

ANXIOUS SPIRITS – PNEUMATOLOGY IN HEIDEGGER, PAUL, AND KIERKEGAARD

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Abstract

The concept of spirit, *aand*, is central in Kierkegaard's thinking, in particular in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Yet, with few exceptions this theme has not been explicitly explored in the commentaries. It points back to his deep connection to the Letters of St Paul, that remain an unexplored source for our understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophical spirituality. The text introduces how the philosophical problem of spirit has obtained a new role and interest in phenomenology and post-phenomenological thinking, especially through the work of Derrida. Through Heidegger's reading of Paul it then returns to the Pauline Letters for a detailed interpretation of spirit, *pneuma*, in Paul. It is shown to emerge as a way of conceptualizing the peculiar temporality of passage and transition within a tradition, and thus as having to do with trans-generational communication. In conclusion it argues for the further importance of this source for our understanding of Kierkegaard.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, St Paul, Spirit, *Pneuma*, Concept of Anxiety, Faith.

“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”.

St Paul, 1st Cor: 2

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...”

St Paul, 1st Cor: 15

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh”.

St Paul, 1st Cor: 12

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Introduction

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard goes further than in any of his other writings in exploring the being of human existence as *spirit*, as *aand*. The animal is described as not experiencing anxiety precisely because it is not determined as “spirit”.² As a concept, however, and in contrast to “anxiety” that has a more immediate contemporary applicability, the role and meaning of *spirit* is not expounded as such in the book. It functions as a fundamental and organizing concept, but is not interpreted and explored in its own right. Human being is said to be both body and soul, and kept together by *spirit*. It is also in the form of *spirit* that human existence can balance the temporal and the eternal. In the end *spirit* emerges the defining characteristic that separates the Greeks from Christians. The “genius” is described as one who is unable to fully access the domain of faith precisely by not being fully *spiritual*, for “only spirit is established through spirit”, as he writes in Chapter III: § 3.

In an essay from 2001, *Spirit and temporality in the Concept of Anxiety*, Arne Grøn, as one of the very few interpreters that have tried to explicitly address this theme, raises the fundamental question: what is *spirit* in Kierkegaard?³ *The concept of anxiety*, Grøn writes, is not a book about the concept of spirit, but it is a book “showing the significance of the concept of spirit”.⁴ In his attempt to explicate the meaning of this notion, Grøn turns to the problem of time and temporality in Kierkegaard. Human existence is a synthesis of temporal and eternal. Spirit must be explored as the intersection of these temporal structures. The temporality of existence is an intersection of both, it is in-finite in its self-relation to time, but it must also be understood as the “movement of radical finitude”. In combining these movements, Grøn writes: “we can describe it as a transcendence of time (infinitude) that takes place in time by relating to time (finitude)”. In the last section of his essay, Grøn also come upon the question of spirit and *history*. For in Kierkegaard, spirit is essentially connected to history, to temporality as history, as a finite exposure to the passage of time.

This is just a brief summary of Grøn’s exposition of the problem. His essay is important in that it brings to our attention the relevance, and even necessity of thinking through this concept in Kierkegaard. His way of accessing it goes by way of a systematic reading of the problem of time, of the temporal and the eternal, and their possible fusion in a momentaneous, historical temporal structure. The reading is inspired by Heidegger, who himself partly learned to use these concepts through his creative appropriation of Kierkegaard in the German translations. What Grøn does not try to do in this essay, however, is to explore the

² Caput I: § 5, in Søren Kierkegaards skrifter. 4, Gjentagelsen; Frygt og bæven; Philosophiske smuler; Begrebet angst, København: Gad, 1997, 348, and in: *The Concept of Anxiety*, transl. A. Hannay, New York: Norton & Comp 2014, 51.

³ “Spirit and Temporality in The Concept of Anxiety”, *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook*, 2001: 128–140.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

history and historicity of the concept of *spirit* itself outside the space of Kierkegaard's usage. But in order to understand how it makes sense, also in the writings of Kierkegaard, I believe it is motivated to examine more closely how it has emerged and developed over time, and how it has been transformed into a philosophical *topos* in its own right. For even though, as Grøn notes, the concept of *spirit/Geist/Aaand* from a certain perspective may seem old-fashioned and strange, it is in fact a central trope also in modern thought, not just in the work of Hegel, but also in and through phenomenology.

