might mean for God to help Isaac. And this leads one to consider two aspects: (1) the *nature* of the help, and (2) the *quantity* of the help:

1. On the nature of divine help, one may consider that God's enabling could occur within at least three categories (though these categories are roughly sketched only to illustrate potential problems): (c1) God's enabling could take place within what is generally accepted as the category of 'reason'.[1] He could offer reasonable (even 'miraculous') evidence. (c2) God's enabling could take place without employing what is generally understood to be the category of 'reason'. He could communicate some innate sense of knowing.[2] (c3) Or, God's enabling could take place, to a greater or lesser degree, within both c1 and c2. One must consider the implications of each category.[3] And this leads to a problem: If God chose to use some version of c2, the nature of his help might not meet the standard for a reasonable condition (as stipulated by this argument)[4].

2. On the quantity of divine help, the problem may be expressed as follows: [Let 'H' represent 'help' and 'Ce' represent 'certain enough', then $x(H) = Ce$]. Which is to say that x (the quantity) of help must be sufficient for Isaac to be certain enough that God has commanded him. This expression recalls a point of inference in the principle argument. Proposition 3 states, 'If God will help Isaac to know a DC for which Isaac is accountable, then Isaac could be certain enough that God is commanding him'. The word 'could' implies only a possibility. It does not follow that God's help would necessarily enable Isaac to be 'certain enough' as it has been defined in this argument. Even if it is established that God's help is probable, it has not been established that God's help must meet this paper's criterion for a reasonable condition. This leads to a problem: If God chose to use some version of c1, he still might not offer a sufficient amount of evidence/reasons[5].

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[1] The term is used here in its widest sense, as it has no absolute definition. C.S. Evans suggests that reason may be thought of as both normative and descriptive. He argues that the descriptive sense, as reflected by societal acceptance, is often in tension with the normative sense (93-112).
[2] This 'innate sense of knowing' (the inner witness) is a common experience among people of faith. Cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* Moreover, one might build an argument that this knowing would constitute some type of proof and thus engage c1.
[3] If this enabling could occur in c2, then it could possibly satisfy the criterion for a reasonable condition. Moreover, if it could occur in c1 and could satisfy the criterion for a reasonable condition, then it could do the same for c3 (because c3 is subsumed in the other two). Thus, the possibility of c1 deserves more attention.
[4] One could argue that c2 is some form of sufficient evidence (this reminds one of Alvin Plantinga's notion of noetic structure), but the point of this paper is to justify Isaac on the basic of a very strict criterion of 'reasonable'.
[5] Nevertheless, IF propositions M though Q are correct, one might argue that God's enabling would be sufficient for Isaac to make a decision which might be construed as 'reasonable', but only by a criterion different than that of this discussion.

The danger is this: even if God assisted Isaac in knowing the content and the source of a DC, he might not do so in a way that was commensurate with this paper's standard for a reasonable condition. To meet this standard, there would need to be *enough* certainty of a particular *type*. Thus, while it is possible for Isaac to have a reasonable condition wherein he might obey an ADC that demanded his life, it may not be probable. Moreover, even if Isaac has this reasonable condition, he still faces severe risks. Indeed, being reasonable is not a guarantee of being right. Isaac must hope for the 'extreme possibility' allowed for by Kant, 'that to take a human being's life because of his religious faith is wrong is certain, unless (to allow the most *extreme possibility*) a divine will *made known* to the inquisitor in some extraordinary way, has decreed otherwise' (6:187).[1] But Isaac must prepare for the extreme risks emphasized by Kierkegaard, 'it is not by evaluating the content of the doctrine aesthetically or philosophically that I will or can arrive at the conclusion…the one called by a revelation… must be prepared to willingly sacrifice life and everything' (XI 98).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to answer the question, 'Is there a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might surrender his life to an ADC?' At the outset, it was determined that a definition must be developed for the term, 'reasonable condition'. This led to a brief analysis of Kant's essay, *Concerning the Guiding Thread of Conscience in Matters of Faith.* From this analysis, it was determined that a reasonable condition would be considered a condition wherein Isaac's certainty that God said to surrender his life is greater than Isaac's certainty that he should protect his life. This definition led to a brief analysis of Kierkegaard's, *The Book on Adler*. From this analysis, it was determined that if ultimate authority (God) potentially issues a claim (DC), then the content of that claim cannot be used to invalidate the source.

