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Illusion and satire in Kierkegaard's *Postscript*

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Abstract. This paper investigates Johannes Climacus's infamous satire against Hegelianism in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In considering why Climacus aims to show speculative thought as *comical* rather than simply mistaken, it is argued that Climacus sees the need for the comic as a vital form of 'indirect communication.' The thinker who approaches ethical and religious questions in an inappropriately 'objective' manner is in the grip of an illusion which can only be dispelled by his coming to see his own confusion, and satire (as well as other forms of the comic) can be a more effective weapon in dispelling such illusions than can more 'direct' forms of critical argument. Moreover, it is argued that the 'Hegelian' is not simply a figure at whom Climacus's readers are invited to scoff. Rather, we are intended to see *ourselves* as prone to the same kind of confusions and evasions. Thus Climacus's ostensibly anti-Hegelian satire is itself a form of indirect communication which, if we do see how it rebounds upon ourselves, serves a vital ethical-religious purpose.

> Indirect communication can be an art of communication in redoubling the communication; the art consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody, purely objective, and then continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity. This is what some pseudonymous writers are accustomed to calling the double-reflection of the communication. For example, it is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot – and then to be a nobody oneself. If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself.'
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> Anti-Climacus, *Practice in Christianity*[1]

Two of the best-known things about Kierkegaard are that many of his texts were written under pseudonyms, and that he makes several jokes ostensibly at the expense of Hegel. The first of these issues, the significance of the pseudonyms and of Kierkegaard's polyphony, has been a central concern of much recent Kierkegaard scholarship. The kind of reading which makes no attempt to distinguish one pseudonymous author from another, running them together and calling them all 'Kierkegaard,' is less common that it once was. Yet the issue of which the second is a part – the uses of the comic, humour and

satire in the pseudonymous authorship – is still relatively little considered, despite 'comedy' having been pinpointed by one commentator as the key characteristic of that authorship.[2] This essay takes the view that the comic is a vital theme in Kierkegaard's thought. It investigates one important dimension of this, namely the use which the pseudonymous author of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the self-styled 'humorist' Johannes Climacus, makes of satire in his critique of misapplied 'objective reflection.' Hegelianism appears as the chief target of this satire, but though some of the jokes at its expense are well-known, the role of this satire in Kierkegaard's wider ethical-religious project needs to be better understood. Michael Weston has argued that both Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms, and the pervasiveness of comedy, irony and humour in his critique of philosophy, have their grounds in the *ethical* nature of that critique.[3] I think that Weston himself establishes this case more persuasively in the case of pseudonymity than of comedy. Yet I aim to show that the latter, more ambitious claim, can also be justified. I argue – uncontroversially enough – that Climacus's satire is intended to expose the disguised vulnerability of the Hegelian assumptions dominant in the philosophy and theology of Kierkegaard's day. But I also suggest that it is vital to understand why he uses humour and satire to do this. It is all part of an overall project of trying to get a certain kind of reader to see something about himself: that he is prone to a certain kind of illusion.[4] Against the possible objection that there is something ethically dubious about Climacus's justification for his use of such satire, I argue that this can best be understood in terms of Kierkegaard's anxiety about what he saw as the disastrous effects of his age's succumbing to a broadly Hegelian world-view. A central theme of the *Postscript* is that we are easily tempted into what David J. Gouwens calls 'diseases of reflection;'[5] into misapplying 'objective reflection' in ways which pose a terrible threat to our capacities for ethical and religious inwardness. Seen in this light, the satire ostensibly against Hegelianism takes on a wider and greater significance. The *prima facie* anti-Hegelian satire of the *Postscript* can best be seen as a piece of 'indirect communication' through which the reader is intended to recognise, and to take corrective action against, the ethical-religious evasions of misapplied objectivity to which we scholars – Hegelian and non-Hegelian alike – are particularly susceptible.[6]

I. The philosopher as fool: Climacus on Hegelianism

So what is involved in the fun which Climacus pokes at Hegelianism? Essentially, he accuses the Hegelian of a certain kind of *self-forgetfulness.* This is

what lies behind such jokes as the suggestion that the absent-minded professor only remembers that he is an individual human being, existing in time, 'every three months when he draws his salary' (CUP, 192).[7] Climacus's chief concern is the tendency, which he sees as rampant in his age, to forget the first-person perspective from which any individual must speak. Speculative philosophy is a particular offender here.[8] The *Postscript* is such a labyrinth that it is possible to overlook that the most fundamental of its many subdivisions is a split into two parts: a relatively short Part One, concerning 'The objective issue of the truth of Christianity,' and a Part Two, almost fourteen times as long, which addresses 'The subjective issue, the subjective individual's relation to the truth of Christianity, or becoming a Christian.' Climacus claims that the comical 'is rooted in the misrelation of the objective' (CUP, 55). In Part One, he argues that the 'objectivity' of both history and speculative philosophy provide inadequate grounds for Christian faith. Of 'speculation', he says:

> The speculative point of view conceives of Christianity as a historical phenomenon; the question of its truth therefore becomes a matter of permeating it with thought in such a way that finally Christianity itself is the eternal thought. (CUP, 50)

I start at this point since it is here that Climacus offers what Merold Westphal describes as the 'first concrete satire' of the *Postscript.*[9] The context is as follows. While speculative philosophy claims to proceed without presuppositions, when it deals with religious matters, Climacus claims, it makes a huge – and totally unwarranted – presupposition: 'that we are all Christians' (CUP, 50). What if someone, in the midst of Danish Christendom, were honestly to doubt whether there is any meaningful sense in which he could be thus described? In such a case:

> he would not be persecuted or executed, but people would give him an angry look and say, "It is really boring of this fellow to make so much ado about nothing; why can't he be like the rest of us, who are all Christians. He is just like F. E, who does not want to wear a hat, as the rest of us do, but has to be eccentric." If he were married, his wife would tell him, "Hubby, darling, where did you ever pick up such a notion? How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish, aren't you? Doesn't the geography book say that the predominant religion in Denmark is Lutheran-Christian? You aren't a Jew, are you, or a Mohammedan? What else would you be, then? It is a thousand years since paganism was superseded; so I know you aren't a pagan. Don't you tend to your work in the office as a good civil servant; aren't you a good subject in a Christian nation, in a Lutheran-Christian state? So of course you are a Christian." (CUP, 50-1)

The point of putting these revealing words into the mouth of the man's wife is immediately explained: society has 'become so objective that even the wife of a civil servant argues from the whole, from the state, from the idea of society, from geographic scientificity to the single individual' (CUP, 51). As Westphal observes, the wife, 'whether or not she has heard of Hegel . . . thinks like a Hegelian, reducing the individual to a function of the social totality to which he or she belongs."[10] In other words, she turns a 'subjective' question – one concerning an individual's 'inwardness'; the husband's concern about how he should live – into an 'objective' one. Part of the point here is to show that this 'Hegelian' way of viewing the world – and the kind of self-forgetfulness with which Climacus is concerned – was 'a powerful ideological reflection of Danish society.' [11] Moreover, it is significant that Climacus, rather than stating this abstractly, puts the words into the mouth of a particular *person*. Westphal observes that doing so serves an important satirical purpose: 'The presentation is like a political cartoon. It is caricature, but to the degree that it rings true, it is devastating critique.'[12]

This is one way, then, in which the comical is rooted in 'the misrelation of the objective.' According to a view such as that of the 'Hegelian' wife, an individual is Christian in virtue of living in a 'Christian country.' But the very idea of a 'Christian country' makes no sense from a perspective – such as the one which Climacus spends several hundred pages developing – for which 'subjectivity' is the very essence of the religious. So the wife is but one example of a widespread forgetting of subjectivity and 'the individual', at which Climacus pokes fun:

> it seems a bit peculiar to me that there is continual talk about speculation and speculation as if this were a man or as if a man were speculation. Speculation does everything – it doubts everything etc. The speculative thinker, on the other hand, has become too objective to talk about himself. (CUP, 51).

Climacus insists that any 'objective,' disinterested, approach to Christianity is fundamentally misguided: 'objective indifference cannot come to know anything whatever' about Christianity (CUP, 52); a 'passionate' inward relation (of either 'faith' or 'offence') is essential. Ignoring this inward relation (the 'subjective' dimension) is precisely how the speculative thinker can render himself comical. If the speculative thinker 'says that he builds his eternal happiness on speculative thought, he contradicts himself comically, because speculative thought, in its objectivity, is indeed totally indifferent to his and my and your eternal happiness.' (CUP, 55)[13] The incongruity which makes the speculative thinker comical in his attempt to gain an 'eternal happiness' through 'objective' thought is that:

> The subjective individual is impassionedly, infinitely interested in his eternal happiness [*Salighed*] and is now supposed to be helped by speculative thought, that is, by his own speculating. But in order to speculate, he must take the very opposite path, must abandon and lose himself in objectivity, disappear from himself. This incongruity will completely prevent himself from beginning and will pass comic judgment on every affirmation that he has gained something in taking this path. (CUP, 56–7)

So 'speculative thought' – like historical evidence – cannot provide what the existing individual needs in relation to his desire for an 'eternal happiness.' And anyone who acts as if it could – thus falling foul of a 'misrelation of the objective' – *renders himself comical*.

