**Being before God: Fabro’s Thomistic approach to Kierkegaard’s Theological Anthropology**

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# **Abstract**

In this article, I uncover a point of contact between Cornelio Fabro’s philosophical theology and Søren Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology. I survey how Fabro’s metaphysical account of the human person as a created “synthesis” between the infinite and finite, also invites a soteriological account of the call of Christian discipleship. My wider argument is that Fabro unearthed a structural feature in Kierkegaard’s theological approach to free creation from nothing, human subjectivity, suffering, and freedom that mapped on to Fabro’s philosophical theology of participation. In doing so, Fabro recovered the missing metaphysical and soteriological elements of Kierkegaard’s theological emphasis on the task and goal of selfhood beyond the atheistic existentialist stereotypes of God-denial, acosmic individualism, and self-annihilation. Often construed as polar opposites, I claim that Thomistic philosophy and Kierkegaard’s existential approach can be juxtaposed fruitfully as sharing an important point of departure with free creation from nothing. In short, Fabro’s creative link between Kierkegaard and Thomas Aquinas affords a unique *theological* development in post-Kantian approaches to the topic of existential freedom.

*Keywords:*

## Creation, Cornelio Fabro, Freedom, Søren Kierkegaard, Theological Anthropology

**F**or Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology, the free spiritual subject is the single individual before God, the Truth that one’s subjectivity remains accountable to and images. In other words, Fabro brought together Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the infinite God-relation as dialectically inseparable from one’s finite self-determination on the basis of participation. Thus, Fabro discovered in Kierkegaard an account of existential participation in the Imitation of Christ as the call of Christian discipleship, which overcomes melancholy, anxiety, and doubt with a willing faith. Thus, Fabro’s Thomistic approach to Kierkegaard’s theology of creation, his theological anthropology, and his moral psychology illuminates the theological point of departure in Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel and Christendom. For Fabro, the Aristotelian inheritance of Kierkegaard’s theology of freedom in relation to the metaphysical Absolute and his emphasis on the paradoxical object of faith provided important links to Thomas Aquinas.

How does Fabro unite Thomas” metaphysics of participation with Kierkegaard’s theology? At first glance, Thomas Aquinas and Kierkegaard have been viewed as polar opposites, but Fabro discovered several subterranean links on the basis of the shared paradoxical claim that God is the omnipotent Free Creator and humans are created with self-determining freedom. In his own words, Kierkegaard wrote:

Creation out of nothing is, once again, an expression of the capacity of omnipotence to make someone independent. He to whom I owe absolutely everything—even while he has just as absolutely retained everything—this is the person who has in fact made me independent. If in creating a human being God himself had lost a little of his power, he would indeed be unable to make a human being independent.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Fabro deploys Thomas for a metaphysical account of created freedom as it pertains to the constitution of the human and angelic creature, and against this backdrop, Fabro sees Kierkegaard’s existential emphasis on the ethico-religious as an indispensable soteriological feature of the subjectivity of the single individual before God. By linking together Thomas and Kierkegaard, Fabro displays how they both assert the theological claim that the God who freely creates and reveals God’s truth, patiently awaits the free response of the creature in the act of faith by grace. In this way, Fabro argues that for both Thomas and Kierkegaard, the analogical paradox of participation clarifies how created freedom is both metaphysically constituted in the act of being (*esse ut actus*) yet existentially self-constituting in the participated creativity of freedom (*esse in actus*).[[2]](#footnote-2)

On Thomas” side, Fabro develops this position not only in his dissertation on the metaphysics of participation, but also in his Leuven lectures on participation and causality. For Fabro, participation names a proportion between freedom and causality in predicamental and transcendental ways. At the end of his career in Perugia, Fabro’s later reflections on freedom develops Thomas” view of the will in a Kierkegaardian way that is not reducible to Duns Scotus.[[3]](#footnote-3) Recently, the director of the Fabro Center, Fr. Gianluca Trombini has analyzed how *one* passage from Kierkegaard’s journals reflects a theology of creation, created freedom, and divine omnipotence.[[4]](#footnote-4) I want to extend Fabro’s insight systematically to illuminate Kierkegaard’s theological approach to the grammatical yet real non-reciprocal relation of dependence between the creature and Creator across the orders of creation and redemption.[[5]](#footnote-5) My suggestion is that Fabro’s link between Kierkegaard and Thomas is a unique *theological* development in post-Kantian approaches to the topic of existential freedom.[[6]](#footnote-6) In what follows, I will explore how Kierkegaard’s maneuvers fit together with Fabro in a unitary and constructive way.

### **1. Kierkegaard on Free Creation**

Readers of Kierkegaard have struggled to embrace his affirmation of creation *ex nihilo*. On the one hand, there is K.E. Løgstrup who mischaracterized Kierkegaard’s view of creation as the hatred of the natural order of things.[[7]](#footnote-7) On the other hand, the late David Kangas suggested that Kierkegaard’s view of creation aligns with a Neoplatonic view of the necessary emanation of goodness since “the absolute neither is nor is not, that it is beyond being and nonbeing”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Yet, despite Kierkegaard’s repeated references to God as Creator, free creation from nothing, the uniqueness of human beings, and the beauty of the natural world, some readers of Kierkegaard’s theology still claim that creation “is not a major theme in Kierkegaard’s writings” and he offers “very little insight” and only a “patchy engagement”.[[9]](#footnote-9) Prior to the 1980s, Cornelio Fabro was one of the few scholars to take seriously Kierkegaard’s view of free creation from nothing and our creaturely dependence in non-contrastive and non-competitive terms.[[10]](#footnote-10) To see how Kierkegaard’s view of our Creator’s loving omnipotence and providential care could resemble anything like St. Thomas” view, a closer examination of specific texts is warranted.