When exploring the meaning and history of *spirit* we inevitably confront the intersection between philosophy and theology. In particular we come across the writings of St Paul, as perhaps the foremost writer on *spirit – pneuma* in Greek – in the entire Western tradition. The scarcity of interest in the philosophical importance of Paul for Kierkegaard is a notable lacuna in Kierkegaard scholarship. Kierkegaard never devotes an extensive analysis to Paul, but he refers to the Pauline *Letters* throughout his writings. Together with Luther and Hegel, Paul is the single most quoted author in his works and papers. And unlike his references to philosophical sources, his references to Paul are almost unanimously positive and non-critical. Paul is of course often mentioned in the commentaries, and some commentators have noted throughout the years that there is a distinct Pauline tonality in his thinking. Still, up until today there does not seem to have been a single consistent attempt to explore in its full width the impact of Paul for the philosophical orientation of Kierkegaard's thinking and writing, despite the fact that at least two of his works took their title directly from Paul, *Fear and Trembling* and *The thorn in the Flesh*.

What I present here is not an attempt to fill this gap. I will not try to recapitulate the many possible and fascinating details of Kierkegaard's Paul, nor the full scope of the Pauline Kierkegaard. After an introduction to how the concept of spirit has re-emerged in philosophy, notably in Derrida, the text is primarily devoted to accessing from an existential-phenomenological platform the meaning of *the spiritual* or *pneumatological* in Paul. Toward the end I return with some remarks on Kierkegaard and Paul in the light of the presented reading of the *Letters*. Like Arne Grøn, I will use Heidegger as a lever to open the question of the spiritual. But instead of going through the general problem of time and temporality I will consult his lectures on religion that were held in 1921, at a time when he was closer to Kierkegaard than perhaps ever before or after, and where the problem of *spirit/Geist* is given a first phenomenological definition.⁵

⁵ The context of the material presented here is an ongoing research project on phenomenology and religion where I have mostly concentrated on the Pauline Letters, picking up the thread from Heidegger's lectures. This attempt to interpret Paul philosophically has had a deep resonance also in recent times, in books by Agamben, Žižek, Badiou and Caputo, to mention the most important, which has contributed to bringing Paul again to the center of contemporary philosophical interest. For a more extensive background to this material and my own understanding, see e. g.: "Faith, Grace,

I

In 1987 Derrida published the essay *On Spirit, De l'esprit*, with the subtitle *Heidegger and the Question*. The reference to “the question” was intentionally ambiguous. This was a time when the discussion about Heidegger’s politics had recently exploded again, and Derrida had been invited to speak at a conference where the theme was “Heidegger and the open questions”. He chose to address these open questions, not straightforward, but rather obliquely through the interpretation of a theme that hitherto had received minimal attention in the literature on Heidegger, namely that of *spirit, Geist*.⁶

The standard conception at that point was that “Geist” belonged to an older philosophical-humanist vocabulary, from which Heidegger had departed. Polemicalizing against this simplified reading, Derrida showed that whereas in *Being and Time* Heidegger distanced himself from the use of “spirit” as a way of describing and analyzing human existence, together with that of the “psyche” and “subject”, he in fact returned again to this vocabulary only a few years later, in the “Rectoral address”, but also in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and in the interpretations of Hölderlin and Trakl. The topic of Derrida’s analysis was then clear: namely to determine the meaning of and rationale behind this re-introduction of *Geist* as a philosophical-political category in the work of Heidegger from the early thirties onward.

With his book Derrida had opened the way toward a deeper questioning of the role and meaning of the *spiritual* in philosophy and in rationality. We could say that he had made *pneumatology* valid again as philosophical and phenomenological concern. In retrospect we can also see how in the context of his own work it pointed the way toward his subsequent preoccupation with the problem of the *ghost*, as the other facet of *Geist*, which he developed in particular in *Specters of Marx* some years later, and which would continue to reverberate in remarks on *revenants* and *hauntings* in the subsequent later writings.

When Derrida wrote *On Spirit*, Heidegger’s lectures on the phenomenology of religion from 1921 had not yet been released from the archive. In these lectures Heidegger does in fact address the Christian and Pauline concept of *pneuma*, in a way that opens a trajectory that was not available to Derrida at the time. Notable in this context is also that this was a time when Heidegger was most intensively preoccupied with the writings of Kierkegaard. Another book that came a few years after Derrida’s analysis, and that was also partly inspired by it, was a

and the Destruction of Tradition: A Hermeneutic-Genealogical Reading of the Pauline Letters”, in: *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 2010, 11, 1: 16–34, and also: “Circumcising the Word: Derrida as Reader of Paul”, in: P. Frick (ed.) *Paul in the Grip of Philosophers*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 71–93.