After further reflection on Kant and Kierkegaard's positions, it was determined that Isaac's attempt to meet this reasonable condition would involve considering the differential between the risk of disobeying the present ADC against the risk of disobeying *his understanding of* an earlier ADC. This determination only underscored Isaac's need for a way to 'know'. Indeed, for Isaac's decision to be reasonable, Isaac must be certain enough that God commanded him. But how could Isaac obtain such certainty? In the absence of a satisfactory answer, a decision by Isaac to obey any ADC (but especially one that demands his life) seemed unreasonable. This led to a discussion of epistemological reversal.

Isaac was defined as a rational thinker who has embraced a particular faith. Because of his faith, he cannot rule out the possibility of a DC, but because of his rational orientation, he is predisposed not to obey an ADC. He reasons that there are severe risks associated with

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[1] Italics mine.

obeying an ADC. And he reasons that he will not obey an ADC unless he is certain enough that the ADC is authentic. Most importantly, he reasons that the God whom he is willing to trust would somehow help him to know that a DC to surrender his life is authentic. Thus, he reasons that it is safer to put his locus of faith on the proposition, 'God is good', than on the proposition, 'I can discern (unaided) God's command'.

Isaac builds his philosophy from the very notion of a divine command. From the notion of 'command', Isaac reasons that the burden of the communication originates with the transmitter and that the transmitter has at least two responsibilities: (1) to initiate the communication and (2) to encode the communication in such a way as to enable the receiver (Isaac) to receive. From the notion of 'divine', Isaac reasons that a good God must have certain attributes (ultimate knowledge and ultimate power) and a good God must have certain virtues (especially justice). Thus, Isaac concludes, if God is just, then God would not hold one accountable to a DC that one does not know. If God possesses ultimate knowledge, then God will know if a particular individual does not know his DC. If God possesses ultimate power, then God is capable of communicating his command in such a way that a particular individual knows it is authentic.

Furthermore, Isaac reasons that there are two related kinds of knowing: (1) knowing the source of the command, and (2) knowing the content of the command. To be accountable for a DC, Isaac must have both the source and the content made known. If Isaac knows the content but not the source, he is missing the reason to obey. If Isaac knows the source, but not the content, he is missing the instructions to obey. Hence, God must communicate in such a way as to enable Isaac to know, regardless of the command's medium, both the source and the content. In this way, Isaac may consider that Abraham is only the medium through which God is speaking to him. He reasons that he can never determine (on his own) that 'God has spoken'; he can only know (with God's help) that 'God is speaking'. Thus, while Abraham may relate the content of the command, God must confirm the (divine) source of the command.

In sum, Isaac determines that unless God somehow helps him (Isaac) to be certain enough that the ADC to surrender his life is authentic, Isaac will most definitely not obey. He reasons as follows: if God is good, then God is just. And if God is just, God will help Isaac to know a DC for which he is accountable. If God will help Isaac to know a DC for which he is accountable, then Isaac could be certain enough that God has commanded him. If Isaac could be certain enough that God has commanded him, then Isaac could reasonably obey an ADC to surrender his life. Nevertheless, Isaac engages this reasoning while cognizant of the extreme risks. He recognizes that God may not be good. He recognizes that even if God were good, and even if God assisted him in knowing the content and the source of a DC, God may not do so in a way that is commensurate with Isaac's understanding of a

reasonable condition. Moreover, even if God is good, and even if God assisted him in knowing the content and the source of the DC, and even if God did so in a way that is commensurate with Isaac's understanding of a reasonable condition, Isaac might still make a tragic mistake – for Isaac knows that being reasonable is not a guarantee of being right.

