

Kierkegaard's Socratic Task

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The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) conceived of himself as the Socrates of nineteenth century Copenhagen. Having devoted the bulk of his first major work, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, to the problem of the historical Socrates, Kierkegaard maintained at the end of his life that it is to Socrates that we must turn if we are to understand his own philosophical undertaking: “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task.” The overall aim of my dissertation is to examine and critically assess this claim, and ultimately to argue that the Socratic nature of Kierkegaard’s endeavor finds its fullest expression in the activity and writings of one of his best-known literary creations, Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The first part of my dissertation addresses Kierkegaard’s own status as a Socratic figure. I examine Kierkegaard’s claim that his refusal to call himself a Christian—in a context where it was the social norm to do so—is methodologically analogous to Socrates’ stance of ignorance. I also consider how the use of a pseudonymous manner of writing allows Kierkegaard to employ a Socratic method. In the second part of my dissertation I focus on Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes Climacus and his claim that his contemporaries suffer from a peculiar kind of ethical and religious forgetfulness. I argue that Climacus adopts two Socratic stances in order to address this condition. In *Philosophical Fragments* he adopts the stance of someone who has intentionally “forgotten” the phenomenon of Christianity, whereas in the *Postscript* he adopts the stance of someone who openly declares that he is not a Christian. In the process, he develops a conception of philosophy that places a premium on self-restraint and an individual’s ability to employ the first personal “I.” As Climacus emerges as Kierkegaard’s Socratic pseudonym *par excellence*, we obtain two significant results: a deeper understanding of Kierkegaard’s conception of Socrates and Socratic method, and a compelling conception of philosophy rooted in Greek antiquity.

Kierkegaard's Socratic Task

*For B.,
and in memory of my mother,
Maury Johnston Muench (5/8/41-11/24/03)*

Περὶ δὲ ψυχὴν, ὧ ἄριστε, οὐχ ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος; ἕως μὲν ἂν
πονηρὰ ἦ, ἀνόητός τε οὖσα καὶ ἀκόλαστος καὶ ἄδικος καὶ
ἀνόσιος, εἴργειν αὐτὴν δεῖ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ μὴ ἐπιτρέπειν
ἄλλ' ἅττα ποιεῖν ἢ ἀφ' ὧν βελτίων ἔσται· φῆς ἢ οὔ;

(And isn't it the same way with the soul, my excellent friend? As long as it's corrupt, in that it's foolish, intemperate, unjust and impious, we should restrain it from its appetites, and not allow it to do anything else except what will make it better. Do you say so, or not?)

—*Gorgias*, 505B

Socrates var en Dagdriver, der hverken brød sig om Verdenshistorien eller Astronomien..., men havde god Tid og Særhed nok til at bekymre sig om det simple *Menneskelige*, hvilken Bekymring, besynderligt nok, ansees for Særhed hos *Mennesker*, medens det derimod slet ikke er sært, at have travlt med Verdenshistorien, Astronomien og andet Saadant.

(Socrates was a loafer who cared for neither world history nor astronomy....But he had plenty of time and enough eccentricity to be concerned about the merely *human*, a concern that, strangely enough, is considered an eccentricity among *human beings*, whereas it is not at all eccentric to be busy with world history, astronomy, and other such matters.)

—*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (CUP 83; SKS 7, 82-83)

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Abbreviations

(Danish Editions)

- Pap.* *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* (Søren Kierkegaard's Papers), 2nd ed., 16 vols., eds. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909-48); supplemented by Niels Thulstrup and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-78). Cited by volume number and entry number.
- SVI* *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker* (Søren Kierkegaard's Collected Works), 1st ed., 14 vols., eds. A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901-06).
- SKS* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (Søren Kierkegaard's Writings), 55 vols., eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup and Alastair McKinnon (Copenhagen: Gad Publishers, 1997-). Citations sometimes include line numbers.

(English Translations)

- JP* *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 7 vols., eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78). Cited by volume number and entry number.
- KW* *Kierkegaard's Writings*, 26 vols., eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-2000). Cited by individual book abbreviation.
- AN* "Armed Neutrality" (written 1849; unpub. in SKs lifetime); *KW* 22 (1998). See *PV*.
- BA* *The Book on Adler* (written 1846-47; unpub. in SKs lifetime); *KW* 24 (1998).
- C* "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress" (1848); *KW* 17 (1997).
- CA* *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844); *KW* 8 (1980), trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson.
- CD* *Christian Discourses* (1848); *KW* 17 (1997).

- CI* *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* (1841); KW 2 (1989).
- COR* *The Corsair Affair* (1842-51); KW 13 (1982).
- CUP* *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846); KW 12 (1992), 2 vols. (vol. 1 text;
CUP2 vol. 2 supplement and notes).
- CUP_{SL}* *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).
- DO* *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* (written 1842-43; unpub. in SKs
lifetime); KW 7 (1985). See *PF*.
- EO1* *Either/Or, Part One* (1843); KW 3 (1987).
- EO2* *Either/Or, Part Two* (1843); KW 4 (1987).
- EUD* *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (1843-44); KW 5 (1990).
- FLE* “A First and Last Explanation” (1846; appended to *CUP*); KW 12 (1992).
- FSE* *For Self-Examination* (1851); KW 21 (1990).
- FT* *Fear and Trembling* (1843); KW 6 (1983).
- JFY* *Judge For Yourself!* (written 1851-52; unpub. in SKs lifetime); KW 21 (1990).
- M* *The Moment and Late Writings* (1854-55); KW 23 (1998).
- MWA* *On My Work as an Author* (1851); KW 22 (1998). See *PV*.
- PC* *Practice in Christianity* (1850); KW 20 (1991).
- PF* *Philosophical Fragments* (1844); KW 7 (1985). The supplement for *DO* is also
designated *PF*.
- PF_S* *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1936).
- PV* *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (written 1848; unpub. in SKs lifetime);
KW 22 (1998). The supplements for *AN* and *MWA* are also designated *PV*.
- PV_L* *The Point of View* (including *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and *On My
Work as an Author*), trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1939).

- R* *Repetition* (1843); KW 6 (1983).
- SLW* *Stages on Life's Way* (1845); KW 11 (1988).
- SUD* *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849); KW 19 (1980).
- SUD_H* *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1989).
- TA* *Two Ages, A Literary Review* (1846); KW 14 (1978).
- UDVS* *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847); KW 15 (1993).
- WA* *Without Authority* (1849-1851); KW 18 (1997).
- WL* *Works of Love* (1847); KW 16 (1995).

Except where noted otherwise, all references to Plato's writings are to John M. Cooper, ed., *Complete Works of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997). I generally follow the abbreviations listed in the Hackett edition on page 1746.