The first point to establish is that Kierkegaard believed not in necessary emanation but rather in free creation. In 1839, Kierkegaard explicitly says in his journals that “God always creates from nothing, and needs neither material nor our self-made wisdom”.[[11]](#footnote-11) In *Works of Love* (1847), Kierkegaard writes that our creaturely dependence upon God is non-reciprocal since “God does not need any human being any more than he needs the whole human race or everything that at any moment is for him the nothing from which he created it”.[[12]](#footnote-12) Kierkegaard’s emphasis on *ex nihilo* resurfaces again in *Christian Discourses* (1848), where he articulates the analogous relation between being and becoming with the love of the good:

But God, who creates from nothing [*der skaber af Intet*], omnipotently takes from nothing and says, "Become"; he lovingly adds, "Become something even in relation to me". What wonderful love; even his omnipotence is in the power of love. From this, results the reciprocal relationship. If God were only the Omnipotent One, then there would be no reciprocal relationship, because for the Omnipotent One the creature is nothing. But for love it is something … The omnipotence that creates out of nothing is not as incomprehensible as the omnipotent love that can make this wretched nothing for omnipotence into something for love.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Indeed, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, is on the same page with St Thomas when he writes that God is himself unmoved and yet he moves all *not* out of necessity but out of *love*, such that

if he moves himself, then there of course is no need that moves him, as if he himself could not endure silence but was compelled to burst into speech. But if he moves himself and is not moved by need, what moves him then but love, for love does not have the satisfaction of need outside itself but within.[[14]](#footnote-14)

One year before his death, Kierkegaard writes in his journal that “God is infinite redoubling” [*uendelig* *Fordoblelse*], which is Kierkegaard’s way of referring to God’s eternal simpleness or what David Burrell has described with the riddle phrase: to be God is to be *to-be* and God wills what God intends, and that God’s act of understanding is God’s act of being.[[15]](#footnote-15) There is no need to debate the priority of thought over being in God because, as Kierkegaard says, “God relates himself objectively to his own subjectivity” which “is simply a redoubling of his subjectivity”.[[16]](#footnote-16) For Kierkegaard, the formal features of God’s simpleness, eternity, and agency turn out to be internally related to the unity of being, truth, and freedom, upon which depend our empirical, ethical, and religious endeavors.[[17]](#footnote-17)

We have seen how for Kierkegaard, there is a real, “infinite qualitative” *difference* between creation and the Creator, but Kierkegaard also asserts a *relationship* of contemporaneity or real presence. In a journal entry from 1837, Kierkegaard wrote about God’s conservation of creation: “It is so impossible for the world to exist without God that if God could forget it, it would instantly cease to exist”.[[18]](#footnote-18) This connection between God’s conserving activity in creation is emphasized again in *Practice in Christianity* (1850) in how we can see the effects of forces in nature

but the power that supports it all you do not see, you do not see God’s omnipotence—and yet it is just as fully certain that he, too, is working, that one single moment without him and then the world is nothing. Thus, invisible on high, he is also present everywhere, occupied with drawing all to himself.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Likewise, for Fabro, the invisible primary cause is the intensive act of being sustaining all that is in act, perfecting every perfection. Moreover, Kierkegaard argues that because there is no time in which the Creator is not *present to* his creation, there is no need for God to interfere with it.

In a certain sense one can say that there simply is no governance, just as, indeed, it is also as if there were no experimenter, or as if the experimenter were no one, because he does not, after all, intervene, but simply permits the complex forces to unfold on their own. And yet the experimenter is sheer attentiveness and incessantly follows along, which is only a weak metaphor for God’s way of being-with, while in another sense he constrains himself entirely from intervening omnipotently. Only once has Governance intervened omnipotently: in Christ.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Thus, like Fabro, Kierkegaard argues that secondary causes retain their integrity despite the non-reciprocal relationship of dependence between secondary and primary causation. Kierkegaard even goes further, saying *that* “God could create beings who are free in relation to himself is the cross that philosophy could not bear but upon which it has remained hanging”.[[21]](#footnote-21)

### **2. Participated Freedom and Subjectivity**

In his 1954 Cardinal Mercier lectures, Fabro explicitly draws upon Kierkegaard’s notion of “given independence” to articulate his own view of participated freedom.[[22]](#footnote-22) For Fabro, we remain unfettered by participation in the good we seek not to resist because “divine omnipotence makes free what it creates”.[[23]](#footnote-23) Fabro notes that “Kierkegaard explained a similarly profound principle in a passage of his *Journals* from 1846 where he begins with the following declaration”:

The highest thing that one can do for a being, much higher than all that a man can do for it, is to make it free. To be able to do that, it is precisely omnipotence that is necessary. This seems strange, because omnipotence ought to make dependents. But if one truly wants to conceive omnipotence, one shall see that it bears precisely in the determination of being able to resume [*riprendere*] itself in the manifestation of omnipotence in such a way that the created thing can, by way of omnipotence, be independent. For this reason, a man cannot ever make another person completely free; for the one who has the power, is therefore bound himself and will always have a false relation to the one who wants to make him free. Moreover, there is in every finite power (natural talents, etc.) a properly finite love. Only omnipotence can resume itself while giving itself away, and this relation constitutes precisely the independence of the one who receives.[[24]](#footnote-24)

For Fabro, Kierkegaard’s remark formulates “a metaphysics of freedom that in my view—if I have understood something about the principles of Thomism—can be accepted by the most orthodox Thomist”.[[25]](#footnote-25) Fabro explained that “the relation is not then properly that God "concurs" with created freedom, but that just as He is the One that establishes it in *esse* so also, He establishes it in action in the sense that it embraces the faculty and the act itself in its totality and wholeness”.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Kierkegaard’s view of creation does not entail a competitive relationship between divine and human agency. Instead, Kierkegaard argues that the “absolutely greatest thing that can be done for a being, greater than anything one could make it into, is to make it free. It is precisely here that omnipotence is required”.[[27]](#footnote-27) Kierkegaard continues: “Only omnipotence can take itself back while it gives away, and this relationship is indeed the independence of the recipient. God’s omnipotence is therefore his goodness. For it is goodness to give away entirely” and “only omnipotence can create independence, creating from nothing something that has its being in itself”. Kierkegaard goes on to describe the non-contrastive relation of creaturely dependence: “Omnipotence does not remain embedded in a relation to an other, for there is no other to which it is related—no, it can give without giving up the least bit of its power—that is, it can make someone independent”. Finally, Kierkegaard concludes:

Creation out of nothing is, once again, an expression of the capacity of omnipotence to make someone independent. He to whom I owe absolutely everything—even while he has just as absolutely retained everything—this is the person who has in fact made me independent. If in creating a human being God himself had lost a little of his power, he would indeed be unable to make a human being independent.

That our freedom is participated from the free creator is a point that Kierkegaard makes elsewhere in his writings. For instance, in his *Upbuilding Discourses*, Kierkegaard writes:

to be dependent on God, completely dependent—that is independence…. Dependence on God is the only independence, because God has no gravity; only the things of this earth, especially earthly treasure, have that—therefore the person who is completely dependent on him is light.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Indeed, Kierkegaard described our creaturely status and participation in God in terms of *abiding*.

