Philosophers, in any school of thought within which inquiry is directed and arguments take shape, are often reminded of a singular fact pertaining to their enterprise, a reminder which comes—strictly speaking—from without the grand intellectual palisade of its employ: "Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted outside philosophy and they die if these roots decay."¹ Philosophical investigation into religion, as richly metaphysical as religious experience is, and as empirically unconfirmable as religion’s propositions may seem, is faced with the truth that religious experience, for the believer—especially one so untrained in the sophisticated methods of philosophical and scientific discovery as may reasonably be found in any culture—is rarely, if at all, the product of reasoned inquiry only. And yet, Tillich—a philosopher and theologian whose own work follows Barth’s critiques of modern Christianity for very similar reasons as those proposed by Tillich—provides a provocative reminder that the great sin committed by those interested in theo-philosophic inquiry is an attempt to subsume the inwardness of faith to the dispassionate objectivity of reason; likewise, lest the zealot here presume herself vindicated, the great sin of the masses is the attempt to subsume reason to the chaos and randomness of human feeling.² Thus, while genuine philosophical dilemmas are truly grounded in experience outside of the sterile environment of reasoned inquiry and its elegant theorizing, it would seem that passional experience, irrespective of its divinity and especially if left unattended by reason, wants a measure of confidence and lacks what may be termed stolidity—a term I take, in this paper, to mean “dependability”, for it may be admitted that no conviction can be said to be meaningful if it lacks an anchor in the facticity of belief, or the “believing of that which is believed”. In order to avoid the “great sin” of reducing passion and reason from one another in the experience of faith, what follows is a phenomenological description of what I consider to be an accurate account of the interplay of reason and passion in possible in religious experience.” The proposed phenomenological description will be distilled during a brief consideration of the popular arguments within this class of inquiry. The description posited here following is a dialectic central in the believer’s move from impassioned desire, to inquiry, to one’s “first moment of faith”.

In the initial moment of this dialectic in which belief first becomes possible, one recognizes that

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the seeds of faith are both contained in the passional will of the individual as well as being present in an intellectual tendency. Of the latter, we are reminded by James that “religious affirmations” comprehend two moments of intellectual recognition: “first, that the best things are the Eternal things; and second, that we are better off for believing (this) first affirmation” than not believing it. This intellectual tendency, enacted in the moment of the recognition of the supernal value of eternal, or heavenly, things (as they are taken to be appropriately disposed phenomena of belief in the vast field of religious experience) relates dialectically to the former—that is, the passional will—in the first instant, because the affirmations of religion assume eternity and the individual’s relationship with eternity in time, or the mortal context of finitude. Of the former, reflection on both points “makes it way inwardly in inwardness,” we would safely say with Kierkegaard, as one reconnoiters herself as being thrust between her “where” and “what” in time, and indefiniteness—that is, an infinite hope in the desired culmination of her existential hopes in the eternal—in her consideration of where she wants to be in eternity. We might, here, consider the aforementioned “intellectual tendency”, as reason itself. The passional will, which may be taken here to mean the tendency to determinateness of choice upon the passion stimulated in the paradox of time and eternity in time, could be said to be what is actually experienced as belief. In this first move of the dialect, impasioned desire may be expressed as having a will to believe in that which one knows not. It is critical to note that, at this stage, the subjects of religious belief are desired but are, to reason, merely potential, or “yet to be appropriated as objects of proper faith”. Nothing of an objective character of divine things needs to have been presented to reason in order for this moment of belief to become possible.

From the first moment belief becomes possible, and in each successive moment of belief, what one comes to know of the divine provides the objective representation of those things to which the faith-seeker relates subjectively in the first movement of the dialectic, in the passionate will inwardly, suggesting that inquiry by reason provides directedness for the passionate will; for, to say “I believe God exists”, Kant reminds us, is a statement which “identifies for us a pure concept of the understanding,” in other words a sort of a priori proposition that, though it may be specified as the form or metaphysic of religious experience, yet “exceeds the bounds” of reasoned inquiry in its extremity, “so that it cannot be said to be derived analytically.” In the second move of the dialectic, the pure ideas respecting the phenomena of religious experience in the understanding are acted upon, in turn, by the deepened inwardness effected by “the spontaneous testimony” of the object of the religious metaphysic—an objectivity which takes shape via reasoned inquiry. From here, belief takes up a “rising” character, a rising conviction in a state of increasing poignancy requiring absolution, one which “forces itself upon” our intuition “from every side...as an indelible impression” which isn’t at all actuated “by arguments or demonstration”. Such impressions take shape in the reading of the bible,
in contemplating of the splendor of nature, and in reflections of one's infinite passion in moments of despair (in which one reconnoiters the infinite need for culmination of the indefinite). Reason, then, in the first and every succeeding moment of the dialectic of religious belief, provides an essential relation to faith in two ways: first, in the reason are contained what may be loosely coined, "the seeds of faith," or the pure ideas of understanding which require interaction with religious phenomena in order to be enacted reflectively. Religious phenomena are all—either together or in part—that which is experienced as belief, in moments of rising conviction and deepened inwardness. Second, reasoned inquiry provides the directedness of inwardness; for, without objective inquiry into the matters of religious experience, the inward directionality of the will may be said to otherwise lack content expressive of religious experience and so may be said to be, in the extreme, zealouness without content, susceptible to be driven upon the wind of this or that doctrine, and whichever one provides the most convincing undertow upon which the zeal sans content may ride to shore. Directed belief, then, is taken to be stolid belief, or dependable in relation to the subjectivity of religious experience. This moment of the dialectic, impassioned inquiry, may be expressed as believing in that which one knows, but not knowing why.