- Ap.* *Apology*
- Chrm.* *Charmides*
- Grg.* *Gorgias*
- Lch.* *Laches*
- L.Hp.* *Lesser Hippias*
- Mx.* *Menexenus*
- Meno* *Meno*
- Phd.* *Phaedo*
- Prt.* *Protagoras*
- Rep.* *Republic*
- Sph.* *Sophist*
- Smp.* *Symposium*
- Tht.* *Theaetetus*

Introduction

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) conceived of himself as the Socrates of nineteenth century Copenhagen.¹ Having devoted the bulk of his first major work, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, to the problem of the historical Socrates, Kierkegaard maintained at the end of his life that it is to Socrates that we must turn if we are to understand his own philosophical undertaking: “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task.”² The overall aim of my dissertation is to examine and critically assess this claim, and ultimately to argue that the Socratic nature of Kierkegaard’s endeavor finds its fullest expression in the activity and writings of one of his best-known literary creations, Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

Kierkegaard held a lifelong interest in Socrates and wrote about him extensively. He is perhaps best known for his 1841 *magister* dissertation, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*.³ Notoriously (and much to the chagrin of his dissertation committee), Kierkegaard argues in his dissertation that Socrates is not the ethical and religious figure he is usually taken to be but instead an ironist through and through. This work contains Kierkegaard’s most scholarly discussion of Socrates and includes an analysis of the writings of Xenophon and Plato together with an examination of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, while also engaging the philosophical and philological scholarship of his day (primarily from Germany), including most notably the writings of Hegel.⁴ Though Kierkegaard is usually represented in the history of philosophy as a great foe of Hegel’s, he nevertheless inherits Hegel’s philosophical vocabulary and makes use in his dissertation of a recognizably Hegelian framework.⁵ Arguing that the three main depictions of Socrates that have come down to us from antiquity are each ultimately *distortions* of the truth (resulting from Xenophon’s shallowness, Plato’s desire to idealize his teacher and Aristophanes’ aims as a comic playwright), Kierkegaard maintains that by tracing

these various distortions and their interrelationships we should be able in effect to triangulate back to their common Socratic source and so come to appreciate, on his view, the fundamentally ironic nature of Socrates' overall position.⁶

Although Kierkegaard seems to argue at times in his dissertation that none of the sources from antiquity provides an accurate depiction of Socrates, he actually allows for one exception: Plato's *Apology*. Calling the *Apology* "a historical document" that "must be assigned a preeminent place when the purely Socratic is sought," Kierkegaard holds both that "a reliable picture of the *actual* Socrates is seen in the *Apology*" and that "in this work we do have, according to the view of the great majority, a historical representation of Socrates' *actuality*."⁷ As the argument of *The Concept of Irony* unfolds (proceeding from Kierkegaard's treatment of the ancient sources, to his discussion of Socrates' trial, to his consideration of Socrates' significance as a world-historical figure), Kierkegaard repeatedly appeals to the *Apology* and not unreasonably treats it as the final authority upon which any conception of Socrates ultimately must rest.⁸ In my view Plato's *Apology* remains the single most important text for Kierkegaard's thinking about Socrates. This is a text to which Kierkegaard returns again and again in his writings about Socrates and which dramatizes for him the Socratic ideal: a life that aims at cultivating the self while also serving as an occasion for one's fellow citizens to examine themselves more closely.

After the completion of his dissertation Kierkegaard opted not to pursue a university career and instead devoted himself to writing, publishing thirty books and numerous articles over a fourteen year span before he died in 1855 at the age of forty-two. While he never again was to devote as many continuous pages to Socrates as he did in his dissertation, Kierkegaard frequently returns to him in his later writings and continues to refine and deepen his conception of Socrates' philosophical method.⁹ Although Socrates forever remains an ironist in his eyes, Kierkegaard later comes to think that his dissertation suffers from a certain one-sidedness that neglects Socrates' significance as an ethical and religious figure.¹⁰ In addition, Kierkegaard also comes to conceive of himself as a kind of Christian Socrates who seeks by means of his various writings to make his contemporaries aware of what it is to live an authentic Christian life while simultaneously trying to draw their attention to the various respects in which their own lives may fail to live up to this Christian ideal. While we will regularly appeal to Kierkegaard's conception of Socrates and have occasion to consider some of the respects in which this conception develops

over the course of his writings, our principal topic of investigation will be Kierkegaard's own use of what he takes to be a Socratic method in his interactions with his fellow citizens of Copenhagen. Unlike Socrates, Kierkegaard's chief means of engaging with others is through writing. For this reason, this dissertation might be conceived of in part as a search for the Socratic within Kierkegaard's writings.

My dissertation has two parts. In the first part, I examine Kierkegaard's own status as a Socratic figure. In Chapter 1, we will consider Kierkegaard's claim that his refusal to call himself a Christian—in a context where it was the social norm to do so—is methodologically analogous to Socrates' stance of ignorance. In Chapter 2, we will consider how the use of a pseudonymous manner of writing allows Kierkegaard to employ a Socratic method. In the second part, I focus on Kierkegaard's literary character and pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus, and argue that he represents Kierkegaard's idealization of the Socratic within Christendom. Climacus presents himself as a critic of modern, Hegelian-style philosophy and contends that this manner of doing philosophy leads people to forget themselves ethically and religiously speaking. The chief interest of Climacus and his two books, however, does not lie in his detailed criticism of Hegel (for that is spotty at best), but in the Socratic alternative that he sketches and himself puts into practice. In Chapter 3 we will consider Climacus' diagnosis of what he thinks underlies this condition of forgetfulness. In Chapters 4 and 5 I argue that Climacus adopts two Socratic stances as a way of trying to help his reader to remember what she has forgotten. As Climacus emerges as Kierkegaard's Socratic pseudonym *par excellence*, we obtain two significant results: a deeper understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of Socrates and Socratic method, and a compelling conception of philosophy rooted in Greek antiquity.