Therefore, the answer to this discussion's question is in the affirmative: There is a reasonable condition wherein Isaac might surrender his life to an ADC. However, this condition is just possible, and it involves *extreme* risks.

Appendix A

[BACKGROUND ON THE ADLER DEBATE]

In 1843, Danish theologian and pastor A. P. Adler published the controversial book *Nogle Praedikener* (Some Sermons), in which he claimed, 'The *Savior* commanded me to get up and go in and write down' a special revelation regarding spirit and the origin of evil (Adler, 1843: 3,4).

Adler's claim was challenged by the Royal Danish Chancellery, and on January 19, 1844, he was dismissed from his pastorate of the Hasle and Ruthsker parishes.[1] But before his dismissal, Adler sent a copy of his *Some Sermons* to his contemporary (and fellow alumni), Soren Kierkegaard, who not only read *Sermons* but also purchased Adler's next three books on their (simultaneous) day of publication.[2]

On April 29, 1845, Dean Steenberg of the Royal Danish Chancellery wrote a letter challenging A. P. Adler's revelation claim. Adler's reply to Steenberg consisted of four main points. Of the four points, the latter two referred to the content of Adler's claim,[3] while the former two referred to the nature of the claim. This paper will focus only on the former two, as they occupy the whole of Kierkegaard's examination. They may be summarized as follows:[4]

A Concise Summary of Dean Steenberg's Questions and Adler's Replies

I. Do you acknowledge having been in an excited and confused state of mind when you wrote and published your sermons and so-called studies?

REPLY A: No. Since I can show meaning and coherence in what I have written in my *Sermons* and *Studies*.

II. Do you perceive that it is fanatical and wrong to expect and to follow such presumably external revelations as, for example, those you described in the preface to your Sermons?

REPLY A: It is obvious that I hold to the Scripture.

(1) Because I have written in the preface to my *Sermons* that Jesus commanded me in the future to keep the Bible.
(2) Because I preach Jesus.
(3) Because I quote the words of Scripture as proof-texts.

REPLY B: No. I know an event through which I was deeply moved by Faith did occur – even if my sermons and studies are regarded only as a child's first babbling, lisping, and imperfect voice (60).

(Table 1)

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[1] On September 13, 1945, Adler's dismissal was termed an honorable discharge (with a pension), apparently in response to a letter written July 5, 1845, in which Adler seemed to soften his position on the 'revelation'.
[2] June 12, 1846.
[3] The third question from Dean Steenberg is this: 'Do you acknowledge that in your aforesaid printed writings there appears several false and according to Christian doctrine deviating statements…?' And the fourth question is this: 'Do you admit that in your aforesaid writings there are many expressions that are offensive, shocking, or highly inappropriate…?' Adler's replies are theological in nature, and are completely ignored by Kierkegaard (Adler, 1845: 14, 15).
[4] Adapted from *Scrivelser min Suspension og Entledigelse vedkommende* (Adler,1845: 3-7,14-24).

Kierkegaard[1] found Adler's replies wholly unsatisfactory. His critique, as presented in 'Adler's Own Shifting Point of View' has been described as the epitome of qualitative dialectic[2] (Hohlenberg: 196), but the entire work may be summarized with three essential points:

<div style="border:1px solid #000; padding:1em;">

A Concise Summary of Kierkegaard's Critique of Adler's Reply

A. With the statement, 'I have quoted the words of Scripture as proof-texts,' Adler appeals to the Christian Scripture as proof that his revelation is genuine, but this is a contradiction (VIIB.235/109).

    (1) Because Scripture cannot prove that 'in the year 1842 Jesus commanded him' to write down the revelation.
    (2) Because Adler has the direct words of Jesus, and therefore he does not need the agreement of Scripture. Even if his revelation disagreed with the Scripture, he must stand firm with his revelation.