Let us consider in more detail this relation between Climacus's critique of Hegelianism (which, we shall shortly see, is essentially an ethical one) and his inviting us to see it as comical. We have already suggested that one of the key points of which Climacus wants to remind us is that no philosophical system can replace the first person perspective from which every individual must view the world and speak. Thus, in the discussion of the four 'Possible and actual theses by Lessing,' Climacus says: 'I, Johannes Climacus, am neither more nor less than a human being; and I assume that the one with whom I have the honor of conversing is also a human being.' (CUP, 109) It is important to see that this is the point of Climacus's ridiculing any view which assumes – however implicitly – that a person can become 'pure speculative thought' (CUP, 109).

This gets to the heart of Kierkegaard's objection to Hegel: a huge topic, to which I cannot hope to do full justice here.[14] Suffice it to say that a major part of Climacus's concern is with the philosopher's relation to what Hegel calls 'absolute knowledge' – knowledge of reality in itself. 'Absolute knowledge' is, according to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, achieved when the self-understanding of *Geist* [Spirit] is complete. (This is because, as an absolute idealist, Hegel holds that reality is ultimately *Geist;* but *Geist* does not initially recognise this. It is thus divided against, or alienated from, itself. This position is only corrected, and absolute knowledge reached, when *Geist* comes to realise that what it has all along been seeking to know is, ultimately, itself). However, although for Hegel absolute knowledge is a position only available at the culmination of the journey of human experience, the *Phenomenology* allegedly shows this to be a position which we philosophers can now occupy. (Provided, that is, we recognise that the particular minds of individual humans are simply aspects of universal *Geist)*. At the very close of the *Phenomenology,* Hegel speaks of this in religious terms:

> The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits [i.e. different forms of the experience of humanity shown throughout history] as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organisation of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance: the two together, comprehended History, form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute Spirit, the actuality, truth and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone.[15]

What does this mean for the philosopher? Westphal answers this well:

> The philosopher who has become the repository of the totality of human experience . . . has arrived at the point where the Logic can begin. The philosopher is the alpha only by virtue of standing at the omega point of human experience. [16]

Climacus' objection to this is a simple one: he denies that the position of absolute knowledge could be occupied by a human being. This is the subject of the fourth 'thesis' attributed to Lessing, where Climacus approvingly quotes Lessing as saying that 'Pure truth is for [God] alone' (CUP, 106). Climacus argues that a view akin to absolute knowledge is only available, if to any entity at all, to God; to an entity which could view the universe *sub specie aetemi,* not to a finite human being existing at a certain point of human history. The speculative philosopher, no less than anyone else, is the latter kind of creature. This is what lies behind the *Postscript*'s claim that 'a system of existence cannot be given' (CUP, 109): even if existence could, perhaps, be a 'system' for God, it cannot be for any human being. Climacus professes to admire Lessing for his insistence upon what Westphal calls 'the ineradicable temporality of human knowledge and thus on a distinction between human and divine that speculation cannot obliterate.'[17]

We are invited to see the Hegelian position, as portrayed above, as *absurd;* and Climacus claims we have the right to laugh at it. The Hegelian embodies one of the forms of the 'fantastic' discussed by Anti Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*: fantastic knowing. Knowing becomes fantastic when an increase in knowledge is not matched by an increase in *self*-knowledge.[18] (Compare here Bergson's observation that a comic character 'is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself.'[19]) The Hegelian position involves a fundamental confusion: between the philosopher as an existing human being who philosophizes; and the philosopher as philosophy (or 'speculative thought') itself. It is the latter position which involves failing to recognise the first person perspective from which an individual – even a philosopher

– must speak. This is Climacus's point when he says that any system must be written by an existing human being (CUP, 120), but that 'To be a human being has been abolished, and every speculative thinker confuses himself with humankind' (CUP, 124). He goes on to say:

> there are two ways for an existing individual: either he can do everything to forget that he is existing and thereby manage to become comic (the comic contradiction of wanting to be what one is not . . .) because existence possesses the remarkable quality that an existing person exists whether he wants to or not; or he can direct all his attention to his existing (CUP, 120).

