

Fear and Faith: A Brief Overview Throughout 25 Centuries

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Abstract.

Relevance. Fear and faith remain foundational yet underexamined categories through which Western civilization has grappled with human vulnerability, meaning-making, and ethical existence across 2,500 years. Despite extensive philosophical attention to emotions, the dialectical relationship between fear and faith, how they inform, transform, and challenge each other has lacked systematic historical-philosophical analysis spanning antiquity through contemporary critical theory.

Purpose. This article traces the intellectual evolution of fear and faith across three major periods Antiquity, Christianity through the Enlightenment, and modernity through Foucault to examine how these fundamental human experiences have been conceptualized, reinterpreted, and deployed within distinct metaphysical, theological, and socio-political frameworks across Western philosophical and theological thought.

Results. The analysis reveals significant paradigm shifts ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno integrated fear and hope within ethics and virtue rather than treating them as opposites. Christianity transformed these concepts through theological frameworks where Origen and Augustine adapted fear and directed towards God. Using it for catalyzing spiritual transformation. Medieval systematizes like Aquinas synthesized Aristotelian and theological traditions while Cusanus challenged rationalism through apophatic theology. Early modernity then witnessed stark contrasts between Spinoza's naturalistic analysis of hope and fear as passive emotions reflecting ignorance, whereas Pascal's embrace of existential dread enabled authentic faith.

Conclusions. Foucault's genealogical analysis finally reveals fear and hope functioning not as spontaneous emotions but as instruments strategically deployed through systems of discipline and power, exposing a central philosophical tension between them. Modernity, definitely, fragments traditional certainties and the persistent interplay of fear, faith, and hope continues shaping contemporary ethical and existential horizons.

Keywords: Fear, Faith, Hope, Western Philosophy, Theological Tradition, Existentialism Virtue Ethics, Power and Discipline, Human Transcendence

Страх і віра: короткий огляд протягом 25 століть

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Анотація

Актуальність. Страх і віра залишаються фундаментальними, але недостатньо дослідженими категоріями, за допомогою яких західна цивілізація протягом 2500 років боролася з людською вразливістю, смислотворенням та етичним існуванням. Незважаючи на значну філософську увагу до емоцій, діалектичний зв'язок між страхом і вірою, те, як вони формують, трансформують і кидають виклик одне одному, не мав систематичного історико-філософського аналізу, що охоплює античність до сучасної критичної теорії.

Метою статті є простеження інтелектуальну еволюцію страху та віри протягом трьох основних періодів античності, християнства до епохи Просвітництва, сучасності до епохи М. Фуко щоб дослідити, як ці фундаментальні людські переживання були концептуалізовані, переосмислені та розгорнуті в різних метафізичних, теологічних та соціально-політичних рамках західної філософської та теологічної думки.

Результати. Аналіз виявляє значні зміни парадигм. Стародавні філософи, такі як Платон, Арістотель, Епікур і Зенон, інтегрували страх і надію в етику та чесноту, а не розглядали їх як протилежності. Християнство трансформувало ці поняття через теологічні рамки, де Оріген і Августин адаптували страх і спрямували його до Бога. Середньовічні систематизатори, такі як Ф. Аквінський, синтезували аристотелівські та теологічні традиції, тоді як М. Кузанський кидав виклик раціоналізму через апофатичну теологію. Рання модерність тоді стала свідком різних контрастів між натуралістичним аналізом Б. Спінози надії та страху як пасивних емоцій, що відображають невігластво, тоді як прийняття Б. Паскалем екзистенціального страху давало змогу створити справжню віру.

Висновки. Генеалогічний аналіз М. Фуко нарешті розкриває, що страх і надія функціонують не як спонтанні емоції, а як інструменти, стратегічно розгорнуті через системи дисципліни та влади, викриваючи центральну філософську напругу між ними. Сучасність, безумовно, фрагментує традиційні уявлення, і постійна взаємодія страху, віри та надії продовжує формувати сучасні етичні та екзистенційні горизонти.

Ключові слова: страх, віра, надія, західна філософія, теологічна традиція, етичне спрямування екзистенціалізму, етика чеснот, влада та дисципліна, трансцендентність людини

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Introduction.

Fear and its counterpoint faith have profoundly influenced human experience throughout history. From ancient existential dread to modern global anxieties, fear has shaped our beliefs, societies, and self-understanding, while faith have offered transcendence and promise of a better future. This article traces the complex relationship between fear and faith across 2,500 years of Western thought through three distinct periods: Antiquity, Christianity to Enlightenment and modern times until Foucault.

In antiquity, the philosophical discourse on fear and faith was rich and varied, with significant contributions from Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno of Citium. However, the term faith with its religious meaning was not in use yet. Hope seems to be a better English translation during this period. The Greek terms, which will be discussed, are therefore: hope (ἐλπίς, elpis) and fear (φόβος, phobos). For a general overview about the topic of emotion in antiquity Pia Campeggiani and David Konstan (2024) offer a current approach.

Analysis of previous research and publications.

This essay primarily engages with primary philosophical and theological texts. While there exist extensive scholarship on individual thinkers, such as Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety, Aquinas's virtue ethics, Foucault's analysis of power. And also specialized studies, which examine emotions within particular periods, such as Simo Knuuttila's (2004) *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* or Pia Campeggiani and David Konstan's (2024) work on emotion theory in antiquity, the author has not identified a comprehensive historical-philosophical survey that systematically traces the evolving relationship between fear and faith across all three periods. From ancient Greece through Christian theology to modern critical theory, within a single integrated analysis. This gap in the literature necessitates the present study's direct engagement with primary sources to map this conceptual evolution and establish a foundational framework for understanding these persistent yet protean categories throughout Western intellectual history.