**Part One:
Kierkegaard as Socratic Figure**

Chapter 1: Kierkegaard's Socratic Point of View

(*The Moment*, 10: "My Task")

In this chapter we will examine a brief essay that Kierkegaard composed shortly before he died. He argues that if we want to understand him and the philosophical activities he has been engaged in, then there is only one instructive object of comparison: Socrates and the role he played as philosophical gadfly in ancient Athens. We will consider in particular Kierkegaard's claim that his refusal to call himself a Christian—in a context where it was the social norm to do so—is methodologically analogous to Socrates' stance of ignorance.¹

1.1 *The Moment*, 10: "My Task"

When Kierkegaard died on November 11, 1855, age 42, he left behind among his papers the finished manuscript for the tenth issue of his serial *The Moment*. This final issue includes a section, dated September 1, 1855, that is entitled "My Task" and that turns out to be in effect Kierkegaard's last pronouncement upon the various activities he has been engaged in as a writer and thinker since the completion and defense of his dissertation.² It is thus also the last in a series of works within Kierkegaard's corpus that (either entirely or in part) are explicit reflections about his methodology and that often include remarks about how to understand some of his other individual works or how to conceive of them as a part of a larger philosophical and religious undertaking. To take an analogy from literary studies, just as there are works of literature and works of criticism, so can we find within Kierkegaard's corpus a number of works that primarily seek to illuminate a certain subject matter or existential stance while also seeking to have an existential impact on the reader; at the same time, there exists a second, smaller class of writings that serves a more critical, methodological function, offering us ways in which Kierkegaard thinks we ought to approach the first class of writings together with general remarks about the

overall point of view that he claims informs his authorship and about the basic method that he employs.³ While most of these methodological texts have received a significant amount of attention from scholars (especially *The Point of View*), the text we are considering, “My Task,” remains relatively neglected.⁴ Having spent several years reflecting about his authorship (and composing a number of texts in the process), Kierkegaard makes one last effort in “My Task” to draw everything together for his reader and to present in as compressed and distilled a manner as possible the essence of what he takes his task to have been. As a result, despite its neglect, this text is perhaps the best single document we have for obtaining a basic picture of how Kierkegaard conceives of his own activities as a writer and thinker.⁵

Over the space of just a few pages Kierkegaard eloquently sketches for us what he takes to be his contemporary situation, a situation where the authentic practice of Christianity has almost ceased to exist while it nevertheless remains the cultural norm for people (notably his fellow citizens of Copenhagen) to continue to conceive of themselves as Christians. In Kierkegaard's view, there is a striking lack of fit between how his contemporaries picture their lives and how they actually live those lives: he contends that they self-deceptively think they are Christians while failing to put into practice the Christian ideal. In response to this situation, Kierkegaard openly refuses to call himself a Christian and at times even denies that he is a Christian: “I do not call myself a Christian, do not say of myself that I am a Christian”; “It is altogether true: I am not a Christian.”⁶ He realizes that a person who openly declares that she does not call herself a Christian is in danger of sounding a bit odd in a society where it goes without saying that everyone is a Christian, especially someone like him who has principally devoted himself to writing about what it is to be a Christian:

Yes, I well know that it almost sounds like a kind of lunacy in this Christian world—where each and every one is Christian, where being a Christian is something that everyone naturally is—that there is someone who says of himself, “I do not call myself a Christian,” and someone whom Christianity occupies to the degree to which it occupies me.⁷

In response to such a claim, those who have a general familiarity with Kierkegaard's writings may feel the strong desire to object: Isn't this a strange thing for Kierkegaard of all people to say? Don't we know he is a Christian, an exemplary Christian who has had a significant impact on theology, on philosophy and on countless other fields and whose writings remain personally moving to some, personally repugnant to others precisely for their very Christian orientation and

emphasis? One might even feel like exclaiming, “If he isn’t a Christian who is?!” Yet, at least in this text, Kierkegaard declares “I am not a Christian” and insists that “anyone who wants to understand [his] totally distinct task must train himself to be able to fix his attention on this” very phrase and the fact that he, Kierkegaard, “continually” repeats it.⁸

In fact, Kierkegaard might not be all that surprised by expressions of puzzlement of this sort from those who take themselves to be familiar with his texts. Though he claims in “My Task” that his authorship was “at the outset stamped ‘the single individual—I am not a Christian,’ ” this is the first time he has openly avowed that this is his position.⁹ Kierkegaard suggests that those who think they know he is a Christian (and what is supposed to follow from this) are almost certain to misunderstand him, for he openly rejects the idea that there is anything analogous in the entire history of Christianity to the stance he adopts and the task he pursues. He contends that this is “the first time in ‘Christendom’ ” that *anyone* has approached things in this particular manner:

The point of view I have exhibited and am exhibiting is of such a distinctive nature that in eighteen hundred years of Christendom there is quite literally nothing analogous, nothing comparable that I have to appeal to. Thus, in the face of eighteen hundred years, I stand quite literally alone.¹⁰

As Kierkegaard clearly cannot mean by this claim that he is the first person ever to declare that he is not a Christian (since this is something atheists and people who practice other religions do as a matter of course), he must attach a special significance to the fact that he utters this phrase in a context where it has become the norm for people to declare themselves to be Christians and even to conceive of themselves as Christians while living lives that in no way reflect these supposed commitments.

Kierkegaard’s claim that there is no one analogous to him in eighteen hundred years of Christianity is not the only thing, however, that is extraordinary about this passage. Immediately after he claims that he stands alone in Christendom, Kierkegaard makes the perhaps even more remarkable claim that there does exist one person prior to him whose activity is analogous: “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian.”¹¹ That is, Kierkegaard claims that Socrates, a non-Christian pagan philosopher, is his one true predecessor, that Socrates’ philosophical activity is the only thing analogous to his activity as a writer and thinker, such that we should conceive of his task—supposedly unique within Christianity—as a *Socratic* task. I think this is a remarkable claim. If

Socrates really provides the only analogy to Kierkegaard and if Kierkegaard's task truly is as thoroughly Socratic as he seems to be suggesting, then we may be in the presence here of a thought that ultimately has the potential to revolutionize the very way we think about Kierkegaard and how we approach his texts.

1.2 Kierkegaard's Socratic Stance: "I am Not a Christian"

The idea that Kierkegaard is in some sense a Socratic figure is bound to strike most scholars of Kierkegaard as obvious. Any random selection of secondary literature is certain to include the occasional appeal to Kierkegaard's lifelong interest in Socrates and interpretations abound that seek to shore up whatever is being argued for with the thought that, after all, Kierkegaard modeled himself on Socrates, had a penchant for irony and indirection, etc., etc. But while it would be surprising to discover someone who claimed to be familiar with Kierkegaard's writings and yet who had no idea that Socrates was an important figure for him, we still lack a detailed, in-depth treatment of the matter. This is not to say that there do not exist any studies of Kierkegaard's conception of Socrates or any helpful accounts of what might be called Kierkegaard's Socratic method. But these are surprisingly few in number.¹² One reason I think "My Task" is a useful place to start is that this text is fairly compressed and schematic in nature. Kierkegaard is here not so much trying to put a Socratic method into practice as to invite us to take up a point of view that he thinks makes *intelligible* many of the activities he has been engaged in as a writer and thinker since the publication of his dissertation. This means that once the point of view at issue becomes clear we will have to turn to other parts of Kierkegaard's corpus if we want to obtain a more detailed grasp of how his task actually gets implemented in practice and what it is more specifically about this task that he thinks makes it quintessentially Socratic.