From a Christian standpoint, you *abide in God*. For if you abide in God, then whether you live or die, whether things go well or badly for you while you are alive; whether you die today or only after seventy years … you still do not come to be outside of God, you *abide*—thus you remain present to yourself in God and therefore on the day of your death you are in paradise on this very day.[[29]](#footnote-29)

In the rest of this discourse, Kierkegaard writes that the Creator’s consummation of all things in joyful communion is the final end of creation, which is not perishability.[[30]](#footnote-30) Kierkegaard also describes joy as the present time when God is eternally present to today. For this reason, Kierkegaard invites his reader to cast her cares upon the Lord (1 Pet 5:7) “with a sureness like that with which the most reliable of guns hits its mark, and with a faith and confidence like that one encounters only in the most practiced marksman—upon God” since her casting of cares casts the relative on to the Absolute, who bears it as nothing, and who gives her a share in His unconditioned joy.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Kierkegaard still affirmed that God’s divine initiative is the origin of our participated freedom that freely responds to God’s presence that we choose as our ultimate end in concrete.

God is present in the moment of choice, not in order to watch but in order to be chosen. Therefore, it is deceitful talk if someone says that God is so lofty that he cannot lower himself to being chosen, because then the choice is abolished. And if the choice is abolished because God is not present as the object of choice, then mammon is not an option either. It is God’s presence in the choice that poses the choice between God and mammon.[[32]](#footnote-32)

This decision to freely seek out God’s intimate presence in our daily life involves not a retreat from the world but rather attunement with creation. In this way, Kierkegaard applies the doctrine of free creation from nothing in an ethical and theological direction regarding the love of neighbor and love of God. This surfaces in Kierkegaard’s emphasis on loving the people we see as neighbors—a fundamental feature of our sanctification in the love of God. Rather than portraying the love of neighbor and God as two separate competing concerns between the “this-worldly” versus the “other-worldly”, Kierkegaard actually describes love as a self-diffusive goodness that loves the other in their actual situation to seek out what is appropriate for each individual. Reflecting on love not being self-seeking (1 Cor 13:5), Kierkegaard writes that even our love is participated from God insofar as it is completely self-giving:

this quality of building up has in turn the characteristic of being able to give itself in everything, be present in everything—just as love has. Thus, we see that love, in this its characteristic quality, does not set itself apart and alongside another; neither does it plume itself on any independence and being-for-itself but completely gives itself; the characteristic is that it exclusively has the quality of giving itself completely.[[33]](#footnote-33)

By thinking with Thomas and Kierkegaard, Fabro examined an enduring metaphysical problem regarding the theological foundation of created freedom. Moreover, Fabro exhibited his understanding of human dignity using Kierkegaard’s emphasis on truth as subjectivity when he suggested that “true truth is what brings us to freedom, but we cannot attain the truth except through freedom”.[[34]](#footnote-34) For Fabro, Thomas and Kierkegaard sought to recover divine transcendence and human subjectivity at once.

Fabro unites Kierkegaard’s existential and soteriological emphasis on subjectivity is truth, which reveals that embodied truth liberates, edifies, and saves because the omnipotent free creator makes us free indeed. The formal capacity of freedom encounters the existential reality of our need for grace by virtue of our deliberate and anxious unfreedom. If we are actually created with freedom by the free creator, then how shall we become free? For Thomas, the disciple of the Lord Jesus “abides” by promoting human dignity in friendship, knowledge of the truth in divine revelation, and human freedom in faith, which anticipates our salvation and emancipation from sin and death.[[35]](#footnote-35) The work of Christ and the Spirit is our emancipatory consolation precisely because the Spirit of Truth guides us into truth (Jn 16:13). Existentially, the truth becomes emancipatory when it is embodied. The redemption of salvation offers freedom *from* the enslavement of sin and pride, and the freedom *for* knowing and loving God in Christ. In this way, Fabro’s recovery of free creation from nothing provides an indispensable basis for Christian humanism since the individual human person is the free spiritual subject “before God”.

To sum up, for Fabro, created freedom has a metaphysical foundation that reflects the non-reciprocal and non-contrastive relation between primary and secondary causation. Fabro’s point is that like Thomas, Kierkegaard also articulates the participatory foundation and creative free act as the relation between being (*esse*) and causality. Indeed, the theological insight of free creation from nothing illuminates Fabro’s core distinction between predicamental and transcendental participation, which disables the modern principle of immanence with the act of intensive *esse*.[[36]](#footnote-36) By connecting Thomas and Kierkegaard on the theology of free creation and created freedom, Fabro also can account for the way that freedom is existentially determinative in decision and the act of faith. Human subjectivity is still required for the exercise of freedom before God, which indicates a temporal discovery of a prior metaphysical structure that enables the free response to the call of the divine initiative. This leads us to the next section on themes in Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology.

### **3. Kierkegaard’s Theological Anthropology**

During the first phase of his Kierkegaard scholarship (1943-1953), Fabro published his translation of *For Self-Examination*,[[37]](#footnote-37) three volumes of Kierkegaard’s *Journals*,[[38]](#footnote-38) assembled an anthology of Kierkegaard’s *Prayers*,[[39]](#footnote-39) and jointly translated *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*.[[40]](#footnote-40) With all of these translations fresh in his mind, Fabro provided an advance sketch of his approach to Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology in one of his first full-length articles.[[41]](#footnote-41) I suggest that Fabro’s analogical vision (A:B::C:D) enabled a fruitful exploration of the writings of Thomas and Kierkegaard that no one had ventured before.

Already before 1950, Fabro attempted to juxtapose the philosophical theology of Climacus with the theological anthropology of Anti-Climacus and connect Thomas’s metaphysics of participation and free creation with Kierkegaard’s view of human subjectivity. For Fabro, Kierkegaard’s critique of Christendom and Hegel is of one piece and Kierkegaard’s remarks about the problem of theodicy reflects a theological view of the human person. For Fabro, Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology is rooted in the Pauline distinction between the first and last Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45). Fabro traced Kierkegaard’s theological itinerary from the original sin of the first Adam, to the redemption offered in Christ as the last Adam to highlight the role of grace and freedom in our journey of sanctification. To highlight the explanatory pitfall that theodicy embraces in the relation between suffering and sin, Fabro observed that Kierkegaard’s comparison between Mary and Job provided a twist on Paul’s view of finitude. Indeed, Kierkegaard’s dilemma is framed between Job’s model of retribution and restitution, or Mary’s model of silent accompaniment.