⁶ J. Derrida: *De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question*, Paris: Galilée, 1987, in English translation by J. Bennington & R. Bowlby: *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989.

study by Alan Olson, *Hegel and Spirit. Philosophy as Pneumatology*.⁷ It traces Hegel's understanding and use of spirit to its religious-political background, to Luther in particular and generally to a pietist religious Lutheranism that was part of Hegel's background. By "spirit" Hegel is here said to seek to think the philosophical vehicle of "infinite mediation and differentiation". Olson does not pursue the topic back to Paul, but stresses the religious inheritance of the concept, back to the (Pauline) Luther.

The studies of Derrida and Olson confirm the relevance of exploring the narrative of Western rationalism and rationality as also narratives of *spirit*, and thus as part of a *pneumatological* inheritance. Such an historical exploration is of particular relevance when one considers the particular aura that surrounds this concept also in Kierkegaard, and more generally in phenomenology. To speak of the spirituality of reason is not a neutral. When it is recalled and put to use, as in the examples just mentioned, it is as the name for the highest possibility and potentiality of reason. It is notable that in Husserl's later writings, for example his lecture on the Crisis of European Sciences from 1935, spirit is recalled when rationality appears threatened by itself, as if by the inner repression, loss, and even death.⁸

In the introductory remarks to his course on phenomenology of religion from 1921, Heidegger insists that the phenomenological question of method is not a question of the appropriate methodological system, but of *access*, how to find the way to a "factual" life experience.⁹ A phenomenology of religious life, he writes, should not be a theory *about* the religious, conceived of as an *object* of study in the standard mode of a science of religion, but rather as *a way of entering in understanding* the religious as a form of meaning-fulfilment or *enactment*.

In the introductory remarks to the course he stresses that the phenomenological question of method is not about the appropriate methodological system, but one of *access*, that passes through factual (*faktische*) life experience. A phenomenology of religious life, he writes, is not a theory *about* the religious, conceived of as an object of study in the

⁷ See A. Olson: *Hegel and the Spirit. Philosophy as Pneumatology*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. Throughout the enormous secondary literature on Hegel there has been surprisingly little attention to the specific role and meaning of "spirit" itself. In his book Olson argues that the reference to and use of spirit in Hegel's thinking is inseparable from what we could call a modern "pneumatological" tradition within Christianity, that he dates back primarily especially the catechetical Luther. In Hegel's discourse a pietistic pneumatological Lutheranism is transformed into a philosophical narrative of the dynamic life of the concept, in a process of "infinite mediation and differentiation".

⁸ First published as an appendix to *Husserliana VI*, "Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie" (Haag: Nijhoff 1954), p. 314–348.

⁹ M. Heidegger: *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 60, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 1995), in English translation by M. Fritsch as *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004).

standard mode of a science of religion, but rather as *a way of entering*, in understanding, the religious as a type of meaning-fulfillment or enactment, in German *Vollzug*. It is not a psychological theory of religious experiences, but an explication of the *meaning* of religion, which therefore does not immediately need to take sides along confessional lines. Instead the confessional, as the meaning of devotion, is itself among the phenomena to be investigated. Nor does it take a definitive stance in regard to the distinction between rationality and irrationality, as if the religious, once and for all, could be located in the latter. The phenomenological understanding, as Heidegger rightly emphasizes, lies beyond this distinction. To such a phenomenological analysis belongs the preparedness to allow the basic, organizing concepts to remain undecided. It is on the condition that we do not force a conceptual structure onto a phenomenon that this phenomenon can begin to speak and have sense on its own terms. Such an explication can also permit the non-understandable to be understandable, precisely by letting-be [*belassen*] its non-understandability. Speaking in the terms of Husserl, we should try to investigate these phenomena by “bracketing” their realist, or metaphysical, implications.

Referring to the contemporary interest philosophy and phenomenology of religion in general, and in regard to Rudolf Otto’s then recently published book *Das Heilige* (from 1917), Heidegger comments on the attempt to delineate the religious sphere with reference to the category of “the irrational” (*das Irrationalen*), in contrast to the rational:

“But with these concepts nothing is said as long as one does not know the meaning of the rational. The concept of the irrational should be determined from the contrast to the concept of the rational, which still remains notoriously unclear. This conceptual couple should therefore be abolished. The phenomenological understanding, according to its basic meaning, lies completely outside this contrast, which only has a very restricted validity, if any”.