B. With the words, 'there was a rescue in marvelous ways,' Adler equivocates his receiving a revelation with the experience of conversion (rescue as in "saved"). But this is a contradiction (VIIB.235/110,111).

    (1) Because one can only be saved into something that already exists, so 'the person who is rescued in a marvelous way is not entrusted with any new doctrine… he must be humble and adapt himself to the old.' But the person called by a new revelation is entrusted with a new doctrine and is 'called to be a teacher.' He must reveal the new (VIIB.235/110,111).

C. With the words, 'if my sermons and studies are regarded only as a child's first babbling, lisping, imperfect voice,' Adler attempts to accommodate the authorities with a 'praiseworthy author-modesty,' but this contradicts the very nature of revelation (VIIB.235/110,113).

    (1) Because one cannot say that something 'was written down according to the Savior's own dictation' and then call it a 'babbling, lisping imperfect voice.'
    (2) Because one cannot speak of revelation as if it were something to be perfected in the future. The fact that it remains to be perfected identifies it as one's own production (VIIB.235/110,114).

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Kierkegaard concludes: Adler's 'explanation is not an extended predicate' but a new position (VIIB.235/104), and that 'it is inconceivable that Adler has been able to write the first and second replies… unless he first must somehow have forgotten what was in the preface to the Sermons' (VIIB.235/115). He declares that both Adler's claims and his defenses may be 'identified as his own productions' (VIIB.235/114).

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[1] I will not use the pseudonym Petrus Minor, as I do not believe it has the same significance as those in Kierkegaard's earlier books. In this decision, I agree with Stephen N. Dunning's comments (19).
[2] Also, see the epigraph in Fabro's translation.

Appendix B

[KIERKEGAARD'S METHOD]

A careful review of the Kierkegaard's argument in *The Book on Adler* yields a distinct observation: *Kierkegaard completely ignores the content of Adler's claim, focusing only on two points: (a) what is said about the claim and (b) what this implies about Adler.*

Kierkegaard might have attempted to evaluate Adler's claim against the one standard that Adler himself offered. Magister Adler clearly said that Jesus instructed him to 'keep to the Bible,' and that he was relying on 'the words of Scripture as proof-texts' (Adler, 1845:18,19). With this claim, Adler subjugated his revelation claim to an earlier claim (the scripture). Therefore, Kierkegaard could have (theoretically) used the Scripture[1] itself to evaluate Adler's claim.

But Kierkegaard ignored this opportunity. And the most significant point of *The Book on Adler* is that it *challenges Adler's authority, not his revelation.* Philosophers and theologians tend to judge a revelation claim by its content (i.e. 'The Bible claims that God created the earth in seven days, but this claim violates the findings of science, therefore the Biblical account cannot be accurate'). But Kierkegaard attempts to judge the content of a claim by its authority.

This represents a radical departure from the methodology used by the Danish Church.[2] And it raises two significant questions: (a) Why does Kierkegaard ignore the content of Adler's claim, and (b) how does he attempt to evaluate Adler's authority?

Question One: Why?

The answer to the first question may be deduced from Kierkegaard's distinctive philosophy of authority. A careful study of *The Book on Adler* yields two foundational propositions:[3]

> Proposition 1: A divine revelation is self-attesting. It cannot be judged by its content, but is rather believed/obeyed because of its source: ultimate authority.[4]

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[1] Kierkegaard's failure to recognize a distinction between initial revelation and subsequent revelation (as demonstrated earlier in this paper) foreclosed on this option.
[2] The Chancellery focused specifically on the content of Adler's claim (Adler, 1845: 14,15).
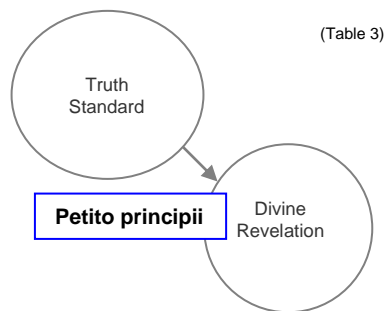[3] Also, see *The Concept of Irony* XIII.284-90,227,258,267,277,320,348,362,370; *PostScript* VII.12,48,57,383,418, 337; *Repetition* III.200,342,263, *Two Ages* VII.99; *Upbulding Discourses* VIII.374,381, *Works of Love* IX.18,28,95.
[4] This proposition is closely related to the teleological suspension of the ethical, and the connection deserves more research. See *Fear and Trembling*.