To establish the *likeness* with the first Adam, Fabro portrayed Job as the “biblical Socrates” gripped by the existential demand for spiritual constancy before the absolute priority of divine holiness and perfection.[[42]](#footnote-42) Here divine perfection is assigned absolute value whereas one’s existential imperfection is assigned to a relative value when Fabro notes that the problem with the actual Socrates was that “he was unable to transcend his own finitude” by nature.[[43]](#footnote-43) In short, the Lord’s direct address to Job overcomes the explanatory formalism of a necessary chain of causal mechanisms that organizes cruelty by attributing suffering to sin as if sin were an agent cause of the punishing result.[[44]](#footnote-44)

To resist the temptation of viewing suffering as a necessary *divine* punishment that our sin somehow causes, Fabro indicated that Job “protests against reasoning reason” when his friends arrive on the scene “armed with formidable syllogisms” that highlight “the comfortable parallelism of truth and geometric reason” to “imprison the adventure of spirit inside the mechanism of causal succession”.[[45]](#footnote-45) To illustrate this explanatory pitfall of theodicy, Fabro turned to a passage in Kierkegaard’s 1851 journals about Job’s search for justice before God and his friends:

The significance of this book [Job] is really to show the cruelty that we human beings commit by regarding being unhappy as guilt, as a crime. This is indeed human selfishness, which wishes to free itself of the impression, the serious and upsetting impression, of suffering, of what can happen to a human being in this life. In order to protect themselves against it, people explain suffering as guilt: It is his own fault. Oh, human cruelty![[46]](#footnote-46)

For Kierkegaard, it is a cruel selfishness that explains one’s unhappiness in terms of guilt and one’s suffering as punishment. Moreover, it is a cruel selfishness that refuses any semblance of suffering as a flight from contingency into necessity. On the other hand, to rationalize suffering with terms like sin, guilt, and divine punishment is a form of theological abuse. Thus, in Job’s friends, Fabro sees that “every form of rationalism” is “organized cruelty”.[[47]](#footnote-47) However, in Job himself, Kierkegaard saw a similarity with exemplars of faith like Abraham and Isaac in the Old Testament, and Mary and Jesus in the New Testament. By observing the proportion between covenants, Kierkegaard distinguished the integrity of difference with a relational tension. Judaism’s task is to repair the fracture and Job represented for Kierkegaard someone indebted “partly to temporal reason, as is all of official Judaism which awaits from God in this world the solution for the drama of existence, in a non-identical *repetition* of earthly goods”.[[48]](#footnote-48) The episodic twist of resignation and return occurs also in the story of Isaac and Abraham, whose suffering lasted almost a lifetime before repair and restitution occurred. Just as Job receives his goods back non-identically, Abraham receives Isaac back. As intolerable and unjust as suffering is, nothing in this world can replace what was taken away as if the suffering was somehow good in itself or never happened in the first place.

Kierkgaard began with the negative relation of suffering and sin by contrasting Job to Mary as different exemplary responses. For Fabro, to intensify the duration of temporal suffering, Kierkegaard turned to Mary, who lived between the covenants and is

*full of grace*, who accepts from the Angel her call to divine motherhood without complaint before Joseph and his other children, who lived anxiously awaiting the prophecy of Simeon, and who fearlessly accompanied the death of the Son when the Father abandoned him to the mockery of his Passion and did not detach himself from, but rather died on the Cross. Thus, Mary is for Kierkegaard the paradigm of Faith in the New Testament, as Abraham is for the Old Testament.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Mary’s suffering persisted throughout her lifespan and Kierkegaard focused our attention on Mary’s example of faith because amid the “calamities, reproach, and incomprehension of men” Mary “is introduced to an understanding with God” even as she understands that she does not fully comprehend.[[50]](#footnote-50) In short, the lifetime of suffering is marked by the expectancy of faith that endures with the acceptance of one’s vocation, and the accompaniment of one’s loving presence.

At this point, Kierkegaard moved to the positive view of seeing suffering in terms of the radical acceptance of God’s love by embracing the contingency of life as a gift. Fabro moves on to discuss the lifelong task of imitating the Model of Christ in divine charity with a view of suffering not as a sign of divine punishment but of divine friendship.

The positive aspect is manifested and known from the negative: the sign of God’s love is the suffering that He sends, and the sign of our love is the acceptance of this suffering as a sign that He is Love and that he sends it out of love. This what it means to be *spirit* and to resemble the Model.[[51]](#footnote-51)

For Fabro, the quality of Christlikeness also endures suffering and accepts it as God’s loving accompaniment as we become Spirit. Love’s indirect communication negatively illuminates itself as suffering the trial of loving as a way of self-gift and self-sacrifice, abiding, persevering in love all the way to the end. Indeed, for Kierkegaard, suffering is the reminder of the God who is Love, from the Love that is God. In his own words, Kierkegaard wrote:

In suffering and spiritual trial, there are situations in which the thought of God, the thought that God nevertheless is love, make the suffering far more intense. Here faith is tested, love is tested, whether one really loves God, really can’t do without him.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Amid the intensification of suffering, faith resists doubt as a temptation of false guilt. Doubt agrees with the negative experience of suffering and resists it as intolerable. Yet God’s love helps us to understand the gift of suffering in the context of faith’s perseverance (cf. Jas 1). Either the cycle of doubting and rationalizing sustains false guilt, or the perseverance of faith intensifies our eternal blessedness. Thus, the context of one’s sanctification is established with the polarity of the greater cost and greater beatitude.[[53]](#footnote-53)

To restate this approach to spirituality perhaps in a less masochistic manner: Kierkegaard’s point is that the universal is relative to the Absolute, just as what is impersonal and contingent value remains relative to what is of personal and spiritual value. Faith encounters suffering not as something to be sought out or to be avoided at all costs. Suffering is not a divine punishment for the guilt of mortality, but rather the purifying intensification of a divine blessing of love that makes us ready for immortality.

Moreover, Fabro also highlighted the places where Kierkegaard overlapped with his own Stigmatine spirituality—not only in the emphasis on the purification of sin by grace, but also the demand for perfection by faith. Following Kierkegaard’s remarks, Fabro reconfigured the emphasis on suffering through this lens as revealing the high price of faith with the invisible presence of beatitude.

Humanly speaking, Job’s wife was, in a sense, right. For humanly, it is truly an enormous burden to suffer like that and, in addition, to be troubled by the thought that God is nevertheless love. It’s enough to make one lose one’s mind—and, humanly, it’s far easier to doubt—period … Doubt is a relief because it agrees with us completely that the suffering is unbearable. The difficulty of the idea of God is to understand that not only is suffering to be endured, but that it is a good, a gift from a God of love … [Even] when, humanly speaking, there seems to be a case against him. God is to be believed, unconditionally; but he, the infinite, can do nothing except infinitely increase the price of faith. How blessed to believe—the greater the price the more blessed it is to believe. It’s not true that faith loses out when the price is raised: the greater the price, the greater the beatitude [*saligere*].[[54]](#footnote-54)