The not-knowing-why of one's believing forms the final move in the dialectic which may culminate as faith—the appropriation of phenomena of religious experience as one's own. Reason inquires objectively into the matter of not-knowing-why as it investigates the objectivity of one's need for the culmination of the indefinite and the objectivity both behind the starry heavens above (or the splendor of nature round-about) and what may seem to be the mystic historicism of biblical accounts. These inquiries take shape in asking questions concerning the nature of the god of the biblical accounts, whether that god relates to the presentment of nature's splendor one now witnesses; the nature of one's soul is also investigated and whether its immortality is linear or transmigrational—or, whether there is, in fact, no god and no soul at all. Reason, alone, is left with "a could...or could not..." concerning the propositions of religious belief. Evidences sufficient for reason alone are not present to sustain the affirmative, neither the negation, of this conditional either/or; and so the inquiry terminates in an upward limit where reason can no longer sensibly penetrate; a moment of Anskt, then, is presented to reason alone: that is, fear; fear of the uncertain and things which cannot solved by rational enterprise. It is critical here to note for clarity that in the previous moves of the dialectic, reason and conviction work in tandem—one specifying the form of religious experience, the other sustaining the pure concept of understanding upon the matters and content of religious experience. In the moment of uncertainty, one reconnoiters reason as being impotent before the uncertainty of the metaphysic of religion—of god, the soul, creation, and so forth. It is in this moment, for the believer, that inwardness—rather than rational inquiry—overwhelms the objectivity of reason as a motivator for continued religious experience, embracing the uncertainties presented to reason in Anskt. As Anskt is inevitable for the reason, so, too, is the overwhelming subjectivity of belief inevitable in overcoming it. Again, it is in this very moment when subjectivity achieves this, its "maximum inwardness," that the "divine miracle
of faith” is enacted, which is the intelligibility to intuition of that which, to reason, is impenetrable and undiscoverable. This move in the dialectic may appropriately be termed faith, or belief in that which one knows and which one knows she cannot deny. Critically, this move is enacted as the appropriation of that which was once desired by the passional will to believe and of that which became increasingly objective to reason in inquiry, but which remained absent of a definitive character for the believer in the initial moments in which belief first becomes possible.

In the foregoing, I have presented a possible method for describing the unison of reason and passion in religious experience. I have shown that this dialectical description is acceptable under the conditions of rising convictions, acting upon pure ideas concomitant with the phenomena of religious experience in the understanding. The existence of these pure ideas may be seen to be evident in the experience of those who have a will to believe, only they know not what; or, those who believe, yet know not why. The dialect terminates in the overwhelming subjective appropriation of that which is believed, concerning which reason inevitably reconnoiters its impotence in Ankst, or fear of the uncertain. This does not mean to say that fear alone motivates belief in god, or that fear is the driver of the dialectic I have described; indeed, it has been shown that one’s searching is preceded by an impassioned desire to search for the object and content of one’s will to believe. Searching by reason has also been shown to be coupled, not with fear throughout the process, but with conviction. For specificity, these convictions may be said to be characterized by confidence in that Being whose being is steadily impressed upon the intuitions of the believer, in an impassioned need for culmination of the indefinite, and in a joyful looking forward to that day, perhaps, in which culmination of one’s infinite need in very fact takes place. Fear, then, only affects the reason, and reason alone, in what has been termed the upward extremity—the furthest delimitation—of investigation, enacted by reason’s abutting the stubborn fact that the metaphysic it successfully described as potential is irrevocably beyond the powers of reason to derive by argumentation and demonstration.