The purpose of this article addresses two central questions: How did the relationship between fear and faith evolve throughout the last 2,500 years when considering central philosophers and theologians? Moreover, is there any identifiable reason why these conceptual changes occurred? By systematically examining primary texts from Plato through Foucault across three distinct periods, the essay traces paradigm shifts in how these fundamental human experiences conceptualized. It seeks to identify the philosophical, theological, and socio-political conditions that drove their transformation from ethical phenomena embedded in virtue theory, through theological instruments of spiritual transformation, to mechanisms of disciplinary power and existential meaning making.

Methodology. This article employs a historical-philosophical methodology combining diachronic

conceptual analysis with comparative hermeneutics. The research proceeds chronologically through three distinct periods (Antiquity, Christianity through Enlightenment, and modernity), systematically examining primary texts from canonical philosophers and theologians to trace how fear and faith have been conceptualized across shifting intellectual paradigms. The method is fundamentally exegetical and interpretive, drawing on close textual reading of philosophical and theological sources from Plato's dialogues and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* through Augustine's *Confessions* and Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles* to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Rather than proposing an original theoretical framework, the essay functions as intellectual history, mapping conceptual evolution and identifying paradigm shifts in how Western thought has understood the relationship between these foundational human experiences. The approach also incorporates elements of genealogical analysis (particularly in the Foucault section), examining how these concepts serve different functions ethical, theological, existential, and socio-political within their respective historical and discursive contexts.

Results.

At first it shall be Socrates' pupil who will be beheld. Plato's exploration of fear and faith is deeply intertwined with his political philosophy. In "Republic," he warns that "tyranny arises from democracy... when the fear of false shame is abolished" (Plato, 1992, Book VIII, 560e-561a). Plato argues that the loss of a healthy fear of disgrace leads to political decay, as unchecked desires embolden the worst impulses in society. Citizens indulge in appetites such as greed, lust, and power without restraint, while demagogues exploit these vices by flattering the masses and calling them "rights." This addiction to vices ultimately results in the public cheering for leaders who promise even greater freedom, until those leaders seize absolute power. In "Laches," Plato further elaborates on the concept of courage, arguing that "courage is knowing what not to fear" (Plato, 2008, 199e). Here, he implies that rational discernment frees us from irrational fears, allowing hope to guide action. Courage, according to Plato, requires wisdom: the ability to fear the right things, such as moral corruption, and not fear the wrong things, such as poverty or criticism. The dialogue ends typically aporetic, which means it's the best answer they can come up with. Similarly, a courageous person distinguishes true threats from false ones. Plato also addresses the failure of judgment that often underlies fear. He notes that irrational fears, such as the fear of death, poverty, or social rejection, stem from ignorance. His pupil Aristotle deals with both in a more psychological way. In "Rhetoric," Aristotle explores emotions and how speakers can use emotional appeals to persuade their audience. Hope is mostly described as something which is a delight of a future to come. He states, for instance, "In a word, whatever objects by their presence delight us, do so, generally speaking, as we hope for, or remember them" (Aristotle,

1872, p. 74). Fear, however, as: "Now, let fear be defined to be "A sort of pain or agitation, arising out of an idea that an evil, capable either of destroying or giving pain, is impending on us" (Aristotle, 1872, p. 121). A politician therefore might warn the public about an impending disaster or the same politician might promise a brighter future to stimulate the audience. By knowing the platonic dialogues, Aristotle could reflect on hope and fear in a differently than his teacher. In *Apology*, Socrates asserts that "death may be the greatest of human blessings yet men fear it as if they knew it to be the worst evil" (Plato, 2017, 29a-29b). This moral cowardice arises because people fail to fear what they should corruption, injustice, or intellectual laziness due to a lack of wisdom. Rational hope, in justice or truth, emerges when these irrational fears are dispelled. Ultimately, Plato's definition of courage implies that it is not the absence of fear but its mastery through reason. Again Aristotle, as a pupil, has a more reflecting view or "meta" level. In "*Nicomachean Ethics*," Aristotle examines the role of fear and hope in relation to virtue. He argues that our actions are often influenced by our desires for pleasure, so we hope for them, and our aversions to pain. He states, "Virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains; we act badly from fear of pain or desire for pleasure" (Aristotle, 1925, II.3 1104b). His analysis highlights the complex interplay between fear, hope, and virtue. He emphasizes that understanding and managing these emotions is crucial for achieving moral excellence. Virtue involves finding the right balance, where one is not overly swayed by the fear of pain or the desire for pleasure but acts according to reason and moral principles.

Epicurus and Zeno of Citium were not pupils of Aristotle, but lived one generation later. Like pupils and teachers often do. Epicurus offers a distinct perspective on hope and fear, particularly in relation to happiness. In his "*Letter to Menoeceus*," he asserts that "pleasure is the beginning and end of the blessed life... not the pleasures of the profligate, but the absence of bodily pain and mental disturbance" (Epicurus, 1926, pp. 128-129). True hope lies in *ataraxia*, or freedom from distress, rather than fleeting sensual pleasures. So, while Epicurus concentrated on simple, sustainable contentment, Zeno defines fear as "the expectation (*προσδοκία*) of evil" (Stoic Fragments *Stoic Fragments*, SVF I.206). Zeno views fear as a disturbance caused by the irrational belief that something bad is impending. Unlike Aristotle, who saw fear as natural, Zeno argues that it stems from misjudging externals as "evil." In the Stoic tradition, as reflected in Seneca's writings, Zeno's teachings suggest that "the wise man is content with himself; he neither hopes nor fears" (Seneca, 1917, 5.7). Hope and fear are two sides of the same coin, both tying happiness to uncontrollable externals. The Stoic ideal is to replace both with virtue, achieving contentment through inner wisdom and self-sufficiency. Until today emotions in antiquity are highly debated. For instance, Martha Nussbaum argues at the end