The burden of suffering invites the doubt that God is not love, and yet faith endures suffering as a good gift from the God who is love. For Fabro, this is Kierkegaard’s way of affirming the existential imitation (or participation) in Christ’s passion. Kierkegaard claims that faith is difficult and doubt is the easy exit given that the presence of the eternal ideal also indicates the presence of the demand for perfection. As a Stigmatine priest, Fabro is sensitive to Kierkegaard’s remarks about God’s love amid suffering. Fabro situates these remarks in terms of an existential participation in the Passion of Christ which is a hallmark of Stigmatine spirituality in the Franciscan tradition. Kierkegaard urges us not to attempt to reconcile God’s unrelenting love with our inalienable experience of suffering, but instead to hold fast in faith knowing that God’s love abides and he accompanies us nevertheless. To illustrate, Fabro turned to an 1847 entry in Kierkegaard’s journals entitled “The Gospel for Easter Monday”:

Salvation, invisibly, walks the road with the mourners. Fundamentally, this is always how it is. What is highest is always nearest to a person—but his eyes are closed. Thus, do eternity and what is highest accompany a person throughout the various ages of life; he does not properly notice this; he does not look closely enough, but wishes, searches, is busy. Just as one can determine the time of day by determining an object’s relation to its shadow, so can one determine a person’s maturity by this ratio: how close does he think he is to what is highest. Thus, youth and manhood pass, but only when evening approaches and the day comes to an end, only then does the understanding arrive that what is highest is what a person has closest at hand, which has walked alongside him all through life, though he has not appreciated it—God grant that it might also "abide with him".[[55]](#footnote-55)

What faith understands is that salvation is the abiding yet invisible divine presence that accompanies us in the present and is only “understood” retrospectively. Faith abides and suffers as it seeks understanding, which always comes too late for mere mortals. Kierkegaard’s view of the religious indicated an awareness of being accompanied by the highest and nearest and thus cannot be represented because Being Itself is not seen. Likewise, the proximity of the invisible to what is visible remains as the relation of shadow and object and invites Kierkegaard’s view of the relation of eternity and time. The close proximity of the highest is how Fabro understands Kierkegaard’s participatory view of free creation and created freedom as divine transcendence *in-and-beyond* immanence. For Fabro, Kierkegaard has a “new and truly positive conception of the Absolute whether in God and in the human being (freedom)”, which he describes as a synthesis that relates between two that each relates to the relation that has posited the whole relation.[[56]](#footnote-56)

#### 3.1 Against a Collectivistic Anthropology

Understanding the human person in terms of spirit is constitutive of one’s dignity as a single individual created in the image of God, and thus more fundamental than any form of citizenship that can be absorbed by the State into a collective public. Spirit is more fundamental than State because the metaphysical and theological ground of one’s soul is always already participated as a God-relation. For Fabro, Kierkegaard further elaborated his dialectical reasoning by contrasting the death of Socrates as the Greek testimony against the immanence of the State’s legal reasoning, and Job’s seeking justice from God as the Jewish testimony of divine transcendence against suffering’s temporal *now* and the *not yet* of salvation’s arrival. The pagans recognized that human mortality demarcated life *in* the body, whereas the Jewish scriptures asserted divine immortality *beyond* the body, and the Christian claimed an eternal life that is *in and beyond* the embodied soul through the Spirit.

In other words, Fabro contrasted Kierkegaard’s distinction between the human and divine law in this way: the State’s immanent reasoning ends with death, whereas the biblical testimony of faith bears witness to a justice that arrives beyond death. Fabro observed a doubly negative movement *from* Socrates’s doubting the human law *to* Job’s seeking justice from the divine law, which *leaps* to the theological positive of Kierkegaard’s eternal law of love in-and-beyond time as spirit.[[57]](#footnote-57) Kierkegaard’s Christian perspective unites the pagan and Jewish perspectives by emphasizing faith in divine justice and immortality.

Indeed, the sanctifying grace of the spiritual trial is for spirit before the Absolute, and yet the difficulty of grace reflects the presence of a genuine resource that manifests negatively as the trial. Fabro turns to Kierkegaard’s reminder that “as long as a person has many wells from which to draw water, he is not aware of having any anxious concerns about the possible unavailability of water”. Kierkegaard’s rationale is that “it is only when Christianity becomes the sole well for a person that spiritual trials begin”.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Kierkegaard’s view of suffering and the difficulty of sanctifying grace indicates for Fabro a positive theological anthropology of participated existence that undergirds Christian personalism as an alternative to Hegelian collectivism. Here Fabro’s approach roots Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegelianism and Christendom in a metaphysics of participation that resists absorbing the individual into the universal and highlights one’s concrete God-relation using Kierkegaard’s view of the Absolute to unite analogically God, subjectivity, and Truth.

Fabro dwelt upon Kierkegaard’s remarks about suffering insofar as they illuminate his theological anthropology of the genuine subjectivity of spirit as the image of God. For Kierkegaard, that the free spiritual subject is free before God as First Truth is infinitely and qualitatively different from a political theology because one remains accountable not to a mere power-relation of the universal, but a truth-relation with the Absolute. For this reason, Fabro resisted the tendency in the European reception of Kierkegaard to secularize Kierkegaard as the forerunner of atheistic humanism with a negative anthropology that resembles Heidegger’s anti-foundationalism.[[59]](#footnote-59) For example, Fabro cites Alfonse De Waelhens who “blindly accepted the exegesis of the left-wing Germans without any direct contact with Kierkegaard’s works” and “the twenty-five pages he dedicated to Kierkegaard document his continuous misunderstanding”.[[60]](#footnote-60)

As an alternative, Fabro uncovered Kierkegaard’s foundational anthropology not in terms of citizenship but the image of God. In his own words, Kierkegaard wrote:

[Hegel] makes [human beings] into an animal race endowed with reason. For in an animal race "the single individual" is always lower than the "race". The human race has the peculiarity that, precisely because every individual is created in the image of God, "the single individual" is higher than the "race".[[61]](#footnote-61)

Kierkegaard’s problem with the Hegelian subordination of theology to philosophy is that it ends up hollowing out the personalist vision of the image of God for a collectivist abstraction of the universal that absorbs the single individual as merely a citizen of the State. Kierkegaard continued:

The error lies principally in that fact that the universal, which Hegelianism makes into the truth (and the single individual participates in the truth by being subsumed into it), is an abstraction: the state, etc. He does not come to God, to subjectivity in the absolute sense, and to the truth: that in the final analysis the single individual is actually higher than the universal, namely the single individual in his relation to God.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Insofar as the concrete individual person gets absorbed into an impersonal abstract universal, the individual is subordinated to a member of the species, which Kierkegaard and Fabro both sought to distinguish from the personal elevation of the individual by the Absolute with the dignity of freedom.[[63]](#footnote-63)

As we saw in a previous section, Fabro observed that Kierkegaard understands human freedom not in terms of autonomy but *participated* freedom. Consider Kierkegaard’s remark about Sancho Panza’s ethical self-flagellation.[[64]](#footnote-64) Each one who binds and is bound also is a contingent individual who by nature fails to do what ought to be done. Participated freedom still requires a divine teacher that indwells the decision and brings about the ought-is coincidence by grace *and* throughfreedom. Rather than merely viewing human beings as individuals that necessarily emanate as material from the species, Fabro points us to Kierkegaard’s view of the human being in terms of the tripartite image of God as a free spiritual subject, which highlights the single individual as open to both sin and faith. In short, Spirit acts decisively according to the moral law to become spirit by being brought up by Providence who gives the law and compellingly teaches us to anticipate being what one is not yet as emerging through the act of faith. Fabro explained that the quality of spirit always remains “before God” in such a way that resists acosmic individualism.