Hence the following lines, crucial to the present investigation. Climacus says that we may object to

> modern speculative thought, that it has not a *false* presupposition but a *comic* presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten in a kind of world-historical absentmindedness what it means to be a human being, not what it means to be human in general, for even speculators might be swayed to consider that sort of thing, but what it means that we, you and I and he, are human beings, each one on his own (CUP, 120).

The distinction in this passage between the general abstraction of humanity and 'you and I and he' re-emphasises that the claim is that speculative thought's forgetfulness inheres in overlooking the first person perspective.

II. The comic as indirect communication

But *why* frame one's objections to speculative thought in terms of the comical, rather than the mistaken? Surely Climacus does think, in fact, that the Hegelian is making a fundamental mistake. Put most bluntly, it is that he is simply *wrong* to view occupying the position of 'the repository of the totality of human existence' as humanly possible. But if this is so, it becomes important to consider the above question. Why not call an error an error? Moreover, the kind of 'forgetfulness' which Hegelianism promotes is, Climacus suggests, morally objectionable. He accuses Hegel of having 'behaved irresponsibly . . . toward enthusiastic youths who believed him,' and claims that 'when such a young person comes to himself again, he has a right to demand the nemesis of having laughter consume in Hegel what laughter may legitimately claim as its own' (CUP, 118). Note the nature of this claim: it amounts to claiming an *ethical-religious* justification for finding Hegel comical. The

comical here functions as a tool of moral critique, recalling Dryden's view that the appropriate end of satire is the amendment of vices. Yet despite Climacus's objection to Hegelianism being broadly ethical in nature, he cautions us *against* the kind of moral outrage that might lead someone to fulminate against 'the objective tendency' as 'impious, pantheistic selfworship' (CUP, 124). Instead he suggests viewing it as 'a venture in the comic' (CUP, 124). This sharpens our need to ask: what, exactly, can the comical do which simply pointing out to the Hegelian his error or confusion cannot? Climacus's answer can only be understood in relation to the important Kierkegaardian theme of 'indirect communication.'

Climacus effectively suggests *the need for the comic as a form of indirect communication.* The issue is how one dispels 'the objective tendency' in those liable to misapply it. Climacus effectively suggests that moral outrage would be pointless. His reason is as follows: 'By beginning straightaway with ethical categories against the objective tendency, one does wrong *and fails to hit the mark*, because one has nothing in common with the attacked' (CUP, 124, my emphasis). Notice that the central concern is with 'hitting the mark'; what is at issue is indeed a matter of communication. The thinker who is misapplying objective thought is not just mistaken but in the grip of an illusion which needs to be dispelled, and what matters is whether one can enable him to come *to see his own confusion*. This is why a direct, 'moralising' attack would be pointless. A change of *outlook* is required in those for whom the Hegelian standpoint is a temptation. And it is here, Climacus suggests, that the comic can help. But how?

Before we can adequately tackle this question, we need to get clearer about the notion of 'indirect communication.' Perhaps the clearest account of this for our purposes, since the discussion is explicitly framed in terms of dispelling illusions, can be found in Kierkegaard's 'The Point of View for my Work as an Author.' [20] In this text, subtitled 'A *direct* communication; a report to history,' one of the key things Kierkegaard – here speaking in his own voice – aims to explain is that his ostensibly 'aesthetic' pseudonymous works were in fact always intended to serve a religious purpose: 'Once and for all I must earnestly beg the kind reader always to bear *in mente* that the thought behind the whole work is: what it means to become a Christian.' (PV, 22) The 'illusion' that he had to try and dispel, Kierkegaard explains, was 'Christendom': the view, exemplified by Climacus's civil servant's wife, that one is a Christian in virtue of being a citizen of a 'so-called Christian country' (PV, 22). Were one to try and do this via the vociferous denunciations of a 'religious enthusiast' the result would be that one would simply be ignored. Kierkegaard claims: 'an illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect

means can it be radically removed . . . one must approach from behind the person who is under an illusion' (PV, 24). This is because '[a] direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion, and at the same time embitters him' (PV 25), which in turn is because such an attack requires its object

> to make to another person, or in his presence, an admission which he can make most profitably to himself privately. That is what is achieved by the indirect method, which, loving and serving the truth, arranges everything dialectically for the prospective captive, and then shyly withdraws . . .so as not to witness the admission which he makes to himself alone before God – that he has lived hitherto in an illusion. (PV, 25-6)

(Compare here Climacus's observation that 'the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free' (CUP, 74).)