Proposition 2: The authority of a person who communicates a direct revelation is not derived from their talent, but rather from (the source of) the revelation. Their authority is delegated.

Proposition 2, is entirely dependent upon Proposition 1. Accordingly, it may be useful to examine the reasoning for Proposition 1. Its implications are challenging, and while Kierkegaard does not offer a detailed argument for his position, one may develop a forceful argument to support it.

A revelation claim, by its very nature, is self-attesting because it could be issued by ultimate (divine) authority. Accordingly, to subject a revelation claim to a truth standard is necessarily to imply a higher authority claim, because that which is being subjected is inferior to that which is subjecting. This is demonstrated by the following chart:

(Table 3)

This attempt results in a fallacy, because to evaluate an ultimate authority by another authority is to begin with a proposition that assumes the conclusion (*petito principii)*. The argument is this:

Wherein x = an ultimate authority claim
Wherein y = another ultimate authority claim

1. If x agrees with y, then y is true.
2. x does not agree with y.
3. Therefore, y is not true.

This is the equivalent of stating:[1]

1. If the one true God ALLAH agrees that YWH is the one true God, then YWH is the one true God.

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[1] Thus, when philosophers such as Harvard's Gordon D. Kaufman protest against the 'demand for unqualified theism' and claim they cannot accept 'overwhelming authority,' they are impugning their own position (56, 57). In actuality, they are just denying one authority in favor of another, be it rationalism, community, experience, etc. Everyone worships at some temple; it is just that some temples appear more religious than others.

2. The one true God ALLAH does not agree that YWH is the one true God.

3. Therefore, YWH is not the one true God.

The nature of x undermines the nature of y. And anything you substitute for x, whether it be the laws of science, a divine revelation, or the rules of logic, supplants y. So the argument is circular as (1) substantiates (3), which substantiates (1), *ad nauseum.*

This concept of authority severely constrains Kierkegaard in his attempt to evaluate Adler's claim. Adler said that Jesus commanded him to 'go in and write down' a special revelation. This claim, in theory, places Adler on a par with the 'apostles'.[1] Kierkegaard, with penetrating logic, recognizes that the content of Adler's revelation claim cannot be judged by an external standard (VIIIB.13/63-69;VIIB.235/94-97).

So then, Kierkegaard is forced to utilize a different way to evaluate Adler's claim. He focuses his investigation on the *authority* of Adler's claim rather than its *content.* Kierkegaard reasons as follows:

1. If Adler is not *consistent* between his initial claim and his subsequent statements/defenses, then his apostolic authority may be doubted.

2. And if Adler's apostolic authority may be doubted, then so may his revelation claim.

Thus, Kierkegaard does not challenge the claim itself. He challenges what Adler says about the claim. Kierkegaard declares that Adler claims to have 'a revelation-fact' and that 'everything revolves around that – or he must be held firmly to that' (VIIB.241/261).

So the answer to 'why' may be summarized as follows: Kierkegaard's concept of divine authority does not allow him to evaluate the content of Adler's claim by an external standard without impugning his own argument. So instead, he evaluates Adler's *authority* to make the claim.

Question Two: How?

The answer to the second question[2] (how does Kierkegaard attempt to evaluate Adler's authority?) may be understood by carefully considering the structure of Kierkegaard's argument. He argues for three primary points:

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[1] Kierkegaard seems to equate the term 'apostle' with the NT biblical writers (as with their counterparts in the OT: the Prophets).