The determination of spirit puts one directly in relation to God, and to the world and to others in relation to God. But to be spirit is to anticipate being, to be what one “must” be, to be the second time, to be free. But I am not truly free unless I am “before God”. I can choose myself in the world and then loose myself in indifference; I can choose myself before others, and then celebrate my pride. Only when my relating first relates to God, there is freedom and the determination of spirit as spirit. The metaphysical and existential moments coincide and cannot be otherwise.[[65]](#footnote-65)

By juxtaposing the ontological image of being spirit with the existential God-relation as being free, Fabro indicated how Kierkegaard held the tension between the actual and ideal self by distinguishing between our natural capacity for freedom (in potency), which must be realized by choosing the Absolute in concrete (in act).[[66]](#footnote-66) Fabro discovered how Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology also expressed that spirit pertains to being and freedom *at once*, which heunderstood metaphysically in terms of free creation from nothing and created freedom. The analogical paradox that Kierkegaard issues and Fabro amplifies is that only divine omnipotence can make creatures free:

Creation out of nothing is, once again, an expression of the capacity of omnipotence to make someone independent. He to whom I owe absolutely everything—even while he has just as absolutely retained everything—this is the person who has in fact made me independent. If in creating a human being God himself had lost a little of his power, he would indeed be unable to make a human being independent.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Fabro tethers Kierkegaard to Thomas at this point on the basis of a metaphysics of creation that also indicated a non-rivalrous form of agency “before God”.[[68]](#footnote-68) By establishing the constitutive foundation of Kierkegaard’s positive anthropology of the image of God, Fabro grounded an existential view of created or participated freedom that freely unites a connection between finite and infinite being by faith (freedom in act) and refuses that connection in sin (unfreedom in potency). Thus, Fabro argued that Kierkegaard’s view of the single individual included freedom as an indispensable spiritual task of selfhood that included but cannot be reduced to an unrealized natural capacity.

#### 3.2. Anxiety, Faith, and Reason

The humble patience of absolute devotion is a key feature of Kierkegaardian faith *and* a condition of spirit. One does not despair because one anticipates the future blessing that the Lord’s providence will bestow with every good and perfect gift. Kierkegaard argued that the invisibility of the Lord’s presence is an advantage because Providence always is “on time” so one may patiently entrust oneself to the Lord’s goodness. The divine presence of the free creator to each creature indicates to Kierkegaard that

“You listen to every cry” and “You know and you have not forgotten. You remember his name, you know where he is hidden” … It is more blessed to give thanks when life becomes a dark saying; more blessed still, when our heart is oppressed, when the soul is in darkness, when reason betrays us with ambiguity and memory tricks us with oblivion.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The point Fabro draws out of Kierkegaard is not the elimination of suffering but the provision of a new context between passion and glory. For Fabro, Kierkegaard’s distinction between faith and reason is foundational to understanding Kierkegaard’s view of anxiety. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is basic to our spiritual climate due to a negative awareness of Infinite being and a positive awareness of finitude. Fabro explains that for Kierkegaard, our fallenness is not original to us:

Anxiety is not then the fundamental atmosphere of humanity but only the spiritual climate of the fall, it is the invasion of the negative in us that each one unleashes with one’s will to abandon the Infinite for the finite, of leaving Being for the nothingness that the object of anxiety precisely is.[[70]](#footnote-70)

For Kierkegaard, the unbeliever experiences melancholy as a divine punishment whereas the believer encounters melancholy as an opportunity for faith’s triumph. Indeed, Kierkegaard explained that anxiety ascends toward faith insofar as one moves concretely toward being and away from abstract thought.

This upbringing from innate anxiety to faith is a rigorous upbringing. Anxiety is the most frightful sort of spiritual trial—until the point is reached at which this same person is practiced in faith—that is in viewing everything inversely, becoming hopeful and confident when something happens that previously would almost have caused him to expire and swoon in anxiety … Clinging fast in this way to the thought that God is love just the same—this is the abstract form of faith, and faith *in abstracto*. Then it will certainly come to pass—he will succeed in making his relation to God concrete.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Easier said than done. However, confident in the hope of the Lord’s loving providence and care, one can make concrete one’s God-relation in the present. For this reason, Fabro explores the twofold tension of anxiety and faith, which tends negatively toward Adam’s sin and positively toward Christ’s atonement. Fabro writes that “before faith and beyond faith, we live in anxiety” since the nothingness of anxiety encompasses finitude as possibility; yet the becoming of faith tends the will toward the infinite as actuality in the decision of freedom.[[72]](#footnote-72) The formal grasp of faith understands abstractly *that* God is love, but faith actually overcomes anxiety with the experience of *how* God is love when faith becomes concrete as a free response directly addressed to Christ, the love of God incarnate.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Fabro explains in a footnote that “Kierkegaard combats directly the idealistic absorption of faith into reason”, which is why he refers to “the object of faith as the absurd (later he prefers *paradox*) since he does not intend absurd in a logical but an existential sense, which is what we *by reason alone* can neither admit nor comprehend”.[[74]](#footnote-74) Still Kierkegaard reserves a “positive function of reason for the preparation of faith and, under the guidance of faith, for its explication”.[[75]](#footnote-75) Thus, Fabro says that Kierkegaard distinguishes the formal grasp of faith’s *object* from the concrete relation of faith’s *act*. The object of faith is paradoxical to disinterested reason insofar as it refers primarily not to a concept but to the existential act of the will’s free response. The approximate proposition is distinguished from and yet related to the appropriate model in a new context.

the being of the Christian in time [is] the relation to transcendence for eternity, articulated in faith in Christ and realized as the imitation of Christ whereby each person becomes a single individual before God and dies to herself and to the world.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Fabro’s depiction of Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology includes the formal draw of the ideal upon the actual, the exegetical integration of Climacus and Anti-Climacus, the metaphysical participation of time and eternity and the finite-infinite since the being (*ens*) of the Christian (in act) participates in the *esse* of divine transcendence (as act), existentially as the single individual before God, morally oriented toward the truth in potency and to the actual good, and theologically expressed in faith yet realized in imitation of Christ’s self-gift.