Let's consider further Kierkegaard's comparison of himself to Socrates in "My Task." As readers we are invited to compare Kierkegaard's situation and the events that have unfolded in his life to the drama of Socrates' life as it is recounted by him in the *Apology*.¹³ Recall that a significant portion of Socrates' defense speech consists of a more general account of how he came to practice philosophy and why he thinks such a life is worth pursuing, together with his explanation of why so many people have been slandering him over the years. Let me briefly

remind you of the main cast of characters who make an appearance in Socrates' account of his life: (1) the sophists, professional teachers and sometimes rivals of Socrates with whom he is often confused by the general public;¹⁴ (2) the god, who manifests himself through the oracle at Delphi and perhaps through the related phenomenon of Socrates' *daimonion* or divine sign;¹⁵ (3) the broader group of those reputed to be wise (represented by the politicians, the poets and the craftsmen) with whom Socrates converses, along with the public at large which often listens to their discussions;¹⁶ (4) the young Athenian men who follow Socrates around and who enjoy listening to him question those reputed to be wise;¹⁷ and (5) Socrates himself, who claims that the only sense in which he is wise is that he "do[es] not think [he] know[s] what [he] do[es] not know," and who believes that the god ordered him to "live the life of a philosopher, to examine [himself] and others," thereby serving as a kind of gadfly who awakens people from their ethical slumbers.¹⁸ Socrates offers this account of his life as a part of the defense speech he delivers before the jury. If we leave aside the character of Meletus and Socrates' other immediate accusers, there exist within the larger dramatic context of Socrates' defense two other significant characters worth mentioning: (6) Socrates' jury, a selection of his Athenian peers which also serves as a kind of literary analogue for the readers of Plato's text, who themselves are invited to arrive at their own judgment about Socrates' guilt or innocence;¹⁹ and (7) Plato, who is represented as one of the young men in attendance at Socrates' trial and who, in turn, is also the writer and thinker who has composed the text in question.²⁰

I want to suggest that Kierkegaard models what he is doing in "My Task"—speaking more generally about his method and overall approach—on the account that Socrates develops in the *Apology* and that he invites us to treat his contemporary situation as a modern analogue to the one faced by Socrates in Athens. As the text unfolds and he develops his claim that Socrates provides his only analogy, Kierkegaard proceeds to single out a variety of characters each of whom corresponds to one of the major characters in the Socratic drama (the sophists, the god, those reputed to be wise along with the wider public, the young Athenian men who follow Socrates, Socrates himself, Socrates' jury, Plato's readers and Plato).²¹ Simplifying a bit, the main characters discussed by Kierkegaard are the following: (1) the pastors and theologians, who make a profession of proclaiming what it is to be a Christian and whom Kierkegaard calls "sophists"; (2) the public, who conceive of themselves as Christians but who do not actually live in accord with the Christian ideal; (3) Kierkegaard qua Socratic figure, who denies he is a

Christian and who helps to make his fellow citizens aware of a deeper sense in which they are not Christians (since they think they are Christians when they are not); (4) the Christian God of Love, who Kierkegaard believes has singled him out to be the gadfly of Copenhagen; (5) Kierkegaard's readers, individual members of the public who are isolated as individuals by Kierkegaard's texts and whom he seeks to engage as interlocutors; and (6) Kierkegaard qua writer and critic, who decides how to dramatize the Socratic engagement of his audience and who offers interpretive tools for understanding his texts.

Let's start with the pastors and theologians and the larger public. Kierkegaard argues that the cultural phenomenon presenting itself as Christianity—what he calls “Christendom” (*Christendhed*)—is permeated by a kind of sophistry. In particular, he compares the pastors and theologians of his day to the sophists²² battled by Socrates:

“Christendom” lies in an abyss of sophistry that is much, much worse than when the Sophists flourished in Greece. Those legions of pastors and Christian assistant professors are all sophists....who by falsifying the definition of Christian have, for the sake of the business, gained millions and millions of Christians.²³

If the pastors and theologians correspond to the professional teachers of virtue in Socrates' day, then the larger Christian public corresponds more broadly to those in Athens who think they know what virtue is when they do not. One of Kierkegaard's main polemics is against the official Danish church and its representatives, the pastors and theologians. He contends that the church has become a business (whose main goal, then, is to make money and to perpetuate itself as an institution), and thus a body that out of self-interest obscures the true Christian message, employing a watered-down version in order for the sake of profits to maximize the total number of Christians.²⁴ At the same time, Kierkegaard also conceives of the public itself as a distinct force to be reckoned with, as an abstract crowd or mob whose existence is predicated on the failure of people to cultivate and maintain themselves *qua* individuals.²⁵ He invites us to imagine the contemporary situation of Christendom to consist of hordes of people, all running around calling themselves Christians and conceiving of themselves as Christians, often under the direct influence and guidance of the pastors and theologians, while next to no one is actually living a true, authentic Christian life. In this way he upholds a distinction between the pastors and theologians (sophists proper), who make a living advocating what it is to be a Christian, and the larger population, who more generally think they are Christians when they are not and whom Kierkegaard generically calls “the others” (*de Andre*).²⁶

Kierkegaard casts himself in the role of Socrates and, accordingly, depicts himself as someone who both seeks to reform the larger public and combats the corrupting influence of the pastors and theologians. By making such pronouncements about his contemporary situation and by presenting himself as someone who is capable of observing such patterns of behavior and even of diagnosing what can lead to such a state of things, Kierkegaard is aware that he might appear to be setting himself up as an extraordinary Christian. But he denies that he is any such thing and suggests that his refusal to call himself a Christian at all partly helps to block such attributions:

I do not call myself a Christian. That this is very awkward for the sophists I understand very well, and I understand very well that they would much prefer that with kettledrums and trumpets I proclaimed myself to be the only true Christian.²⁷

Recall that Kierkegaard is well aware that his refusal to call himself a Christian is bound to strike his contemporaries as a bit odd against the backdrop of a society where everyone as a matter of course calls herself a Christian. Despite this appearance of bizarreness, Kierkegaard contends that there are two significant reasons why he continues to assert this about himself. First, he ties his refusal to call himself a Christian, or in any way to modify this statement, to his desire to maintain a proper relationship with an omnipotent being, a being he later characterizes as the Christian “God of Love”:

I neither can, nor will, nor dare change my statement: otherwise perhaps another change would take place—that the power, an omnipotence [*Almagt*] that especially uses my powerlessness [*Afmagt*], would wash his hands of me and let me go my own way.²⁸

At the same time, Kierkegaard ties his stance of one who does not call himself a Christian to an ability to make his contemporaries (“the others”) aware of an even deeper sense in which he claims that they are not Christians:

I am not a Christian—and unfortunately I can make it manifest that the others are not either—indeed, even less than I, since they *imagine* themselves to be that [*de indbilde sig at være det*], or they falsely ascribe to themselves that they are that.