of her article *Emotions as judgments of value* (Nussbaum, M., 1992) about emotions in antiquity against Stoicism that they do have a value for judgment, although they can go wrong. When it comes to wrong judgement, Epicurus also addresses the fear of the gods as so. In his "*Principal Doctrines*." He argues that "a blessed and indestructible being has no troubles itself, nor does it cause trouble for others, so that it is not affected by anger or favor" (Epicurus, 1926, *Principal Doctrines* 1). Furthermore, he states, "It is impossible for someone to dispel his fears about the most important matters if he does not know the nature of the universe but instead suspects the truth of some mythical story" (Epicurus, 1926, *Principal Doctrines* 12). Epicurus rejects the notion of divine punishment. Superstition, or the fear of gods' wrath, is a major source of anxiety, which true philosophy can dispel.

Stoicism and Christianity share notable connections, particularly in their approach to emotional mastery through virtue. The awareness about impact of fear and hope was huge and so, philosophers figured out to deal with them. Stoics like Zeno taught that fear and hope were disturbances from false judgments, advocating for *apatheia* freedom from irrational passions. Roman Stoics refined these ideas, with Seneca arguing against hope and fear, and Marcus Aurelius promoting *amor fati* (acceptance of divine providence). This discipline influenced early Christian asceticism through *propatheia* acknowledging emotions while maintaining rational control, mirroring, for instance, Christ's Gethsemane experience. Philo of Alexandria bridged these traditions by combining Stoic ethics with biblical thoughts (Philo, 1935). Ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno didn't view fear and hope as opposing emotions, but as elements integrated within their ethical and political systems. Simo Knuuttila (2004) examines the role of emotions from antiquity until the medieval times properly. However, the period from early Christianity until Enlightenment witnessed an enormous shift. Monotheistic religions introduced new frameworks for understanding fear especially divine judgment and different conceptions of hope, then referred to as faith, rooted in transcendent promises and personal divine relationships. For many centuries these concepts became contrasts between earthly anxieties and spiritual conviction, transforming them from philosophical virtues into fundamental theological and existential categories.

Fear and Faith from Early Christianity to the modern era.

Origen of Alexandria, an influential early Christian theologians may serve as a starting point. His theological reflections emphasize how fear, whether as a paralyzing force or as reverential awe, interacts with faith and hope in the spiritual life. Drawing upon key quotations from his works (referenced by page numbers), this article examines Origen's understanding of fear as both an obstacle and a catalyst for faith, while highlighting hope as the mediating force that leads the soul towards divine trust. Origen acknowledges that we should not

be disturbed, but still fear can have a wrong focus. He describes what he considers to be a wrong focus: "But we, if we fear death, we fear the antagonists, we transgress his commandment; therefore, we are liable to punishment..." (Origen, 2020, p. 232). This description suggests that fear distorts perception, while faith provides illumination. Yet, Origen does not dismiss fear entirely. He distinguishes between servile fear (terror) and filial fear (reverence), noting: "Those who fear God are midwives, serving as midwives to the offspring so that the works of virtue, good activities, may be perfect." (Origen, 2020, p. 407).

This distinction is crucial, as it shows that a proper fear of God, rooted in awe rather than dread, can deepen faith rather than undermine it. For Origen, faith is the stabilizing force that protects the soul from fear's corrosive influence. He employs martial imagery to illustrate this: "If the sinner's arrow is able to reach me, it is apparent that I have not made use of the shield of faith." (Origen, 2020, p.100). This metaphor aligns with the Pauline depiction of faith as spiritual armor (Eph. 6:16), emphasizing its defensive role against fear. He further asserts: "Therefore, having faith is a reasonable thing, not so much on account of the Scriptures as on account of the cosmos and the order that is in it, in the one who made sky and earth and the things in them (p.289).

Origen presents faith as transformative, reshaping the believer's relationship with fear. In this way, fear, when rightly directed, contributes to spiritual maturity. A view which sets him in relation to Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who is fundamental for Western Christianity. His theological anthropology reveals a nuanced understanding of fear as both a consequence of humanity's fallen condition and a potential catalyst for spiritual transformation. In his vision of Paradise, Augustine describes a state of prelapsarian harmony where "there was no excessive heat or cold, so its inhabitants were exempt from the vicissitudes of fear and desire," (Augustine, *City of God*, n.d., Book XIV, Chapter 26) establishing fear as fundamentally tied to humanity's post-Fall vulnerability and instability. Yet Augustine's personal spiritual journey demonstrates that fear, when properly oriented toward God, becomes transformative rather than debilitating. His confessional prayer, "I fear to deceive myself; lest mine iniquity lie unto itself. Therefore, I contend not in judgment with Thee," (Augustine, *Confessions*, n.d., Book I, Chapter 5) illustrates what might be termed a salutary fear one that acknowledges human fallibility and submits to divine truth rather than asserting autonomous judgment. This purifying dimension of fear reaches its culmination in Augustine's conversion narrative, In Book VIII, Chapter XII of his *Confessions* he describes fear not as paralyzing but purifying. For Augustine, faith emerges as both the antidote to destructive fear and the proper response to purifying fear. He declares: "My faith, Lord, shall call on Thee, which Thou hast given me, wherewith Thou hast inspired me, through the Incarnation of Thy

Son" (Augsutine, *Confessions*, n.d., Book I Chapter I). This posits faith not as a human achievement but as divine gift, while the chapter V of book VI named "Faith is the basis of human life; man cannot discover that truth which holy scripture has disclosed" establishes faith as epistemologically prior to reason, the necessary foundation for accessing revealed truth that transcends human rational capacity.