Heidegger’s main interest is the sense of *time* that animates the Pauline discourse, which he explores by focusing on the formulations of a life in faith as one of hope, waiting, and awakedness, of an open, finite existential horizon for the unexpected.

Toward the end of his lectures Heidegger himself also briefly addresses the problem of *pneuma* in Paul. He speaks of it in the context of its “Bezugsinn”, its “relational significance”, or the meaning of its relation to world. *Pneuma*, just like *psuche* and *sarx* (flesh), should not be seen as entities, he argues. Instead they should be seen as “zeitliche Güter”, and temporal goods, to the extent that they are lived in and through temporality. The “original Christian life” that he traces in the Pauline letters is one that cannot be interpreted with the help of categories that designate a continuous harmonic life, but involves a sense of “being shattered”. In this context Heidegger also rejects the idea of Paul as a mystical “pneumatian” (*Pneumatiker*) and of man as divinity that had been suggested by the biblical scholar Richard Reitzenstein in a study on Hellenistic

mystery religions. In terms of the “objective historical circumstances” the thesis may be valid Heidegger says, but in terms of how *pneuma* functions in the Pauline text it adds nothing to the interpretation.

Taking instead his lead from the famous quotation, cited above, from 1 Cor 2.10 f. of how it is through *pneuma* that the depth of God is sought, and that it is only through spirit and not through worldly wisdom that understanding can be had, Heidegger states that “*pneuma bei Paulus ist die Vollzugsgrundlage, aus der das Wissen selbst entspringt*”, that *pneuma* is the basis of enactment from which knowledge itself arises.¹⁰ For the same reason, he says, what is essential in Paul is not to *be* spirit, but to *have* spirit, *pneuma echein*. For Heidegger it is thus important to draw a sharp line between the mystics, who use artificial means to access the divine, whereas the Christian position is to remain “awake and vigilant”.

Recent critics have pointed out the lacunae in Heidegger’s understanding of the historical situation of the Jewish communities within which Paul was formulating his discourse.¹¹ There is a kind prevailing Lutheran ideological bias in Heidegger’s preoccupation with the very idea of “original Christianity”. An interpretation of the Pauline letters today needs to transcend the horizon of Paul as “Christian” in the sense that this word receives only later. Paul was, and this has become more and more of an accepted view in the confessionally unfettered literature, primarily a Jewish reformer of the inherited Judaic religion, who experienced his own historical situation and teaching as truthful to this tradition and its inner meaning at a decisive historical juncture. It is also only from this perspective that the genuine significance of his pneumatology makes sense. This is not the case in Heidegger’s interpretation, which is why the reading of Paul I propose here goes beyond the horizon of Heidegger’s conclusions, while relying on his basic hermeneutic approach.

II

Pneuma in the Pauline letters is not *one* thing. It is the principle frequently recalled by Paul in order to secure the unity of his own message, as when he writes in 1 Cor 12.13, of how we are all by “one *pneuma* ... baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, etc”. *Pneuma* is here the metonymic figure of the unity of the congregation, as a unity for which he is struggling, at times desperately, as the Letters clearly demonstrate. But the fact that *pneuma* is recalled to forge a unified congregation, does not make it itself into a unified entity. On the contrary, it works along several parallel trajectories in the Letters, as both a manifestation of God, and as identical to his essence (2 Kor 3.17), as both a

¹⁰ *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, transl. M. Fritsch & J. Gosetti-Ferencei, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004, 88.

¹¹ For this argument, see W. Blanton: *Displacing Christian Origins. Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007.

means of human knowledge to reach the truth (Eph 6.17), and as truth itself (ibid), as a source of goodness (Gal 5.22), as distinct forms of comportment (Rom 8.15), and as an independent force that takes possession of life. It moves throughout the Letters as a resource from which his discourse draws support, in and through which it inhales and exhales the force needed to communicate its message. *Pneuma* thus appears as partly a performative concept, as it is recalled at decisive junctures, to secure the force and the legitimacy of the discourse itself – as when he says (in 2 Kor 4.13) that he has “the same *pneuma* of faith as mentioned in the scripture ... we too believe and therefore we too speak,” and also that what is spoken is itself secure as a communication of *pneuma* (2 Cor 3.6).