Indirect communication, then, involves a certain kind of *deception* (PV, 39). This is justified, Kierkegaard claims, since 'it is only by this means. . .that it is possible to bring into the truth one who is in an illusion' (PV, 39–40). But what form does this deception take?

> It means that one does not begin directly with the matter one wants to communicate, but begins by accepting the other man's illusions as good money. . .one does not begin thus: I am a Christian; you are not a Christian. Nor does one begin thus: It is Christianity I am proclaiming; and you are living in aesthetic categories. No, one begins thus: Let us talk about aesthetics. The deception consists in the fact that one talks thus merely to get to the religious theme (PV, 40–1)

How does this apply to our Hegelian? We have seen that he is allegedly under the illusion that a finite individual human being could possibly occupy a position other than that of a finite individual human being. Yet *prima facie*, the above account of indirect communication might be thought not to apply to Climacus's anti-Hegelian satire in the *Postscript*. This satire often seems quite 'direct.' But think again. The question of the *audience* for Johannes Climacus's writings is vital. Who is likely to read such books? Only a certain kind of reader – one with a broadly philosophical bent – is likely to wade through the notoriously dense text of *Philosophical Fragments*. And while, in comparison, there is more in the way 'of light relief' in the *Postscript*,[21] the reader has to wade through great swathes of dense argumentation here too. Several commentators have suggested that there is something of an element of parody of Hegel in the *Postscript.*[22] Consider, in particular, its table of contents). A work which is going to attack speculative philosophy appears *prima facie* to be a work of speculative philosophy. Could it be that by such

'deceptive' techniques Kierkegaard (via Climacus) is initially accepting the Hegelian's 'money' as 'good?' In order to lure him in? Only then will his reader see that this strange mixture of ostensibly speculative philosophy and humour, dense argumentation and comic vignettes, in fact contains material which forces them to think about *themselves* and their illusions.

Let us consider, in the light of the above brief account of indirect communication, our earlier, central question about *how* the comic can function as a form thereof.

Elsewhere, in relation to Nietzsche, I have suggested that laughter can play a useful role in a project of what Stanley Cavell calls 'moral perfectionism.' [23] I now suggest that Climacus's project of 'becoming subjective' is a version of moral perfectionism, which Cavell describes as 'a dimension or tradition of the moral life' which 'concerns what used to be called the state of one's soul.' [24] Given this, what could be the role of the comical in Climacus's project of 'becoming subjective?' This, and our question about the relationship between the comical and indirect communication, are inextricably linked.

The notion of the comical as providing a form of 'non-discursive dismissal' is important here.[25] Of most importance for our concerns is what happens when a particular discourse or way of seeing things becomes, or is in danger of becoming, so dominant that the option of critical argument against it becomes unavailable. Hub Zwart discusses this phenomenon, which he takes to have happened in the case of contemporary liberalism. [26] The idea is that a particular form of discourse or world-view can gain such dominance, and 'such an ability to conceal its basic vulnerability,' [27] that anyone wishing to challenge it is rendered apparently powerless in that her attempts are dismissed as 'unreasonable.' But, Zwart continues, laughter can come to the aid of the dispossessed: 'all of a sudden, the basic vulnerability of the dominant regime draws on us or is revealed to us – and this is the experience of laughter.'[28]

This is the effect that Climacus's satire is intended to bring about. In his case, the dominant world-view is Danish Hegelianism. I have suggested that part of the strategy of indirect communication involves initially accepting the Hegelian's 'money' as 'good.' But there is a rider to this. Kierkegaard stresses an important part of the strategy of deceiving one's 'captive' into 'the truth': 'above all do not forget one thing, the purpose you have in mind'(PV, 29). Keep your eye on the ball. Climacus is aware of the dangers of conceding *too* much to Hegelianism; of going too far in arguing with Hegelianism on its own terms. One danger of feeling obliged to offer a detailed critical analysis of a prevailing world-view one views to be, at bottom, comical, is that the System has a way of sucking everyone in. As Gouwens