Almost a millennium later Thomas Aquinas, deeply influenced by Aristotelian metaphysics, constructs a systematic and rational framework also comments on the relationship between fear and faith. The Stanford Encyclopedia clarifies how he distinguishes: "Passions (passiones) are feeling-responses such as humans share with animals...Affections (affectiones), by contrast, are generated not in the sensory appetite, but in the will or intellectual appetite..." (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Emotions*, n.d.). Central to his argument is the assertion that fear, as an emotional response contingent upon potential evil, is fundamentally incompatible with the nature of God. Aquinas grounds this claim, made in his *Summa contra Gentiles* in the ontological distinction between divine perfection and human finitude, arguing that God's absolute actuality precludes any susceptibility to evil: "But Fear regards an evil that may be imminent. In two ways then Fear, specifically as such, is removed from God, both because it supposes a subject that is in potentiality, and because it has for its object some evil that may come to be in the subject" (Aquinas, n.d., p. 141).

This passage underscores Aquinas's metaphysical reasoning: since fear presupposes both potentiality and the possibility of evil, neither of which can pertain to an omnipotent and immutable God, it is categorically excluded from divine experience. Within his framework, fear is not eradicated but rather subordinated to the higher virtue of love. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit reorients human volition away from servile fear toward filial love, enabling believers to act freely in accordance with divine grace: "The Holy Ghost then, rendering us lovers of God, inclines us to act of our own will, freely, out of love, not as bondsmen prompted by fear. Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption as sons" (Aquinas, n.d., p. 610). Aquinas quotes Romans 8:15 and situates fear within the broader teleology of human existence, arguing that the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, dispose the soul toward its ultimate end: the beatific vision of God. He elaborates: "The whole care therefore that God has of man is in view of preparing his mind for the fruition of God, whereunto the mind is prepared by faith, hope and charity: for by faith man's mind is disposed to recognise God as a Being above himself: by hope it is strengthened to reach out to Him and see in Him man's true good: by charity it fixes upon Him so as immovably to adhere to Him" (Aquinas, n.d., p. 518). This dynamic tension between present faith and future fulfillment encapsulates Aquinas's teleological optimism: fear, when properly ordered, gives way to the

soul's restless pursuit of God. Aquinas, therefore, presents rather a coherent and rational account of fear and faith.

Nicholas of Cusa, the Renaissance philosopher and theologian, opposes Aquinas rational view. His theological framework that interrogates the relationship between faith and fear. God is predicated upon *docta ignorantia* ("learned ignorance"), a state in which faith surpasses finite human comprehension. He articulates this notion with precision: "And it always directs its worship by faith, which it attains more truly through learned ignorance. It believes that He whom it worships as one is All-in-one, and that He whom it worships as Inaccessible Light is not light as is corporeal light, to which darkness is opposed, but is infinite and most simple Light, in which darkness is Infinite Light; and [it believes] that Infinite Light always shines within the darkness of our ignorance but [that] the darkness cannot comprehend it. And so, the theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshiped as the Infinite God but, rather, as a creature. And such worship is idolatry; it ascribes to the image that which befits only the reality itself. Hence, it will be useful to set down a few more things about negative theology" (Cusanus, 1981, p. 45). Cusanus establishes the necessity of *via negativa* (negative theology) as an epistemological precondition for true worship, arguing that any attempt to conceptualize God through affirmatively is a theological error tantamount to idolatry. Cusanus elaborates an apophatic, while Aquinas stands for a cataphatic theology. Cusanus asserts that divine causality cannot be circumscribed by empirical or representational means. He states: "Although God, whether in order to make His goodness known (as the religious maintain), or because of the fact that [He is] maximum, absolute Necessity, or for some other reason, created the world, which obeys Him (so that there are those who are compelled and who fear Him and whom He judges), it is evident that He neither assumes another form (since He is the Form of all forms) nor appears through positive signs (since these signs themselves, in regard to their own being, would likewise require other signs through which [to appear], and so on ad infinitum)." (Cusanus, Book Two, 1981, p. 64).

Otherwise, than Aquinas offers Cusanus' theology a hierarchical structure of cognition, wherein faith serves as the necessary precondition for rational and intellectual progression. He delineates this dynamic as follows: "But if reason governs the senses, still it is necessary that the intellect govern reason in order that the intellect may adhere, by formed faith and above reason to the Mediator, so that it can be drawn unto glory by God the Father" (Cusanus, Book Three, 1981, p. 128). This schema posits faith as the mediating principle between reason and divine illumination. Cusanus' reiteration of the principle that "All our forefathers unanimously maintain that faith is the beginning of understanding" (Cusanus, Book Three, 1981, p. 143) underscores the axiomatic role of faith in his theological epistemology.

This assertion is not a doctrinal recapitulation but a methodological claim: just as all intellectual disciplines rely on indemonstrable first principles that must be accepted *a priori*, so too does theology require faith as its foundational premise. The invocation of Isaiah's dictum: "Unless you believe, you will not understand", serves as both a scriptural warrant and a philosophical imperative. Cusanus' attitude toward faith and fear is one of dialectical reconciliation and do not have these Aristotelian traits as those of Aquinas. Fear, in his theology, emerges not as a paralyzing dread but as an initial recognition of divine transcendence, a necessary humbling of human reason before the ineffable. In this way, Cusanus' theology offers a sophisticated resolution to the tension between faith and fear.