I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free), but I can make it manifest that the others are that even less.²⁹

He seems to think that adopting a position of one who refuses to call himself a Christian makes him an especially tenacious interlocutor, someone whom his contemporaries will not be able to shake off very easily:

Just because I do not call myself a Christian it is impossible to get rid of me, having as I do the confounded characteristic that I can make it manifest—also *by means of* not calling myself a Christian—that the others are that even less.³⁰

Kierkegaard, then, conceives his task to have a two-fold structure. By denying that he is a Christian in the face of his contemporaries' wont to assert the opposite, he claims to be developing and upholding some kind of religious relationship to a divine being while also acquiring a powerful means of awakening his contemporaries and making them aware of the lack of fit between how they conceive of their lives and how they actually live them.³¹

1.3 Socratic Ignorance

In the process of sketching his contemporary situation and characterizing both the sophist-like attributes of the pastors and theologians and the more general condition of his contemporaries (who, he claims, think they are Christians when they are not), Kierkegaard repeatedly invokes Socrates, especially in order to throw further light on his characterization of himself as a Socratic figure. He suggests that Socrates' task in Athens has the same two-fold structure as his task: Socrates is both a gadfly to his contemporaries and someone who holds that his life as a philosopher is an expression of his devotion to the god. Let's consider the image of the gadfly first. Socrates' use of this image in the *Apology* is tied to the idea of his fellow citizens' being in some sense asleep and therefore in need of being awakened. He compares their condition to that of a sluggish but noble horse who can only be stirred into life by the sting of a fly. But just as it is not uncommon for horses to kill the flies that sting them (with the quick snap of their tails), Socrates also notes that there is a certain danger involved in his being a gadfly:

You might easily be annoyed with me as people are when they are aroused from a doze, and strike out at me; if convinced by Anytus you could easily kill me, and then you could sleep on for the rest of your days, unless the god, in his care for you, sent you someone else.³²

Kierkegaard ties Socrates' ability to awaken his fellow citizens to his stance of ignorance, and invites us to compare this stance with his own stance of refusing to call himself a Christian.³³ He contends that Socrates' ignorance both effectively distinguishes him from the sophists (who profess to be knowledgeable about virtue and the like and who are willing to teach this to others for a fee) while also serving as a means for making his fellow citizens aware of a different kind of ignorance that they themselves possess:

O Socrates! If with kettledrums and trumpets you had proclaimed yourself to be the one who knew the most, the Sophists would soon have been finished with you. No, you were *the ignorant one* [*den Uvidende*]; but in addition you had the confounded characteristic that you could make it manifest (also by means of being yourself the ignorant one) that the others knew even less than you—they did not even know that they were ignorant.³⁴

By likening his stance of someone who refuses to call himself a Christian to Socrates' position, Kierkegaard suggests that he shares with Socrates the ability to make people aware of a more shameful or disgraceful form of ignorance (cf. *Ap.* 29b), an ignorance that can only be counteracted through a greater attention to and cultivation of the self. The chief result of interacting with either a Socrates or a Kierkegaard is that an interlocutor comes to see that she has been self-complacent, thinking she knows things she is not able to defend under examination or thinking she lives a certain way that does not in fact square with her actual life. To be in such a condition is characterized by self-neglect and a lack of true intellectual curiosity, for if one thinks one is living as one imagines then no deeper self-examination is deemed necessary, and if one thinks one knows all about a subject then one feels no need to look into it in a more searching way. While Socrates' concern with what a person knows might on the face of it seem to be of a different order than Kierkegaard's concern with whether a person lives as a Christian, the principal focus of both of them is what we might call the practical sphere of human life, the sphere of ethics and religion, where an individual's grasp of a given ethical or religious concept is inherently tied to whether or not it plays an appropriate role in the life she leads.³⁵ Like Socrates, Kierkegaard focuses in particular on the tendency people have to lose track of the fundamental connection between knowing what virtue is or what it is to be a Christian and actually living a virtuous life or living an authentic Christian life.³⁶

The dangers associated with Socrates' being a gadfly include the tendency of other people to grow angry with him as well as an unwillingness to take him at his word when he

claims that he himself is ignorant about what he can show that the others only think they know. In the *Apology* he says that it is not uncommon for his interlocutors to grow angry in response to having been refuted by him and for them and the larger audience to assume that he must know, despite his claims of ignorance, what he has shown that they do not know:

As a result of this investigation, gentlemen of the jury, I acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden; many slanders came from these people and a reputation for wisdom, for in each case the bystanders thought that I myself possessed the wisdom that I proved that my interlocutor did not have.³⁷

The characteristic ways people have of responding to Socrates' profession of ignorance have also, according to Kierkegaard, applied with respect to his denial that he is a Christian. He claims that he often faces the same kind of anger, together with a corresponding presumption about his own Christian status. But he is quick to deny that it in any way follows from his having an ability to make others aware that they are not Christians that he himself is a Christian:

But as it went with you [Socrates] (according to what you say in your "defense," as you ironically enough have called the cruelest satire on a contemporary age)—namely that you made many enemies for yourself by making it manifest that the others were ignorant and that the others held a grudge against you out of envy since they assumed that you yourself must be what you could show that they were not—so has it also gone with me. That I can make it manifest that the others are even less Christian than I has given rise to indignation against me; I who nevertheless am so engaged with Christianity that I truly perceive and acknowledge that I am not a Christian. Some want to foist on me that my saying that I am not a Christian is only a hidden form of pride, that I presumably must be what I can show that the others are not. But this is a misunderstanding; it is altogether true: I am not a Christian. And it is rash to conclude from the fact that I can show that the others are not Christians that therefore I myself must be one, just as rash as to conclude, for example, that someone who is one-fourth of a foot taller than other people is, ergo, twelve feet tall.³⁸

Part of the difficulty in taking seriously Socrates' ignorance or Kierkegaard's denial that he is a Christian is an unwillingness to accept the idea that someone in that condition could nevertheless be a skilled diagnostician and able conversation partner. We find it hard to believe that Socrates could understand his interlocutors as well as he seems to be able to (seemingly being acquainted with all the different forms that their ignorance can take) while remaining himself ignorant about the subject in question. Similarly, could Kierkegaard really be as good at depicting the various

ways that a person can fall short of being a Christian while continuing to think she is a Christian if he were not himself that very thing? But this is to underestimate the power of self-knowledge. For Socrates and Kierkegaard to be good at diagnosing and treating different species of that more disgraceful kind of ignorance what is required first and foremost is that they have become acquainted in their own case with the phenomenon at issue, the tendency of a person to a kind of self-satisfaction where she imagines she knows more than she does. This tendency is a condition she is prone to that she needs to discover and—through self-examination and self-scrutiny—learn to regulate and control. While it is clearly true that a Socrates or a Kierkegaard will not make an effective conversation partner if he cannot discuss with some precision whatever it is he suspects that his interlocutor only thinks she knows, the chief qualification is that he be personally acquainted with the activity of forever being on the lookout for any such tendency in his own case. In fact, he must himself be an accomplished master of this activity (he must uphold the Delphic injunction to know thyself) if he is to be able to help others to make similar discoveries about themselves and to introduce them into the rigors of a life that seeks to avoid that more disgraceful kind of ignorance in all its various manifestations.