Pneuma occurs frequently in the Letters as an oppositional concept, in opposition to matter, to body, to the finite in general, and directly in opposition toward death. “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit” (Rom 8.9). Also in Romans it is said that “if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the spirit do mortify the deed of the body, you shall live” (8.13). *Pneuma* is thus fixed as a name for that which *survives*, but also for the very possibility of survival, as a possible victory over mortality. What it promises is that there is survival, that there is a way to leave the earthly bonds, and thus to liberate oneself. The ultimate symbol of this promise is Jesus, who is taken to have vanquished death, and to have done so precisely in virtue of *pneuma* (Rom 1.4).

Leaving aside the myth of resurrection, and the direct contrast between a supposedly atemporal spirit and temporal matter, we can see how the *pneumatic* thus carries a more general promise of a life liberated from destruction and also from being enclosed and entrapped, not outside time, but precisely in time, in a transformed time. In 2 Kor 3.17 there is an important passage that expands the conception of spirit in this direction. It speaks of how “where the *pneuma* of the Lord is, there is freedom”. The whole context of this passage deserves close consideration, for it pushes the meaning of the *pneuma* toward another contrast, which in the end is more important than the one with mortal flesh, namely with *literal tradition*. Paul writes here of how the standard reader of the “old covenant”, i. e., the inherited body of Jewish literature, has a “veil over his face”, a veil that can only be lifted by the working of Christ as the vehicle of spirit. In other words, *pneuma* is also the means of interpretation, a received capacity of gaining a supposedly more genuine access to tradition.

From here we can see the real significance of the fact that in many passages in Paul, spirit is not primarily contrasted with body or flesh (which it is too of course), but with “the letter”, as when he writes in 2 Cor 3.6, that it is not of the letter but of the spirit, *ou grammatos alla pneumatos*. It is through spirit that a reader is supposedly enabled to move beyond the surface of what is read. Spirit is thus not simply directed *against* the *gramma*, but it is rather what works in the service of the *gramma*, in the sense of “what is really said”. It is, again and in short, a capacity for receiving tradition. It is a capacity to speak and commu-

nicate a message that is at once tradition and in excess of tradition, as the second covenant is not “of the letter, but of the *pneuma*” (2 Cor 3.6).

The same passage is followed by the remarkable conclusion: “for the letter kills, but the *pneuma* gives life”. Here the transition is established seamlessly between the problem of life and survival, and the very mode of how tradition is transmitted. And *pneuma* is at the heart of it all. If we abide by the letter we die, whereas the spirit will guarantee that we live. What then is this *sur-vival*, for which the pneumatic reception is so central? How is it that we can die in and of a literal reception of tradition, whereas a pneumatic reception of it will enable it to live in us, and we through it? We need to phrase the question in this way in order to truly see what kind of hermeneutics is at work in Paul, and how his preoccupation with the *pneumatic* is in fact motivated by an attempt to orchestrate the destruction and the resurrection of tradition at once. In the end, the resurrection of Christ works as a metonymical promise of another resurrection, which is the resurrection of the individual and the community within the transmission of an inheritance. Or as he writes in Rom 8.11:

“But if the *pneuma* of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he ... shall also give life to your mortal bodies by his *pneuma*” [transl. modified].

The extent to which *pneuma* essentially has to do with how tradition is transmitted is highlighted most visibly perhaps in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 2. This is the passage where Paul presents himself as someone who comes not with “lofty speech or wisdom (*sophia*)”, but with words of *pneuma* and power or strength (*dynamis*), that should guarantee that the listeners do not “rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”. This pneumatically secured wisdom is then qualified in a temporal-historical way, by saying that it is “not of this time” (*ou tou aionos toutou*) but that it comes “before the ages” (*pro ton aionon*). This teaching or wisdom is then again qualified by *pneuma*, for it is what has been revealed through the *pneuma* (*dia tou pneumatos*), which is then followed by the formulation quoted earlier, of how the *pneuma* is what searches everything. In other words, *pneuma* is a means and vehicle of knowledge, communicated and transmitted through time, and that acts so as to preserve what was there, but what the passage of time itself also tends to forget and dissimulate. Its knowledge is free, and it is also what brings about freedom. It is a force from ancient times that brings the present in touch with the past, to the extent that this present is already opened to the past.