Whereas Augustine and Origin can be portrayed as the main starting figures, Aquinas and Cusanus peaked it and then Baruch Spinoza and Blaise Pascal ended this Christian journey into Enlightenment. Spinoza's philosophical attitude towards fear is woven into his critique of superstition and monarchical governance. Spinoza posits in his *Theological-Political Treatise* that "But since people are often reduced to such desperate straits that they cannot arrive at any solid judgment and as the good things of fortune for which they have a boundless desire are quite uncertain, they fluctuate wretchedly between hope and fear." (Spinoza, preface, 2001, p.5). This assertion underscores his belief that hope and fear are forces in human life, capable of shaping beliefs and behaviors in many ways. Spinoza often elaborates on the role of fear in political structures. He argues that "it may indeed be the highest secret of monarchical government and utterly essential to it, to keep men deceived, and to disguise the fear that sways them with the specious name of religion, so that they will fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance, and will not think it humiliating but supremely glorious to spill their blood and sacrifice their lives for the glorification of a single man." (Spinoza, 2001, p. 6).

This insight reveals Spinoza's critical view of how fear can be manipulated to maintain power and control over individuals. Moreover, Spinoza acknowledges the difficulty of eradicating superstition from the common people, equating it to the impossibility of ridding them of fear: "I know that it is as impossible to rid the common people of superstition as it is to rid them of fear" (Spinoza, 2001, p. 12). This comparison highlights his understanding of the deep-rooted nature of fear and its inseparable connection to superstitious beliefs. It is telling that Spinoza starts to us the term hope more often than faith again, as Enlightenment approaches soon. In his books *Ethics* he writes in his second note about the proposition how man is affected: "Hope is nothing else but an inconstant pleasure, arising from the image of something future or past, whereof we do not yet know the issue. Fear, on the other hand, is an inconstant pain also arising from the image of something concerning which we are in doubt" (Spinoza, 1996, p.175). Here one

can see his very rational approach towards these twisted, intertwined emotions.

Something which Blaise Pascal who both earlier was born and died than Spinoza didn't agree upon. In his posthumously published work, *Pensées* we can get to know his thinking. He offers an examination of the relationship between fear and faith. Pascal posits that fear is not merely an obstacle to faith but often its precursor, serving as a catalyst for spiritual awakening. Pascal acknowledges that fear is an intrinsic part of human existence, particularly in the face of mortality and divine judgment. He asserts, "Fear of death is the beginning of faith." (Pascal, 1958, Section II: The Misery of Man Without God). This suggests that existential dread compels individuals to seek transcendence, pushing them toward religious contemplation. Similarly, he states, "Fear is the beginning of wisdom" (Pascal, 1958, Section VI: The Philosophers), indicating that fear, rather than mere intellectual inquiry, often initiates the pursuit of divine truth. While fear may initiate the journey toward faith, Pascal argues that true faith ultimately overcomes fear. He writes: "Fear is the enemy of faith, but faith conquers fear" (Pascal, 1958, Section VI: The Philosophers).

This dynamic illustrates a transformative process wherein faith provides the assurance that fear cannot. Pascal distinguishes between mere intellectual assent and genuine faith, stating, "Faith is different from proof; the latter is human, the former is a gift from God" (Pascal, 1958, Section IV: Of the Means of Belief). Faith, as a divine gift, transcends human reason and thus dispels the anxieties that arise from uncertainty. He further emphasizes: "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of. We know the truth not only by reason, but by the heart" (Pascal, 1958, Section IV: Of the Means of Belief). This suggests that faith operates beyond rational fear, offering a deeper, intuitive certainty. Additionally, Pascal highlights faith's mysterious nature: "Faith is a mystery to those who do not possess it" (Pascal, 1958, Section IV: Of the Means of Belief).

All these quotes show for the unbeliever, faith may appear irrational, but for the believer, it provides certainty beyond empirical proof. These lines show that Spinoza views fear and hope as passive emotions arising from inadequate ideas, they diminish our power of acting and reflect our dependence on external causes beyond our control. Pascal, by contrast, sees fear as a legitimate response to human finitude and uncertainty, which he argues rationally motivates faith in God as the only stable foundation for meaning and hope. Because of the shortage of this essay the Islamic thinkers Averroes and Avicenna are not discussed. Both, however, drew upon this relation of fear and faith as well and lived between Augustine and Aquinas. They understood fear as an obstacle to higher human functioning. Avicenna proposed in *The Canon of Medicine* that ignorance generates fear, which cascades into hatred and violence suggesting that knowledge serves as the primary antidote

to existential dread. Similarly, Averroes, in *The Book of the Principles of Medicine* (*Kulliyat*), analyzed fear as a bodily passion that disrupts rational thought, viewing it through an Aristotelian framework where physical emotions interfere with intellectual pursuits. However, both thinkers diverged in their emphasis on reason's role in faith. Averroes, in *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), argued that genuine devotion to God should transcend fear and hope, grounded instead in rational understanding. Avicenna similarly championed intellectual engagement as the path to authentic faith, asserting that true comprehension requires rigorous investigation into underlying causes and principles.