##### *Concluding Remarks*

Let me provide a brief comment on Fabro’s contribution to the future direction of a systematic theology that seeks to integrate existential and metaphysical perspectives. In 1954, Michael Wyschogrod (1928-2015) signaled a watershed moment for the English-speaking reception of Kierkegaard’s writings by highlighting the ontological backdrop of Søren Kierkegaard’s existential project.[[77]](#footnote-77) Although Kierkegaard does not “assume an objective interest in ontological problems”, Wyschogrod argued that there still remains “a very marked ontological basis from which his existential thinking proceeds”.[[78]](#footnote-78) Throughout this seminal work, Wyschogrod explicitly linked Kierkegaard’s traditional ontology to the writings of Thomas Aquinas.[[79]](#footnote-79) Generally speaking, since 1954, neither the Thomists nor the Kierkegaardians have been willing to accept fully Wyschogrod’s thesis.[[80]](#footnote-80) However, while Wyschogrod was advancing his argument in North America, in Italy Fabro already was establishing subterranean links between Thomas and Kierkegaard in a series of roughly ten articles that were later translated into English between 1962 and 1988.[[81]](#footnote-81)

My wider argument is that Fabro remains one of the most important European interpreters of Kierkegaard in the twentieth century. Time does not permit an in-depth survey, but Fabro’s constructive contribution to Kierkegaard studies is threefold: i) Fabro turned to Kierkegaard’s emphasis on edification as an organizing principle that brought coherence to Kierkegaard’s authorship with a practical aim; ii) Fabro provided a dialectical view of Kierkegaard’s qualitative distinction between faith and reason, and uncovered some of the Catholic sources that informed Kierkegaard’s theological anthropology; and iii) Fabro illuminated the metaphysical background of Kierkegaard’s philosophical strategy through his use of Aristotle regarding the ontological priority of being, which at once motivates Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegelian idealism and provides a link to the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas.

As a Thomist scholar, it is unexpected that Fabro would branch out beyond the medieval period to engage with more modern thinkers. However, the level of Fabro’s fluency with modern atheism, German Idealism, and existential thought attests to a versatile mind that is open to new developments. In fact, Fabro described his own approach to Thomistic philosophy not in terms of endorsing a closed intellectual system. Instead Fabro offers an historical and speculative enquiry that is open to respond to the demands and challenges of modern culture.[[82]](#footnote-82) Defining his own project, Fabro invokes the Kierkegaardian idea of non-identical repetition:

“essential Thomism” refers then to an active judgment on human and Christian thought in general and on Thomism itself in light of modern thought. Merely a “passive repetition” of the thought of St. Thomas would bring us back to the 13th century (but would it really bring us back there?), whereas history never turns back and yet it demands that every thinking person be engaged with the problems and anxieties of their time, as Aquinas did for his own epoch.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Fabro discovered in Thomas” writings the essential resources for a Christian humanism, which emphasized the dignity and flourishing of the human person as a “free spiritual subject”.[[84]](#footnote-84) Fabro’s intellectual legacy is worth recovering today because he contributed a metaphysical perspective and theoretical critique of the philosophical presuppositions of secularism and materialism. Fabro highlighted Kierkegaard’s signature emphasis on the freedom of the will in uniting our pursuit of the good and union with God. Fabro also refracts this Kierkegaardian emphasis back into his reading of Thomas Aquinas because existential freedom is the participatory link between transcendence and immanence. In short, Fabro discovered an indispensable ally in Kierkegaard and displays this intellectual and spiritual alliance in creative ways.