It is also at this particular point that the logic of Paul’s pneumatology reaches its most intense moment in the entire corpus of the letters, as he writes of how we are “taught by the spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (*alla en didaktois pneumatos pneumatikois pneumatika synkrinontes*). What he is reaching for here – this is the interpretation I am suggesting – is an articulation of the ideal of a truthful transmission of tradition – a tradition that can only be taught

from within itself, in accordance with this itself, to those who are already open to it, and yet in contrast to the current cultivation of its message in the world.

In this particular passage readers have often stopped short before what appears to be a strict demarcation between the *spirit of the world* (*pneuma tou kosmou*) and the spirit of god (*pneuma tou theou*), ending up in fruitless disputes about to what extent Paul is pointing beyond this world and its obligation, and toward an entirely different world, which must then be countered with all his remarks of how we should still be committed to this world, to a love and concern for our immediate community, etc. But this discussion leads away from the underlying motive of the entire narrative, namely to secure – metaphorically and poetically – that the senses of his community remains open to the possibility of living the truth of its own tradition through time, across and against the constraints of the present.

In the following and final passage of this letter on learning, interpretation and transmission, the different types of intelligence are differentiated in a remarkable way. For here Paul writes that the ordinary human soul (*psuche*) does not reach into the *pneuma* of God, for these truths are only accessible through *pneuma*, as the supreme and indisputable source of certainty. For the pneumatic man – he adds – is judged by no one. And in the last sentence he asks how we can reach into the *reason*, the *nous*, of God himself, answering that this is possible through the spirit and reason of Christ. For we have, he concludes, the mind or reason – the *nous* – of Christ.

The very formulation of “having the mind of Christ” (*noun Christou echoumen*), as a secured means of access to the *nous* of God – can easily invite a reading of Paul as a mystic, in particular as he has earlier in the same passage referred to the “mysterious wisdom of God” (*en mysterio sophian theou*). But as Heidegger rightly points out in his lectures, as quoted above, it is misleading to read Paul as a mystic in a conventional sense of the mystery cults. His remarks are to the point, and they lead in the direction of the interpretation that I have tried to develop here. Yet, in his urge to rid Paul of the label *Pneumatiker*, Heidegger shuns away from the possibility of truly assessing the weight and implication of the pneumatic in the Pauline letters, and thus also of reaching a more philosophically reflected understanding of the pneumatic as such.

Once we have secured access to the phenomenological meaning of the pneumatological, as a poetics of historical existence and transmission of inheritance, we can also go further into the edifice of Pauline theology, and discern its structure. I am thinking in particular of the specific antagonistic framing of the pneumatic that runs through his discourse, where the *pneuma* is consistently acted out not just against the *letter*, but also against the law (*nomos*). An important passage that illustrates this constellation we find in Galatians 5.18, where it is said: “if you be led by the *pneuma*, you are not under the law”. Not to be under the law, is not however the same thing as having left the law behind or to be law-less. On the contrary, and this is central to the Pauline message, that

it is only by not being subjected to the law that the genuine meaning of the law can be fulfilled. Or as it is written in Romans 8.4: “that the righteousness (*to dikaoima*) of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit”. So again we see how *pneuma* works to secure the access to the genuine meaning of the tradition, against the plain obedience, which looks only to the current practice and interpretation. As a means of hermeneutic access, it establishes a link between the past and the present.

The same logic characterizes the passages that contrast *pneuma* and *gramma*, spirit and writing, that occur on several occasions, e. g., in Romans 7.6, that speaks of the delivery from the law as under a spell of death, and how life is made possible again not through the “oldness of the letter” (*palaioteti grammatos*) but through “the newness of pneuma” (*kainoteti pneumatatos*). Here again the temporal dimension gives the clue to the interpretation. *Pneuma* is a newness of the old, that which comes before and through the times, whereas the letter is the oldness of the new. While the letter – that which is written - could seem to carry the weight and the truth of tradition and thus of what is living, it is in fact an inheritance of death. In contrast, the *pneuma* is what guarantees the life and liberation of the old, but of an oldness which in its newness is older than the old.

The event of Christ is for Paul ultimately a hermeneutic event, one that makes the ancient doctrines legible and valid again. The pneumatic understanding of this event and of its tradition is meant to secure the access to this inheritance in understanding. Christ guarantees this access through his resurrection. The defining moment of his existence is not the fact that for a moment he was dead, and then again living, but that he, in and through his example, has shown how the tradition can become alive again as a promise. This is precisely the matrix according to which Paul understands the relation to the tradition and the law (*nomos*), that it has become imbued with death, but that it can again – through *pneuma* – becoming living, and thus also remain living.