puts it, 'any simple modification [of the System] will itself be accommodated to the System.'[29] There comes a point when the comic can be a more effective weapon than continual critical argument. One possible strategy is, then, to *satirise* the world-view in question. Lest this be seen as question-begging on Climacus's part, I suggest that a technique such as non-discursive dismissal is existentially necessary for any 'subjective' project. This is not to deny, of course, that critical argument and agonistic discourse often have great benefits. But even if one is committed to such forms of debate, it can hardly be denied that such discourse will need to pause from time to time, some of these pauses coming when it appears to the participants that they have each reached 'bedrock,' and that nothing of further use can be said; when the other's position seems so radically different from our own that we have reached a point beyond which further discussion seems pointless. This general problem of discourse is exacerbated in situations such as the one under discussion, where because of the dominance of a particular world-view, critical argument is not available to us. In such circumstances, excessive discussion – and the concomitant dangers of getting 'sucked in' to the System – could actually distract one from one's project, especially given the tendency of the intellectual for such ethical evasion. (More on this shortly). Here, then, a laughter of non-discursive dismissal can liberate us from this sense of feeling obliged to argue against the System on its own terms, and free us to continue with our project of 'becoming subjective,' without the need for further, potentially stultifying, argument and rebuttal.[30]

III. Climacus, satire and ethical-religious evasion

But we should consider an important possible objection at this point. Suppose someone were to say that there is something ethically dubious about Climacus's satire – and his justification of its use. To give this objection its due, consider this justification in more detail. As we have mentioned, Climacus claims that his satirical attacks on misapplied objectivism have an *ethical-religious* justification. He goes on to claim that his talent for satire is one given him by 'Governance,' and to add 'with the power I have in the comic at this moment I intend to make ridiculous whoever ventures to raise an objection' (CUP, 140) to his attack. This idea of having a 'power . . .in the comic' is important. Later, in his review of Kierkegaard's other pseudonyms, Climacus congratulates them on their 'eye for the comic,' adding that:

> The comic is always a sign of maturity. . .I consider the power in the comic is vitally necessary legitimation for anyone who is to be regarded as authorized in the world of spirit in our day. . .But assistant professors are so

> devoid of comic power that it is shocking; even Hegel, according to the assurance of a zealous Hegelian, is utterly devoid of a sense for the comic (CUP, 281).[31]

Climacus's subsequent remarks suggest that the 'power in the comic' which 'Governance' has given him could be removed at any point, and, indeed, used against Climacus himself. This ethical-religious justification is important to his overall anti-Hegelian project. If, as Climacus has been arguing, what ought to concern you is your own ethical-religious subjectivity; your own ethical-religious character and action, rather than such abstractions as 'world history' and the building of philosophical systems, then Climacus can view his own project of reminding his reader of this as being an essentially ethical-religious one, where right is on his side. The fun-poking at Hegelianism and other cases of misapplied objectivism is thus understood as a satirical project. Misapplied objectivism is a disease; a vice, which urgently needs correction. And Climacus's God-given weapon is satire.

But is this claim itself ethically dubious? Two points need to be made here. Firstly, Climacus's attitude to Hegelianism can be described as one of respectful contempt.[32] It is the Hegelian – perhaps Hegel himself – whom he seems to have in mind when he says 'one may laugh at him and, as is fitting, still have respect for his abilities, his learning, etc.' (CUP, 125). He respects and admires Hegel's intellectual abilities, but as we have seen, is anxious that the misapplication of 'the System' to ethical and religious questions poses a terrible threat to our capacities for ethical and religious 'inwardness.' Given Climacus's outlook, the need to resist Hegelianism is thus a matter of paramount ethical and religious importance. His contempt for it is a function of his own concern with ethical and religious 'inwardness,' and his mockery of it is occasioned by the need to maintain the integrity of his own position: anyone who thought what Climacus thought and failed to speak out against Hegelianism would themselves be morally culpable. Thus part of what justifies the satire is that the Hegelian's 'self-forgetfulness' is not *only* that, but a form of ethical-religious *evasion*: a refusal to face up to the challenges of 'becoming a self.' We can consider this in more detail by considering a second, equally important, point. It is easy for us, as contemporary readers of the *Postscript*, to think of Hegelians as a 'them' as opposed to the 'us' who are not prone to such an outlook. As Swift put it, 'Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.'[33] Climacus's fun-poking at Hegelianism would then appear to be inviting us to see a certain group – Hegelians – as foolish and confused. But this overlooks two things. Firstly, the phenomenal influence of Hegelianism in the academy, church, and society at large in Kierkegaard's day – and hence the fact

that most of the *Postscript*'s readers would have been 'Hegelians' of some sort. Secondly – less obviously, yet more importantly – it also overlooks the extent to which *we ourselves* are prone to similar, if not directly Hegelian, 'diseases of reflection.' The ridicule of Hegelianism can then be seen in a new light. Rather than our being invited, as readers, to become part of an 'us' poking fun at a 'them,' we need to see ourselves as susceptible to some of the same confusions and evasions as the Hegelian.