I suspect that a further reason that we may find it difficult to take seriously Socrates' ignorance is that it does not seem to sit well with our idea of him as a philosopher. While we may certainly applaud the manner in which he helps others to overcome their more disgraceful condition of ignorance, the fact remains that Socrates still seems to fall short of a certain philosophical ideal. The image we get of him in many of Plato's dialogues is of someone who is always approaching knowledge, perhaps gaining greater and greater conviction about what he holds to be the case but never actually arriving at knowledge itself.³⁹ This picture of Socrates (upheld both by Plato and Aristotle and most of the philosophical tradition since them, including Hegel and the early Kierkegaard of *The Concept of Irony*) tends to conceptualize his philosophical activity as being only a part of a larger enterprise, as itself incomplete or preliminary in nature.⁴⁰ While Socrates' method of engaging his interlocutors may help cleanse them of misconceptions or remove a certain kind of self-satisfaction that stands in the way of a proper philosophical engagement of a given topic, once Socrates has done what he does well (so the story goes) then other methods are required if we are actually to gain what he has shown his interlocutors to lack. Though Kierkegaard seems to endorse a version of this picture in his dissertation, as his conception of Socrates develops in his later writings he more and more

vehemently comes to reject this picture and instead maintains that Socrates' philosophical activity is not a mere precursor to something else but itself the human ideal (the best ethical and religious life available outside of Christianity). Socrates' life as a philosopher is thus held by Kierkegaard to be humanly complete, and ought in his view to make a claim on us and to serve as a model that we can emulate in our own lives. Socrates' activity of examining and refuting, forever on the lookout for further instances of a person's thinking she knows what she does not, becomes a life-long, ever vigilant task that he invites each of us to take part in; a task that a person will never finish, for the moment she begins to imagine that she has finished with such self-examination and self-scrutiny is the very moment when she may begin to think she knows something she does not.⁴¹

To motivate this picture of Socrates, Kierkegaard appeals to the religious significance that Socrates attaches to his activity as a gadfly in Athens. In the face of the reputation for wisdom that he has acquired over the years, Socrates upholds his stance of ignorance and insists that it really is the case that he lacks knowledge of the very things he tests others about. But this would then seem to leave us exactly where Socrates found himself upon first hearing of the oracle's claim that no one was wiser.⁴² How can it truly be the case that Socrates is both ignorant (as he insists) and the wisest among human beings? Recall that in the *Apology* Socrates offers us a way out of this apparent bind and, in the process, exhibits the very modesty that is often associated with his stance of ignorance:

What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: "This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless."⁴³

The claim that human wisdom is worth "little or nothing" can strike people in quite different ways. In the traditional picture of Socrates (in which he battles the sophists, destroying sophistry to make room for philosophy, though himself remaining only a preliminary step in its development), one might be inclined to restrict this claim about human wisdom to pre-philosophical forms of wisdom. As philosophy develops and becomes ever more sophisticated, a wisdom becomes possible that no longer is "little or nothing" but rather approaches the wisdom Socrates reserves for the god. In his later writings on Socrates, Kierkegaard rejects this reading and instead takes it to be the case that Socrates means to draw a strict line *between* the human

and the divine, and to ground claims of human wisdom in an individual's ability to remain aware of that distinction.⁴⁴ On this picture the difference between a wise human being and an ignorant one is that the wise person remains aware of her ignorance in relation to the wisdom of the god; the task is to develop oneself while maintaining this awareness, thereby at the same time developing a proper relationship to the god. For Kierkegaard, then, Socrates is to be taken at his word when he says that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. He does not think that Socrates' practice of philosophy is meant to begin with this little or nothing and incrementally try to bring it as close as possible to what only the god truly possesses. Rather, it is to engage in a task of self-examination and self-scrutiny of the sort that helps a person to *fortify* herself against the ever prevalent tendency to think she knows things she does not; that is, against the tendency to lose track of the difference between the human and the divine. For Kierkegaard, Socrates' life as a philosopher embodies a rigorous task of ethical self-examination that expresses in its human modesty a deeply religious commitment. Socrates' ignorance is the point from which a person shall not be moved, not the point from which a better, more developed philosophy can begin to emerge.⁴⁵

As Kierkegaard develops the parallel between himself and Socrates, it becomes clear just how significant Socrates is for him personally. One of the ways this manifests itself stems from his claim that he stands *alone* within the Christian tradition. While underlining yet again that he thinks that "in Christendom's eighteen hundred years there is absolutely nothing comparable, nothing analogous to [his] task," he notes that there are certain burdens associated with occupying such a unique position:

I know what it has cost, what I have suffered, which can be expressed by a single line: I was never like the others [*de Andre*]. Ah, of all the torments in youthful days, the most dreadful, the most intense: not to be like the others, never to live any day without painfully being reminded that one is not like the others, never to be able to run with the crowd, the desire and the joy of youth, never free to be able to abandon oneself, always, as soon as one would risk it, to be painfully reminded of the chain, the segregation of singularity that, to the point of despair, painfully separates a person from everything that is called human life and cheerfulness and gladness....With the years, this pain does decrease more and more; for as one becomes more and more spiritually developed [*Aand*], it is no longer painful that one is not like the others. To be spiritually developed is precisely: not to be like the others.⁴⁶

With such real isolation and heartfelt loneliness in view, Kierkegaard's claim that Socrates occupied an analogous position becomes all the more poignant since this in effect ensures that there is at least one person who would be in a position to understand the difficulties of his task. Early on in "My Task," just after he claims that Socrates provides his only analogy, Kierkegaard turns and openly addresses him:

You, antiquity's noble simple soul, you the only *human being* I admiringly acknowledge as a thinker: there is only a little preserved about you, of all people the only true martyr of intellectuality, just as great *qua* character as *qua* thinker; but how exceedingly much this little is! How I long, far from those battalions of thinkers that "Christendom" places in the field under the name of Christian thinkers...how I long to be able to speak—if only for half an hour—with you!⁴⁷

In this way Socrates becomes a kind of inner companion for Kierkegaard, someone to whom he can confide and whose example he can draw upon in his darker, lonelier moments, or in those moments perhaps when he feels least understood by his contemporaries.⁴⁸