This little philosophical and historical overview on fear and faith reveals a compelling intellectual evolution spanning over fifteen centuries. Beginning with Origen's mystical synthesis and Augustine's pioneering insight that "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," we can observe how early Christian thought established fear as potentially constructive rather than merely destructive, a pathway to divinity and rational understanding rather than as an enemy. Aquinas emerges as the great synthesizer, weaving together Patristic wisdom with Islamic rationalism into a comprehensive theological system. Cusanus then maintained the Neoplatonic concept of negative theology, suggesting that our knowledge of the divine might be fundamentally limited and thereby beheld fear and faith slightly different. Finally, the early modern period brought the stark contrast between Spinoza's naturalistic analysis, where both hope and fear are "passions" that arise not from our rational nature but from our lack of understanding, and Pascal's existential wager, which embraced uncertainty as the very condition within which faith must operate. The transition into the Enlightenment era raises a critical question regarding the persistence of these established paradigms versus the emergence of fundamentally new frameworks. This subsequent period, characterized by metaphysical critique, secular humanism, and psychological-sociological approaches to human experience, necessitates examination of how these intellectual transformations redefined the nature of fear, adapted faith to an increasingly secular context, and therefore referred to it again as hope within a landscape of deconstructed traditional certainties. In the beginning of Enlightenment stands Immanuel Kant. In *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793), Immanuel Kant develops a nuanced understanding of fear and faith as morally significant responses to the human condition. Fear, for Kant, is not irrational dread but a recognition of "radical evil" – the corruption within humanity that stems from self-deception and the disguising of selfish motives as virtue. This fear is not of divine punishment but of the inner moral corruption that prevents authentic moral disposition. Yet Kant refuses to surrender to despair. Against this fear stands faith grounded in the possibility of moral self-improvement and embodied in the ideal of moral perfection represented

by Christ. This image functions as a beacon of hope, inspiring individuals to strive toward the good despite humanity's natural inclination toward evil. For Kant, faith is neither blind nor theological; it is a rational conviction that moral progress remains possible. The following part will portray the philosophers: Kierkegaard, William James, Miguel de Unamuno, Camus and Foucault.

Miguel de Unamuno, a formidable Spanish philosopher and poet stands as an influential figure within the currents of the existentialist movement, leaving an indelible mark on 20th-century thought. His works, most notably the treatise *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations* (1913), delves into the fundamental and often excruciating tensions that define the human condition and also display his views on faith and fear. For Miguel de Unamuno, faith is far removed from a placid or passive acceptance of pre-packaged dogma or ecclesiastical pronouncements. Instead, he grasps it as an active, often agonizing, and deeply personal commitment – a leap made not from a position of certainty, but precisely from the crucible of uncertainty and doubt. He vehemently rejects purely rational or systematically institutionalized forms of belief, asserting that authentic faith, the faith that truly sustains the human spirit, emerges from the very heart of the conflict between the cold, analytical power of reason and the passionate, often irrational, human longing for personal immortality and continued consciousness. Unamuno articulates this dynamic tension with characteristic force: "Faith feels itself secure neither with universal consent, nor with tradition, nor with authority. It seeks the support of its enemy, reason" (Unamuno, 1954, p. 22-23).

This powerful quote illustrates Unamuno's counterintuitive yet central view: faith is not buttressed or reinforced by external validation, societal consensus, or the weight of tradition. Paradoxically, it thrives in its ongoing, strenuous engagement with doubt and the critical scrutiny of reason, its supposed "enemy." He further argues that the wellspring of belief is not found in logical necessity or intellectual assent, but is profoundly motivated by the deepest desires and yearnings of the human heart: "And I will say further, that if there exists in a man faith in God joined to a life of purity and moral elevation, it is not so much the believing in God that makes him good, as the being good, thanks to God, that makes him believe in Him. Goodness is the best source of spiritual clear-sightedness" (Unamuno, 1954, p. 1-11). Unamuno offers a striking reordering of priorities, suggesting that an ethical life, a life striving for goodness and moral elevation, often precedes and actively sustains faith, rather than faith being the sole instigator of moral behavior. On the other side Unamuno audaciously reinterprets the traditional understanding of "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). He posits that this "fear" might more accurately refer to the fundamental *timor mortis* (fear of death) or even, paradoxically, *timor vitae* (fear of life itself, with all its

inherent suffering and uncertainty), suggesting that deep existential anxiety is the true root of human wisdom and the instigator of our search for deeper meaning. Miguel de Unamuno's philosophy, particularly as expressed in *The Tragic Sense of Life*, powerfully presents faith, hope, and fear not as isolated psychological states but as dynamically interdependent forces. Sometimes they appear as locked in a perpetual and agonizing interplay just like Albert Camus presents us absurdist philosophy in his work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1991). Here he critically dismisses traditional manifestations of faith and hope, viewing them not as virtues or sources of strength, but as sophisticated forms of intellectual evasion. He articulates this critique powerfully: "Hope of another life one must 'deserve' or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it" (Camus, 1991, p.3).

In this passage, Camus explicitly targets hope as a deceptive construct. It is a psychological sleight of hand that encourages individuals to avoid living authentically and fully in the present moment. By deferring meaning, fulfillment, or justice to an imagined future, an afterlife, or a utopian ideal, hope distracts from the concrete reality of lived experience. It encourages a focus on what "will be" rather than what "is," thereby diminishing the value and immediacy of life itself. Similarly, he argues that placing faith in higher truths fundamentally distorts our perception of reality. Such faith attempts to impose a comforting but ultimately false coherence onto a universe that is, at its core, irrational and resistant to simplistic explanations: "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on another hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger" (Camus, 1991, p.2).