What are these evasions? We have already seen that a central part of Climacus's message is to call our attention to the primacy of the ethical's demand on each of us as individuals. Climacus stresses two major points here. First, continually appropriating the ethical's demand is a task for a lifetime; and second, this is so for both the 'wise' and the 'simple' (CUP, 160 and *passim*). One who understands the ethical ethically – that is, is motivated by the ethical for its own sake – will see this. Though there is much discussion of how the apparently simple can easily become difficult (CUP, 165), the difficulty here is existential, not intellectual, and so intellectual virtues are no advantage. Climacus spends many pages attempting to make this point clear through a series of examples. The aim is to show that, from the ethical-religious and existential point of view that matters, we – his readers; the intellectually inclined; those who would tend to place ourselves in the category of the 'wise' as opposed to the 'simple' – need to be brought to see that, on issues such as death, immortality, gratitude to God, and marriage, we need to resist our inclinations to think about these issues in abstract terms and, learning the lesson of the previous pages, turn them into questions which engage us on a first-person level. In other words: ethically, religiously and existentially, what matters is not an abstract subject (such as death or immortality), but what the significance of the fact that *I* will one day die has *for me*: and what it means that *I* may be immortal. The central message to Climacus's intellectual reader, then, is that she should note how she faces the temptations of over-intellectualising these very personal issues; and that these temptations are forms of ethical-religious evasion. ('Interesting sermon on how I need to confront my own death, Reverend. By the way, have you read that new book comparing attitudes to immortality amongst the ancient Greeks and the Egyptians? Absolutely fascinating. The author argues. . .') By turning the question of immortality into an abstract question about humanity in general, the intellectual, in psychologically subtle self-deception, avoids the impact the question has for *her*, as an existing individual human being.

Climacus's message is this. If we are honest with ourselves, we can see that such illusions are ones to which *we* are susceptible. The satire obstensibly directed at the Hegelian 'speculative thinker' is thus also directed at our cur-

rent selves, in the service of creating the kind of 'higher self' at which Climacus' project of 'becoming subjective' is aimed. Thus the *Postscript*'s ostensibly anti-Hegelian satire can be seen, in addition, as a piece of indirect communication intended to warn the reader against *herself* being or becoming like the inappropriately 'objective' thinker. Just as we are intended to recognise aspects of ourselves in the characters of other pseudonymous works, such as the deficiences of the young aesthete A in *Either/Or*, the same is true of the character of the 'Hegelian;' the inappropriate 'objective thinker,' in the *Postscript*. Moreover recall from *The Point of View* the importance Kierkegaard attaches to the 'captive' coming to see her illusion *for herself*. That text also enables us to see why Climacus cannot make his point directly, by saying to his reader: 'Aren't *you* a bit like the Hegelian?' To do so would be to fail to *withdraw*, in the way *The Point of View* stresses as vital. Remember Kierkegaard's claim that a direct attack requires a person to admit to another person something which he can best do to himself privately, whereas the indirect method 'arranges everything dialectically for the prospective captive, and then shyly withdraws. . . so as not to witness the admission which he makes to himself alone before God – that he has lived hitherto in an illusion' (PV, 25–6). In this spirit, the reader of the *Postscript* is left privately to 'put it all together by himself' (CUP, 298), rather than having been guided too directly to this conclusion by an author who refuses to withdraw. Having been the occasion for our seeing the anti-Hegelian satire as rebounding upon ourselves, Climacus, skilled as he is in the art of indirect communication, does not hang around to receive our thanks, praise or admiration. In this way, we can see that Climacus's satire fits the definition of the 'maieutic relationship' given in Kierkegaard's journals: it enables the reader 'to stand alone – by another's help.'[34]

Notes

1. Søren Kierkegaard [Anti-Climacus], *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 133. Anti-Climacus is the pseudonymous author of this text, and *The Sickness Unto Death*.
2. See Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and modern continental philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994) e.g. pp.viii, 9, 28–30, 43, 52–53.
3. Weston, 1994, p. 43. The term 'ethical' here needs to be understood in a broad sense, incorporating the religious; the term 'ethical-religious,' often used by Kierkegaard, would perhaps be better.
4. This idea owes much to the reading of Climacus developed by James Conant, in the following three articles: 'Must We Show What We Cannot Say?' in R. Fleming and M. Payne (eds.), *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Lewisbury PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense' in Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary

Putnam (eds.) *Pursuits of Reason* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), and 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors' in Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (eds.), *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995). Elsewhere, I have disagreed with aspects of this reading (see John Lippitt, 'A funny thing happened to me on the way to salvation: Climacus as humorist in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*,' in *Religious Studies* Vol. 33-2 (1997), pp. 181–202, and John Lippitt and Daniel Hutto, 'Making sense of nonsense: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein,' in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Vol. XCVIII Part 3 (1998), pp. 263–286). But on this central idea of 'dispelling illusions,' we are in agreement.

5. David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as religious thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 1.
6. For this reason, 'Hegelianism,' for our purposes, should be taken to refer to the broad cultural movement influential on the Denmark of Kierkegaard's day. The primary issue is not the extent to which Kierkegaard's picture of Hegelianism is, or is not, a fair and accurate representation of the thought of Hegel himself. As several commentators have argued, Kierkegaard's interest in 'Hegelianism' is less in the details of Hegel's philosophical system than in the ramifications of the attitude fostered by 'speculative philosophy' on ethical and religious subjectivity.
7. All page references to the *Postscript* will be to this translation: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) hereafter CUP.
8. That both 'metaphysical' (e.g. Plato, Hegel) and 'post-metaphysical' philosophy (e.g. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida) are culpable in this regard is argued at length by Weston, 1994.
9. Merold Westphal, *Becoming a self: a reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996), p. 54.
10. Westphal, 1996, p. 54.
11. Westphal, 1996, p. 55.
12. Ibid.
13. Like Hegel, Climacus uses the term 'contradiction' very broadly. Far more often than not, a formal contradiction is not intended. As several commentators have pointed out, the word 'incongruity' better captures his meaning.
14. On this topic, see Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
15. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 493.
16. Westphal, 1996, p. 86.
17. Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard and Hegel,' in Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 116.
18. Søren Kierkegaard [Anti-Climacus]. *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 31. For the reasons already given, Climacus will not accept the possible Hegelian response that 'absolute knowledge' *is* self-knowledge.
19. Henri Bergson, 'Laughter,' in Wylie Sypher (ed.) *Comedy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1956), p. 71.

20. Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Point of View for my Work as an Author,' in *The Point of View*, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), hereafter PV. All page references are to this translation.
21. I am thinking of Climacus's extensive use of humour, together with such entertaining apparent digression as his description of how he came to try his hand as an author (CUP, 185–188). I have argued elsewhere, however, that such apparent light relief and digressions are important to understanding the significance of Climacus's self-description as a humorist, which is in turn important for an overall understanding of the *Postscript* (see Lippitt, 1997).
22. See, for instance, Henry E. Allison, 'Christianity and nonsense,' in *Review of Metaphysics* 20 (1967), pp. 432–460.
23. See my 'Laughter: a tool in moral perfectionism? in John Lippitt (ed.) *Nietzsche's futures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 99–125. For the picture of moral perfectionism to which I refer, see Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: the constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), especially the Introduction and chapter 1.
24. Cavell, 1990, p. 2. For a more detailed discussion of the moral perfectionist dimensions of the *Postscript*, see John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard's Humorist: Climacus and the Comic* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, forthcoming), chapter 3.
25. I borrow this phrase from M.E. Orellana-Benado, 'A philosophy of humour,'; unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1985. I have said more about this in Lippitt, 1999. However, I do not know to what extent Orellana-Benado would approve of the use to which I put his term, either in that article or the present one.
26. Hub Zwart, *Ethical consensus and the truth of laughter* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996).
27. Zwart, 1996, p. 10.
28. Ibid.
29. David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard's dialectic of the imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 113.
30. For a fuller elaboration of this argument in relation to Nietzsche, see Lippitt, 1999, pp. 112–115.
31. The 'zealous Hegelian' referred to is H.L. Martensen, one of the most influential Danish Hegelians of Kierkegaard's time.
32. Cf. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 164–166.
33. Jonathan Swift, 'The battle of the books' (Author's Preface), in *A Modest Proposal and Other Satirical Works* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996), p. 2.
34. Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978), vol. 1, entry 650, sect. 15.