1.4 Kierkegaard as Writer and Thinker

In addition to characterizing his contemporary situation and his response to that situation in terms of the four main figures we have been discussing thus far (the pastors and theologians, the public, the Christian God of Love, and himself *qua* Socratic figure), Kierkegaard makes clear in "My Task" that he also conceives of himself as playing a role analogous to that of Plato the writer and thinker. Just as Kierkegaard often depicts (and takes part in) Socratic exchanges within his texts, so also in his capacity as a writer does he frequently engage in a conversation with the individual readers of these texts, usually addressing them in the singular as "my dear reader."⁴⁹ Though the individual reader is frequently invited by Kierkegaard to apply what has been enacted in a given work to her own life (as a reader of one of Plato's dialogues might come to examine herself more closely in the light of certain exchanges that Plato has portrayed between Socrates and a given interlocutor), there are also cases within Kierkegaard's corpus where he engages the reader *qua* reader, seeking to instruct her on how to read his texts. Kierkegaard's activity in this case is akin to Socrates' attempt to inform his jury about his practice as a philosopher, and seeks to provide his reader with a more general understanding of

his overall point of view and how he, the writer and thinker, thinks that his books should be read. Obviously the mere fact that Kierkegaard claims that his books mean thus and so, or that they ought to be read in the light of such and such, etc., does not guarantee that he is right.⁵⁰ The proof lies in how illuminating we find such orienting remarks to be. Do they reveal to us ways of approaching his texts that make those texts interesting to read, and do they help us to discern patterns of argument and literary nuance that we otherwise might not properly appreciate?

The main aim of “My Task” is to provide us with a point of view from which, according to Kierkegaard, his activities as a writer and thinker become intelligible. As should have become clear by now, that point of view might be called a Socratic point of view, and it remains Kierkegaard’s chief contention that Socrates is the one individual prior to him whose activity sheds any light on his task. By making such pronouncements Kierkegaard in effect presents himself as the best qualified person to offer a critical account of his authorship, and suggests that if you want to become a good reader of his texts then you should look to him and remarks of this sort for help.⁵¹ His claim to be the “one single person who is qualified to give a true critique of [his] work” partly rests on his belief that none of his contemporaries has properly appreciated his endeavor.⁵² He contends that “there is not one single contemporary who is qualified to review [his] work” and argues that even those who sit down and try to offer a more detailed analysis only arrive at the most superficial of readings:

Even if someone considerably better informed takes it upon himself to want to say something about me and my task, it actually does not amount to anything more than that he, after a superficial glance at my work, quickly finds some earlier something or other that he declares to be comparable. In this way it still does not amount to anything. Something on which a person with my leisure, my diligence, my talents, my education...has spent not only fourteen years but essentially his entire life, the only thing for which he has lived and breathed—then that some pastor, at most a professor, would not need more than a superficial glance at it in order to evaluate it, that is surely absurd.⁵³

In the face of all the pastors and theologians who claim to find all sorts of things that are analogous to his task, Kierkegaard declares that “a more careful inspection” by them would reveal that there is nothing analogous within Christianity—and then adds, “but this is what [they do] not find worth the trouble.”⁵⁴

Kierkegaard wants us to be better readers than he thinks his contemporaries have been, to take the trouble to give his work that “more careful inspection” he claims it requires; and he

encourages us to carry out this activity in the light of his suggestion that his task is a Socratic task. But this is not to say that we should expect such an inspection to be an easy one. If Kierkegaard is right and none of his contemporaries has understood him and his task, why should we think that it will necessarily fare any better in our own case? Kierkegaard is a strange, somewhat hybrid figure. He presents himself as a Socrates, someone skilled in the art of indirection and so seemingly forever elusive; and yet he demands that we try to understand him and offers us tools to assist us in our attempt. Anyone who embarks on such an enterprise should be warned up front that she is repeatedly likely to encounter moments of seeming clarity and a kind of shared intimacy with Kierkegaard (this most personal of philosophers), followed by moments of utter incomprehension and the anxiety that he is far too profound a character for our more limited sensibilities. Trying to bring Kierkegaard into focus can often seem akin to what it is like when one encounters irony in a text or meets face to face with an ironist herself:

Just as irony has something deterring about it, it likewise has something extraordinarily seductive and fascinating about it. Its masquerading and mysteriousness, the telegraphic communication it prompts because an ironist always has to be understood at a distance, the infinite sympathy it presupposes, the fleeting but indescribable instant of understanding that is immediately superseded by the anxiety of misunderstanding—all this holds one prisoner in inextricable bonds.⁵⁵

Sometimes we will feel certain we have gotten hold of Kierkegaard, only in the next moment to have the familiar experience of having him slip away yet again. Despite these difficulties, I remain convinced that there is much to be gained from taking Kierkegaard up on his suggestion that we view his activity as a writer and thinker as a Socratic task. Readers of “My Task” who share my conviction will be aware, however, that I have been operating at a fairly general level of description thus far. Kierkegaard’s main claim is that the refusal to call himself a Christian is analogous to Socrates’ stance of ignorance. He claims that so adopted, this stance gives him the ability to make his fellow citizens aware of a deeper sense in which they are not Christians, while also allowing him at the same time to pursue an authentic ethical and religious life.

In the next chapter I examine two other methodological texts, *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*. In these two works Kierkegaard develops further the idea that he employs a Socratic method and provides us with a clue about where to look within his corpus if we want to find a paradigmatic example of this method actually at work. There is perhaps a touch of irony in Kierkegaard’s suggestion that it is only the activity of Socrates that sheds any

meaningful light on his own activity. For Socrates, of all people, is about as enigmatic and elusive a character as we can find within philosophy, and is the very person who Alcibiades claims is utterly *unlike* any other human being:

[Socrates] is unique; he is like no one else in the past and no one in the present—this is by far the most amazing thing about him....[He] is so bizarre, his ways and his ideas are so unusual, that, search as you might, you'll never find anyone else, alive or dead, who's even remotely like him. The best you can do is not to compare him to anything human, but to liken him, as I do, to Silenus and the satyrs....⁵⁶

If Kierkegaard's claim bears out, then a proper investigation of his writings will reveal that Alcibiades was mistaken in his claim about Socrates' uniqueness by one person. When investigating further Kierkegaard's claim that Socrates provides his only analogy and that his task is a Socratic task, it's worth keeping in mind that Kierkegaard devoted the bulk of his first mature work, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, to developing an account of who he thinks Socrates is. Despite the prominence given in the title to the concept of irony, Kierkegaard spends nearly three quarters of his discussion examining the very individual he will later model himself upon and toward whom he now points us.⁵⁷ In this way Kierkegaard brings us full circle from his last words in "My Task" to the first words of his dissertation. His first true act as a writer and thinker was to stake his claim as the best interpreter of Socrates; in the end of his life he maintains that if we want to become interpreters of him who avoid the superficial readings he attributes to his contemporaries, then we should take his suggestion and examine his writings in the light of Socrates. In effect Kierkegaard suggests that one riddle, the riddle of Socrates (which he once thought he had solved in his dissertation and which continued to occupy him throughout his life), is the key to our trying to solve a second riddle, the riddle of Søren Kierkegaard.