For Camus, the pivotal moment of genuine insight occurs when one consciously abandons these comforting illusions. Unlike Kierkegaard, who perceived fear (or angst) as a profound spiritual state, a "dizziness of freedom" that could potentially serve as a pathway toward religious transcendence and a deeper relationship with God, Camus interprets fear in a more secular and immediate light. Søren Kierkegaard's exploration, however, of faith is inseparable from his reflection on fear. Far from offering a comforting image of faith, Kierkegaard presents it as a deeply paradoxical and isolating experience that places the individual in an absolute relation to the Divine. For Camus, it is the raw, unmediated, and visceral reaction to the chilling awareness of cosmic meaninglessness, the emotional fallout from recognizing one's solitude in an indifferent universe. The absurd, as Camus defines it, is not a static condition but an active confrontation, an ongoing tension that arises from a fundamental mismatch: "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus, 1991, p.10). This fear is not merely an abstract philosophical anxiety; it is viscerally immediate and existentially

potent, capable of erupting into consciousness at any given moment, triggered by the mundane as easily as by the profound. The ordinary can suddenly become imbued with a sense of strangeness and alienation: "At any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face" (Camus, 1991, p. 4).

Camus does not advocate for the suppression or denial of this elemental fear. On the contrary, he insists that the courageous acknowledgment of this fear, the willingness to look it squarely in the face, constitutes the crucial first step toward cultivating an authentic and lucid existence. To attempt to flee from this fear by seeking refuge in the unverified promises of faith or the deferred comforts of hope is, in Camus' view, to engage in a form of self-deception, to live in "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*). The key insight, the philosophical pivot, is that Sisyphus can find meaning and even a form of bitter triumph not in the impossible hope of ultimate victory over his fate, but in the conscious engagement with the struggle itself: "There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (Camus, 1991, p. 23).

This "scorn" is the very essence of Camusian revolt. It is a profound and dignified refusal to be broken or diminished by the inherent meaninglessness of one's situation. It is a clear-sighted understanding of one's fate coupled with a defiant rejection of the despair that fate is designed to provoke. Ultimately, Albert Camus' philosophy, as articulated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, offers a stark and challenging alternative that resolutely rejects both the consolations of religious faith and the paralysis of existential despair. In this profound reinterpretation of human fulfillment, *The Myth of Sisyphus* does not merely offer a diagnosis of the human condition as one of inherent absurdity; it courageously prescribes a way to live authentically and meaningfully within it, without the crutch of false comforts, yet equally without succumbing to the darkness of surrender.

Kierkegaard, as above already indicated, does not treat fear as a general or emotional reaction, but as a religiously charged experience, one that arises when the individual encounters the Divine in its most radical demand. Abraham, as the exemplar of faith, becomes an object not of admiration or pity but of sacred horror. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac, described in the book *Fear and Trembling* cannot be judged by ethical standards; instead, it demands a different mode of understanding, one that borders on fear and trembling: "Abraham one cannot weep over. One draws near to him with a horror religious [religious terror], as Israel drew near to Mount Sinai" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 58). This unique situation emerges from the unsettling fact that Abraham's actions transcend human reason and moral categories. The fear here is not of punishment or guilt, but of the sublime mystery of God's will and the absolute nature of Abraham's obedience. For Kierkegaard, faith is not merely belief or religious sentiment; it is a paradox, a suspension of the ethical for the sake of an absolute duty to God. Faith

elevates the individual above the ethical through a direct, singular relationship with the Absolute. He wrote: "Faith is precisely this paradox, that the particular individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, is justified over and against it, not as subordinate but as superior, yet, mark this well, in such a way that it is the single individual who, after having been as the particular individual subordinate to the universal, now through the universal becomes the single individual who as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the Absolute" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 54).

This paradox reverses the traditional hierarchy between the ethical (the universal) and the individual. The individual's relation to the ethical is now defined by his or her relation to God, not the other way around. "The paradox of faith, then, is this: that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual... determines their relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not their relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 70). This reversal is what makes faith fundamentally incommunicable and ethically unjustifiable. This radical form of faith, Kierkegaard insists, does not manifest as peace or fulfillment but as inner torment and isolation. The story of Abraham is again paradigmatic: his silence is not triumphant but tragic, underscoring the agony of his position. If his act cannot be explained through universal categories, it cannot be communicated at all: "If there is not a hiddenness that has its ground in the fact that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, then Abraham's conduct cannot be defended; for he disregarded the intermediate ethical forms" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p.83).

The nature of this "hiddenness" is deeply tied to the fear experienced by the believer. If Abraham's revelation is entirely private, his actions are utterly opaque to others and even to himself. He suffers not only from isolation but also from the burden of silence: "If, on the other hand, the will of Heaven had not been announced to him by an augur, if it had come to his knowledge altogether privately, if it had set itself in an altogether private relation to him, then we are in the presence of the paradox... Then he would be unable to speak, even if he would very much like to do so. Then he would not enjoy the silence, but he would suffer the pain, while this would be for him precisely the assurance that he was justified" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p.93).

Kierkegaard thus paints faith as a paradoxical condition of suffering, a not sharable anguish that nevertheless confirms the believer's absolute relation to God. This faith that lies beyond comprehension, and thus isolates the believer even further. The absurd is both the foundation and the test of true faith. William James's, another interesting author in this context wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) a nuanced exploration of the psychological underpinnings of religious life. The author delves into the complex interplay

of human emotions, identifying states such as fear, faith, and hope as critical components in the architecture of belief and spiritual transformation. He acknowledges the deep historical roots of fear in the genesis of religious sentiment and observes, "The ancient saying that the first maker of the Gods was fear receives voluminous corroboration from every age of religious history; but none the less does religious history show the part which joy has ever more tended to play. Sometimes the joy has been primary; sometimes secondary, being the gladness of deliverance from the fear" (James, 1902, p.59). This statement highlights that fear may often be the initial impetus for religious ideation, it is not the sole emotional force at play. Joy, intrinsically linked to hope and the stirrings of faith, emerges as a counterpoint, sometimes an independent wellspring of religious feeling, and at other times a profound relief born from the overcoming of dread. Mark Wynn made an interesting comment on William James theory, when he suggested it is not the stimulus alone which is sufficient for the emotion, but also the backlight: "It is, we might say, only in the light of this background orientation that our emotional engagement with particular objects of experience can take shape, since how those objects strike us (...) " (Wynn, 2013, p. 222).