With this in mind we can also make better sense of some of the most complex and troublesome statements on the relation to existing (Jewish) tradition. When we read in Romans 2.29 that “he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the *pneuma*, and not in the letter” this makes perfect sense in relation to the suggested interpretation. It is not through the outer, material mark, nor through obedience to the written law, that one is true to one’s tradition, but this is something that takes place through the connection between the *pneuma* of the law and the *pneuma* of the individual, in other words that one experiences oneself as attached, joined, and committed to one’s human-intellectual inheritance. This passage should not primarily be read in the context of the controversies between Jewish and Christian, where it has worked its disastrous effects for centuries, for this is not really what is at stake. What is a stake is – again – the attempt to grasp poetically the nature of a living bond to tradition, first of all for the Jews, and indirectly for anyone who is able to access it.

I have tried to show how we can and should read Pauline pneumatics as in fact a discourse primarily concerned with the problem of tradition and inheritance, and thus of the temporal condition of understanding. But it is indubitably the case that a central aspect of Paul's pneumatology is one of the *triumph* of life over death. In Romans 8.2 he writes that it is the *pneuma* of life in Christ that has liberated me from the law of sin and death. And in Romans 6.23 the gift of God is said to be "eternal life" (*zoen aionion*), and to be "pneumatically minded" (*phronema pneumatōs*) is equated with *life*, as opposed to being "bodily/carnally minded", which leads to death. The examples could be multiplied. *Pneuma* is connected to life, and to the possibility of triumph over death. It is a word for *survival*, for the securing of survival, but also a name for that which *survives*. Tradition and legacy presupposes death. It is a law of history, that the testator shall die, but also through his testament *sur-vive*.¹² The 2. Cor 4.11 speaks of the life of Jesus that is to be made manifest in the mortal flesh, in other words it speaks of an infusion of life into the mortal body, and there is "victory of death" (1 Cor 15.54).

But from whence does this life come? What is Paul here speaking about? A way of phenomenologically understanding this statement is that he is poetizing the experience of survival of an original impulse of life and capacity, that moves through time and history, travelling across the law of death, as the genuine memory of what was originally promised. The *pneuma* is not just a position from within which the individual subject speaks, but it is the attempt to name that in tradition, which survives as a possibility for an unlimited future. It is the life in death, and the life across death. In 2 Cor 3.6 it is said that they have become "ministers of the new testament" (*diakonous diatekes*) not through the letter, but through the *pneuma* – for the letter kills, whereas *pneuma* gives life. Here again we can see that the caretaking of the tradition is made possible by spirit as *sur-vival*, as a principle of life.

When the Pauline letters refer to spirit/pneuma, they refer to a transgeneration and ancestral force, operating through tradition, thereby maintaining tradition. Paul transforms this inheritance, articulating spirit/pneuma explicitly as a hermeneutical experience, a key to not only the genuine inheriting of tradition, but as a way to permit the life of tradition to be operative in himself and in his community, through a dismantling of its inherited claim. This is also why he, as the carrier of a new and happy message, an *eu-angelos*, is also the one who must perform a "destruction" of that very same tradition. In 2 Cor 10.4 he writes: "I destroy buildings of thought" – *logismous kathairtontes*, in latin: *concordia destruentes*. This destruction is here performed by an individual who readily acknowledges himself to have a bit of madness in him (*aphrosynēs*), 2 Cor 11.1, something that should serve the power and the spirit of a god, who also grants this power to his servant.

¹² On this theme, see also the supposedly apocryphic letter to the Hebrews 9.16.

In a final and concluding section I will now return to Kierkegaard, in order to point to some ways in which this interpretation of Paul and the problem of spirit/*pneuma* can permit us to access his thinking.