# **Author Biography**

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1. Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard”s Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), NB: 69. Henceforth, KJN. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more, see Christian Ferraro, “Liberta E Partecipazione Nel Tomismo Di Cornelio Fabro,” *Revue Thomiste* 23, no. 1 (2012), 145-178. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more, see Anna Giannatiempo, “Sul Primato Trascendentale Della Volontà in San Tommaso,” *Divus Thomas* 74, no. 2 (1971), 131-154. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For more, see Gianluca Trombini, “ Sinteticità Metafisico-Esistenziale Della Libertà Nel «Tomismo Essenziale» Di Cornelio Fabro” (Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 2019), 165-172. The relevant passage is from 1846 in *Journals*, KJN NB:69. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For more, see Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Also see, Joshua Furnal, “The Dialectic of Faith and Reason in Cornelio Fabro”s Reading of Kierkegaard”s Theology,” *Theological Studies* 78, no. 3 (2017), 718-739. See also, my introduction to Cornelio Fabro, *Selected Articles on Søren Kierkegaard* (IVE Press, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Trombini, pp. 256-282. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Knud Ejler Løgstrup, *Opgør Med Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968), 104, 163. Løgstrup was also influential for Alasdair MacIntyre’s view of Kierkegaard. For a rebuttal to Løgstrup, see M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love”s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard”s Works of Love* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 76ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. David J. Kangas, *Kierkegaard”s Instant : On Beginnings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 14. Against Kangas” Neoplatonic interpretation of Kierkegaard, Claudia Weltz raises an important question: “if God as the good “beyond being” really comes down from above and gives himself, being both the giver and the given, how could he nevertheless remain beyond all experiential givenness? […] I am not convinced that Kierkegaard’s belief in creation is compatible with the Neoplatonic idea of emanation” in Claudia Welz, *Love”s Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 100ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For instance, see Aaron Edwards and David J. Gouwens, eds., *T&T Clark Companion to the Theology of Kierkegaard* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 223, 239. Andrew Torrance admits that although Kierkegaard “makes very little reference to this doctrine in his formally published writings, his deep respect for this doctrine is clear from his journals and notebooks” (224 n. 4). Nevertheless, Torrance finds many passages that support a putative doctrine of creation in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous writings. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Valter Lindström, “The First Article of the Creed in Kierkegaard”s Writings,” *Kierkegaardiana* 12 (1982), 38-50. Also see, Matt Frawley, “The Doctrine of *Creatio Ex Nihilo* in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard,” *Kierkegaardiana* 23 (2004), 7-25. For more, see Curtis L. Thompson, “Creation” in Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard”s Concepts: Classicism to Enthusiasm*, vol. 15, Tome 2 (New York: Routledge, 2016), 93-100. It has also been suggested that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* links Kierkegaard explicitly to Johannes Tauler’s view of *imitatio Christi*, see Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *KJN*, EE:15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Works of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 120. Henceforth, WL. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Christian Discourses ; the Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 127-128, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 1, *Kierkegaard”s Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God : Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), ch. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. KJN, NB 33:23. Recently, Kierkegaard’s emphasis upon God’s eternity has been identified as explicitly Augustinian in Craig A. Hefner, ““In God’s Changelessness There Is Rest”: The Existential Doctrine of God’s Immutability in Augustine and Kierkegaard,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20, no. 1 (2018), 65-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For more, see David B. Burrell, *Aquinas : God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. KJN, FF:59 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. KJN, NB 34:29. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. KJN, FF: 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For an extended discussion, see Trombini, “ Sinteticità Metafisico-Esistenziale Della Libertà Nel «Tomismo Essenziale» Di Cornelio Fabro”, 129-190. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cornelio Fabro, *Partecipazione E Causalitá Secondo S. Tommaso D” Aquino* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1960), 647. Henceforth, PC. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. PC 647 n. 4. My translation of Fabro’s rendering of KJN, NB: 69. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 27, no. 3 (1974), 449-491. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cornelio Fabro, *Dall” Essere All” Esistente*, 2nd ed. (Brescia: Morcelliana, [1957] 1965), 302. In the Hong translation of the *Postscript*, the reader is referred to the journal entry above, which “the Italian scholar Cornelio Fabro has called the most important page of writing from the nineteenth century” in Kierkegaard, Hong, and Hong, *Postscript*, 2:233 n. 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. PC 647. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. KJN, NB:69. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 182. Henceforth, UDVS. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air : Three Godly Discourses*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 90. Henceforth, LF. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. LF 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. LF 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. UDVS 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. WL 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cornelio Fabro, “La Liberta” in Hegel E Tommaso D”aquino,” *Sacra Doctrina* 66 (1972), 166. See extended discussion in Trombini, pp. 47ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cf. *Ev. Joann* 8.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For more, see Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation,” 449-491. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Soren Kierkegaard, *Lo Specchio Della Parola*, trans. Enrica Valenziani and Cornelio Fabro (Firenze: Fussi, 1948). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Søren Kierkegaard, *Diario*, trans. Cornelio Fabro, 3 vols. (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1948-1951). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Søren Kierkegaard and Cornelio Fabro, *Preghiere* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1951). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Soren Kierkegaard, *Il Concetto Dell”angoscia : La Malattia Mortale*, trans. Cornelio Fabro (Firenze: Sansoni, 1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Cornelio Fabro, “L”uomo Di Fronte a Dio in Soren Kierkegaard,” *Euntes Docete* 11, no. 3 (1949), 291-320. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For more on Job’s distinction between explanation and direct address, see David B. Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy : Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. KJN, NB 24:143. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, “Kierkegaard Poeta-Teologo Dell”annunciazione,” *Humanitas* 3 (1948), 1025-1034. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. X1 A 478 / NB 11:176 [1849]. Translation amended to match Fabro’s use of “beatitude” where the English version uses “blessedness”. Later in this passage, Kierkegaard specifically mentions Lessing’s problem as a “presumptuous wrong turn”. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Kierkegaard’s rationale here is not unlike what is described in Wisdom 2:12-20. Fabro has a similar view of intensification in glory. For more, see Christian **Ferrarro’s** essay on the ontological constitution of beatitude in Gianluca Trombini, ed., *La Libertà Nel Pensiero Di Cornelio Fabro* (Montefiascone: EDIVI, 2016), 55-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. KJN, NB 11: 176. Translation amended to match Fabro’s rendering. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. KJN, NB: 168 [1847]. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. KJN, NB 4:159. In the margin, Kierkegaard recalls Numbers 21:6-9 and John 3:14 when he writes that “Not everyone who is bitten by serpents can come to a decision to believe in the atonement or find the grace to do so”. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, “L”angoscia Esistenziale Come Tensione Di Essere-Nulla, Uomo-Mondo Nella Prospettiva Di Heidegger E Kierkegaard,” *Psichiatria e Territorio* 4, no. 1 (1987 [1980]), 63-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 294n. For more, see Alphonse de Waelhens, *La Philosophie De Martin Heidegger* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1942), 330ff. It is also worth noting that Henri de Lubac makes a similar observation in Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Kierkegaard writes: “If I am to bind myself and there is no binding force higher than myself, then where, as the A, who binds, can I find the rigor I do not possess as B, the one who is to be bound, when, after all, A and B are the same self? … Not only is there no law that I myself give myself as the ultimate, but there is a law that is given to me by something higher. And not only that, but this lawgiver also takes the liberty of participating, in the capacity of an educator, and makes use of compulsion … When a person acts decisively and enters into actuality, existence can take hold of him and Governance can bring him up … Spiritually, the teacher immediately comes to dwell wherever I finally act decisively. For what do I want: I want to be brought up to be spirit—and yet do not want to act decisively? Nonsense” in X2 A 426 / NB 15:91 [1850]. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Ibid*. Fabro notes that elsewhere, Kierkegaard writes that “What is dangerous about Hegel is that he changed Christianity—and in so doing made it agree with his philosophy” in KJN, NB 25:7. Inversely, Fabro’s Thomistic approach attempts to change philosophy to agree with the Christian faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. KJN, NB 15:66. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. KJN, NB: 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 294. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, Reidar Thomte, and Albert Anderson, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 41ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. KJN, NB 16:25. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Fabro, “L’uomo di fronte a Dio”, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Michael Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: The Ontology of Existence* (New York: Humanities Press, [1954] 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: The Ontology of Existence*, 24. Wyschogrod went on to explain that for Kierkegaard: “Pure Being can find a place in such an ontology in spite of the fact that it is non-existential because it expresses the paradox of existence—that there is something in the situation of the existing thinker that acts as a disconcerting ingredient by being a point that can never be reached fully and never be lost fully … [Thus, this represents] a revolt not against the concepts of traditional ontology which, as has been shown, Kierkegaard generally accepts, but against the sovereignty of that ontology and against its status as the final arbiter of the human issues involved” (pp. 24 & 136). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Wyschogrod, pp. 9-14, 22-28, 78-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Two significant exceptions are Ralph McInerny, “Ethics and Persuasion: Kierkegaard”s Existential Dialectic,” *The Modern Schoolman* 34 (1956), 219-239. James D. Collins, “Fede E Riflessione in Kierkegaard,” in *Studi Kierkegaardiani*, ed. Cornelio Fabro and Nicola Abbagnano (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1957), 105-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. In his personal library, Fabro owned a copy of Wyschogrod’s book. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Cornelio Fabro, *Tomismo E Pensiero Moderno*, *Cathedra Sancti Thomae, Pontificiae Universitatis Lateranensis* (Roma: Libreria Editrice della Pontificia Universitá Lateranense, 1969), 16-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Fabro, *Tomismo E Pensiero Moderno*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Fabro, *Tomismo E Pensiero Moderno*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)