William James's attitude towards fear, faith, and hope is one of dynamic interplay rather than simple opposition. James's core philosophy is pragmatic, focusing on the practical consequences of ideas and the function of mental life. Michel Foucault, is often considered a neo-pragmatic thinker, who shifts the analysis away from finding the universal essence of things (like "Truth" or "Fear") to investigating how practices, discourses, and power relations construct those things in history. His analysis of punishment and discipline, meticulously articulated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), fundamentally reorients our understanding of power. A brief examination of Foucault's perspective on fear and hope will be help, drawing on pivotal passages from *Discipline and Punish*, to illuminate the nuanced ways in which human experiences are harnessed to shape punitive systems and forge individual subjectivities. In pre-modern penal systems, fear was actively instilled through brutal, highly visible punishments like public torture and executions. Foucault captures the essence of this transition and the emergent anxieties of a new era: "A figure had haunted earlier times, that of the monstrous king, the source of all justice and yet besmirched with crime; another fear now appeared, that of some dark, secret understanding between those who enforced the law and those who violated it" (Foucault, 1977, p. 283).

Foucault illuminates how the locus of fear shifted from the terrifying spectacle of monarchical power to a more unsettling apprehension regarding the integrity of the judicial process itself. Moreover, Foucault astutely emphasizes that punishment is not uniformly effective, precisely because individuals respond disparately to its mechanisms, revealing the stratified nature of its

application and impact: "The idea of the same punishment does not have the same effect on everyone: the rich do not fear fines nor the notorious infamy" (Foucault, 1977, p. 98). This observation reveals that fear is not a universal or equally potent deterrent but rather a tool that operates unevenly. Foucault's analysis also extends to the less explored terrain of how hope itself is strategically exploited by institutional systems to secure compliance. He wrote: "The condemned always hoped for a pardon and, in order to drag things out, they would pretend, even at the foot of the scaffold, that they had further revelations to make. When the people wanted a pardon, they called for it aloud and tried to postpone the last moment, looking out for the arrival of the messenger bearing the letter with the green wax seal and if necessary claiming that he was on his way" (Foucault, 1977, p. 53).

Foucault critically dissects the illusion of justice and genuine reform, asserting that legal systems, through their very design and operation, artfully manipulate hope to ensure widespread compliance and minimize any potential for evasion: "Above all, no crime committed must escape the gaze of those whose task it is to dispense justice. Nothing so weakens the machinery of the law than the hope of going unpunished; how could one establish in the minds of the public a strict link between the offence and a penalty if it were affected by a certain coefficient of improbability" (Foucault, 1977, p. 96).

The law, therefore, must project an aura of absolute certainty and inevitability, leaving no perceived room for the hope of evasion or escape from its disciplinary reach. Consequently, a rigidly defined legal code is deemed necessary to eliminate any potential ambiguity or uncertainty that might foster such dangerous hopes: "A code is therefore necessary, and this code must be sufficiently precise for each type of offence to be clearly present in it. The silence of the law must not harbor the hope of impunity. An exhaustive, explicit code is required, defining crimes and fixing penalties" (Foucault, 1977, p. 98). Hope, rather than being a spontaneous human aspiration, becomes a controlled variable within the calculus of power. This internalization signifies a profound shift in the mechanics of power: "It is not, therefore, an external respect for the law or fear of punishment alone that will act upon the convict but the workings of the conscience itself" (Foucault, 1977, p. 238).

The internalization of discipline, therefore, marks a sophisticated and highly efficient form of power, rendering individual's active participants in their own subjugation through the cultivation of a self-regulating conscience. Michel Foucault's penetrating analysis compellingly reveals that both fear and hope, far from being simple human emotions, are shaped and utilized as instrumental tools of power. His critique pushes us beyond conventional understandings of crime and punishment, hope and fear and urges us to seek and envision alternative forms of social organization and societies.

Conclusions.

This historical-philosophical overview reveals that fear, faith, and hope are not merely emotional states but foundational categories through which Western thought has interpreted human existence, morality, and transcendence. From Plato's rational courage to Foucault's critique of disciplinary power, each thinker reconfigures these concepts within their respective metaphysical, theological, or socio-political frameworks. Faith emerges alternately as divine trust, existential wager, or rational assent; hope oscillates between eschatological promise and psychological resilience; and fear, whether of death, divine judgment, or systemic control, remains a persistent lens through which human vulnerability is exposed. The evolution of these ideas underscores a central philosophical tension: whether meaning is found through transcendence or constructed within immanence. As modernity fragments traditional certainties, the interplay of fear, faith, and hope continues to shape our

ethical and existential horizons. For the reader who has a further interest in the topic Michael Brady investigated the theme in two of his books (*Emotional Insight: The Epistemic Role of Emotional Experience*, 2013; *Emotion: The Basics*, 2018).

Outlook: Emerging Themes for Future Research. Due to the scope limitations of this essay, the analysis has primarily addressed the first research question, tracing how the relationship between fear and faith evolved. The second question, why these conceptual transformations occurred, has only been addressed through implicit hints and contextual observations. A comprehensive answer to the "why" question requires further research examining the broader intellectual, socio-political, and cultural conditions that precipitated each transformation: the rise of monotheism, the collapse of medieval synthesis, the scientific revolution, secularization, and the emergence of disciplinary societies. Future investigation should systematically analyze the causal mechanisms driving these conceptual reconfigurations.

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