[2] Kierkegaard explains that *The Book on Adler* 'is basically an ethical inquiry into the concept of revelation' (VI.6447). In all likelihood, he uses the term 'ethical' for this reason: If one were to inquire about a revelation claim, from the perspective of the religious stage, one would necessarily begin with the authority to which they were already committed. But the critique of Adler is attempted with the tools available in the ethical stage.

1. Adler claims he was given a new revelation, but then he tries to validate his claim by a different revelation.

2. Adler claims he was given a new revelation, but then he boasts that his faith in the old revelation was strengthened.

3. Adler claims he was given a new revelation, but then he promises to perfect it over time as if it were a human product.

As we have seen, these points may be challenged, but it is more important to note their form. *The first half of each sentence refers specifically to the claim made in Adler's preface to the Sermons. The second half refers to statements made in Adler's replies to Dean Steenberg.* Not once does Kierkegaard challenge the content of the claim; he only challenges the latter statements made about the claim. This observation is elucidated by the two Latin terms Kierkegaard uses in the introduction to his argument:

1. *e concessis* – He declares he will argue 'only *e concessis*', and that his argument 'neither flatly affirms nor denies' the content of the claim. The Latin term *e concessis* denotes: 'on the basis of the other's premise' (VIIB.235/93).

2. *sibi constans* – His inquiry 'pays close attention to whether it can hear from Adler's own utterances that he does not understand himself, is not in agreement with himself (*sibi constans*) and with his statements about himself'. The Latin term *sibi constans* denotes steadfast agreement, consistency (VIIB.235/93).

Kierkegaard insists that 'the issue is about Adler's self-identity', and the 'self-contradictions' and 'intrinsic irregularities' in Adler's statements indicate that Adler is not an 'apostle', but a 'confused lyrical genius' (VIIIB.7:7/23, VIIIB.7:7/24). And he argues that Adler's intrinsic irregularities belie his apostolic authority so that both Adler's claims and his defenses may be 'identified as his own productions' (VIIB.235/114).

So the answer to 'how' may be summarized as follows: Kierkegaard challenges Adler's authority with a criterion that demands *sibi constans* between Adler's revelation claim and the subsequent statements made about the claim.

Appendix C

[SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE ADDRESSING THE *AQEDAH*]

Each search was conducted, and the data collected, on July 20, 2006. The data for The British Library represents the combined total from two advanced searches of the Integrated Catalogue (by 'any word' and 'subject') for each key word term. The data for the Library of Congress represents the combined total from two guided searches (by 'keyword' and by 'subject') for each key word term. Utilizing the www.scholar.google.com database, all Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities books, journals, articles were searched with the exact phrase, 'Abraham and Isaac,' 'Genesis 22,' etc., or with all the words of 'DC' and 'Abraham,' etc. For the www.questia.com analysis, the 'contents' of all books, articles, essays, etc. were searched for the exact phrases of the key words or, where applicable, all the words (i.e. 'DC' and 'Abraham'). Finally, an advanced 'Book' search was employed through www.amazon.com, limited to the category of 'Religion & Spirituality,' for each key word term. It is also important to note that www.scholar.google.com claims only to provide approximate results, qualifying each statistic as 'about' x results.

Key Words	The British Library	Library of Congress	Scholar. google.com	Questia.com	Amazon.com	Total sources per Key Word
Abraham and Isaac	353	55	1,300	800	7,470	**9,978**
Genesis 22	4	14	781	315	2,236	**3,350**
Justification of Isaac	0	0	0	0	2	**2**
Teleological Suspension of the Ethical	0	1	169	95	91	**356**
Binding of Isaac	6	12	466	225	654	**1,363**
DC, Abraham	3	1	811	1,043	46	**1,904**
DC, Isaac	3	1	570	879	12	**1,465**
DC, sacrifice Isaac	0	0	71	77	6	**154**
Total results per search engine	**369**	**84**	**4,168**	**3,434**	**10,517**	**18,572**

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