III

One of the philosophically most dense passages in all of Kierkegaard's works is the introduction to Chapter III in *The Concept of Anxiety*. The topic here is the emergence of anxiety through a failure to recognize one's sin. Kierkegaard recalls his previous analysis of human existence as the fusion of body and soul, carried by a *spirit* that stands in direct proportion to anxiety. He adds to this that anxiety should be understood as the "moment" or actually the "moment of vision", the *øjeblik*. The temporal category of the "moment of vision" is here introduced as the key to understanding spirituality. Over the following pages he critically discusses how modern (Hegelian) thinking has ultimately failed to conceptualize the problem of "passage" or "transition", making it into a dialectical game. In the Platonic problem of "the sudden", *to exaifnes*, he finds the most advanced attempt in classical metaphysics to articulate the problem of passage, of fusion of being and non-being, and thus of the very dynamics of the temporal. But in the end, he concludes, the Greek thinkers were not able to think temporality either. And the reason for this was that they "lacked the concept of spirit".¹³ In a footnote to this passage he notes that *The New Testament* has a "poetic transcription" (*poetisk Omskrivelse*) of the moment of vision, namely when Paul says that the world will perish "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (*en atomoi kai en ripe ophtalmou*). But what Kierkegaard does not say is that this passage from 1st Cor: 15, is not just a poetic transcription of "the moment of vision", but the very creation of this literal trope, as one of a number of key concepts that he takes directly from his reading of Paul.

The consequence of this correlation has a deeper resonance for our argument. The inability of the Greek tradition to understand the concept of spirit is directly connected by Kierkegaard to its inability to understand the temporality of the moment. We are thus led to the conclusion that a key to Kierkegaard's understanding of spirit is also to be found in Paul. On the following page he states that as soon as spirit is posited there is also the moment, and vice versa. The temporality of the moment and the spiritual are mutually implicative. Taking his starting point in a passage from the *Letter to the Ephesians* (4.19) on "those being past feeling" or literally "without pain" (*apelgekotes*), he then goes on to argue how the emergence of genuine spirituality produces an intensified contrast *vis-à-vis* the non-spiritual. The non-spiritual person can mimic spirit, but only as empty talk, because it does not speak *in virtue of spirit*, or through the *force* of spirit (*i Kraft af Aand*).

The examples of how Kierkegaard forges his own understanding of the spiritual in proximity to Paul could be multiplied. Here I will only

¹³ Søren Kierkegaards skrifter. 4, Gjentagelsen; Frygt og bæven; Philosophiske smuler; Begrebet angst, København: Gad 1997, 391.

recall one more dimension of this larger problematic, namely the distinction between genius and prophet. This comparison is also first articulated in *The Concept of Anxiety*, in the following section in the same chapter (III: 2). The genius, he writes, is characterized by subjectivity, and by its understanding of its own exterior as “destiny”. In its understanding of destiny the genius represents a superior position in relation to the non-spiritual. But having understood the world as destiny is not to have reached fully into an understanding of providence and grace. For this requires an experience of sin, that is only available to the spiritual person. In *The Concept of Anxiety* this argument is not connected directly to Paul, even though the whole context is clearly guided by a Pauline sensibility. But if we turn to the later essay *On the Difference between Genius and Apostle*, the extent to which Paul serves as a model for his own writing and philosophical orientation becomes evident. The genius is here someone who remains on the surface of things, who works with aesthetic means. The apostle, on the other hand, is not of the aesthetic, nor of the philosophical order, but it is someone who speaks with and through the authority of the divine.¹⁴

To speak with spirit, as a spiritual thinker, is to think from within the experience of sin, anxiety, and the temporality of the moment. In short it is to speak from within the experience of *faith*. If we are to understand the meaning of the spiritual – of *Aand* – in Kierkegaard we need to go back to Paul. But this return to Paul does not mean that we stay in and with Paul or that we relinquish philosophy to theology or simply to a confessional comportment. On the contrary, and as I hope to have shown here, the meaning of the spiritual/*pneumatikos* in Paul is by no means settled. The spiritual is presented in the letters as a force that provides certainty and which gives authority to speak and to comport oneself. But the question remains what the true source of this force really is. I have argued that we can only begin to understand this if we read Paul as a thinker of the problem of tradition, of transmission, and thus of the historical. To read Paul in this way is not simply to apply a Heideggerian matrix to a theological thinker. Instead it amounts to showing how a certain problematic has already been operative from the start in the Pauline text, in ways that were not even fully apparent to Heidegger.

The theme of the spirit reaches Heidegger partly through Kierkegaard, as a pneumatological inheritance, that is concerned with inheritance as such. The *pneuma* is a name for that which travels and moves over generations, it is a name for that secret force that permits the new to strike a rift in the solid fabric of time, in order to release the full force of the temporal and historical itself. In all its hyperbolic certainty, it is therefore also a name for the vulnerability of freedom.

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaards skrifter. 11, Lilien paa marken og fuglen under himlen, København: Gad, cop. 2006, 100.