Chapter 2: Kierkegaard's Socratic Method

(*The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and *On My Work as an Author*)

In the last chapter we examined Kierkegaard's text "My Task" and considered the parallel that Kierkegaard draws between his own life and the life of Socrates. We saw that he invites us to conceive of him as the Socrates of Copenhagen and to think of his life as engaged in the Socratic task of making his fellow citizens aware of their tendency to think they are Christians when they are not. I argued that "My Task" was the last in a series of works within Kierkegaard's corpus in which he addresses his readers in a manner reminiscent of the way that Socrates addresses his jurors (where he steps back from his activity as a gadfly and tries to offer an account of why he has lived his life as a philosopher). While the schematic nature of "My Task" helped to isolate what I was calling Kierkegaard's Socratic point of view, there was not much in this text that more explicitly connected this point of view to his larger body of writing. However intriguing we may find Kierkegaard's claim that Socrates serves as his only analogy and that his activity as a writer and thinker is best understood as a Socratic task, this claim still remains fairly abstract. How much light does it really shed on Kierkegaard's corpus? In what respects does the Socratic manifest itself within Kierkegaard's writings, and how exactly is Kierkegaard playing the role of a Socrates in his various activities as a writer and thinker? In an effort to begin answering these questions, I want to turn in this chapter to two further methodological texts, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and *On My Work as an Author*.¹ In these two works Kierkegaard discusses the kinds of writings he has produced and argues that over the course of his authorship he has employed a Socratic method. In this chapter we will thus examine Kierkegaard's classification of his writings together with his claim that his entire authorship is directed at the issue of becoming a Christian in an age where people are frequently under the "illusion" (*Sandsebedrag*) that they already are Christians (while their lives are characterized by "entirely different categories....aesthetic or, at most, aesthetic-ethical

categories”).² In the process we will also discuss some of Kierkegaard's philosophical terminology (such as what he means by the categories of the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious) and examine his concept of a pseudonymous author and the related notion of indirect communication. Our principal aim will be to consider two respects in which Kierkegaard holds that he employs a Socratic method: (1) through his use of a pseudonymous manner of writing and (2) by assuming a disguise or incognito in his personal interactions with his contemporaries.

2.1 Kierkegaard's Authorship

Anyone who had followed Kierkegaard's activity as an author during the eight years that lay between the publication of his first post-dissertation work, *Either/Or* (1843), and the publication of *On My Work as an Author* (1851) would certainly have been struck by the fact that he had written a significant number of books, many of which were quite unusual.³ For starters, he published several books under a number of different pseudonyms (such as Victor Eremita, Johannes de silentio,⁴ Constantin Constantius, Johannes Climacus, Vigilius Haufniensis, Frater Taciturnus, Anti-Climacus). These pseudonyms, however, were not simply pen names that Kierkegaard adopted but literary characters in their own right. As Louis Mackey nicely puts it, “A Kierkegaardian pseudonym is a *persona*, an imaginary person created by the author for artistic purposes, not a *nom de plume*, a fictitious name used to protect his personal identity from the threats and embarrassments of publicity.”⁵ Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works are thus noted for their literary ingenuity and their flamboyant, often outspoken fictional narrators, together with their lively engagement of a number of cultural and philosophical topics and their examination of several different fundamental outlooks on life, what Kierkegaard calls “life-views” (*Livs-Anskuelse*).⁶ At the same time, Kierkegaard published several other books under his own name of a rather different character. Calling these works edifying speeches or talks (*opbyggelige Taler*), he offered his readers a number of meditations on particular religious topics and Biblical passages.⁷ The pseudonymous books seemingly seek above all to entertain and intellectually engage their readers and provide Kierkegaard with an opportunity to display his philosophical intellect and his literary artistry.⁸ The edifying works, on the other hand, are much less frenetic; their calm, more reflective prose does not draw attention to the same extent to Kierkegaard's philosophical or literary brilliance (though this is always present) but rather seems

directed more at inviting readers to join him in quietly reflecting about their own individual lives.⁹ While the first class of writings allows Kierkegaard to give expression to his poetic and intellectual impulses (giving free rein to what can make him appear justifiably to be an exceptional writer and thinker), the second class of writings is more straightforwardly concerned with what he calls the universally human, that which each of us can cultivate *qua* ethical and religious individual independent of any literary talent or special intelligence we may or may not happen to possess.¹⁰

Kierkegaard was aware that readers might wonder why he uses pseudonyms for some of his writings, and also might wonder why one and the same person writes what appear to be such radically different types of books (literary/philosophical writings vs. religious writings). Whether or not those contemporary readers who were principally engaged with the pseudonymous works initially connected these writings in any meaningful way to Kierkegaard's edifying speeches, it's worth noting that it was never much of a secret in Copenhagen that Kierkegaard was the writer behind the different pseudonyms.¹¹ Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus claims that it had become common practice for people to assume that "the pseudonymous works are by one author."¹² When Kierkegaard first publicly acknowledged in 1846 that he was that author, he noted that "probably everyone who has been concerned at all about such things has until now *summarily* regarded me as the author of the pseudonymous books even before the explanation was at hand."¹³ Yet though Kierkegaard allows that he is responsible for the pseudonymous works in a "legal and in a literary sense," he insists that if confusion is to be avoided it is important that readers sharply distinguish between him, "the author of...the [pseudonymous] authors," and his literary creations themselves,¹⁴ each of whom is "a poeticized author" who "has his definite life-view":

What has been written [in the pseudonymous books], then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the creating, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who poeticizes characters and yet in the preface is himself the author. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person a *souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the [pseudonymous] authors, whose prefaces in turn are their productions, as their names are also.

The pseudonyms are poetized personalities, poetically maintained so that everything they say is in character with their poetized individualities; sometimes I have carefully explained in a signed

preface my own interpretation of what the pseudonym said. Anyone with just a fragment of common sense will perceive that it would be ludicrously confusing to attribute to me everything the poetized characters say.¹⁵

Just as one wouldn't confuse the words and thoughts and actions of a fictional character with those of its author, so Kierkegaard insists that part of what is involved in understanding a pseudonymous work is that one recognize that it has been written from the point of view of a fictional character, a character who represents himself as the (pseudonymous) author of the work in question.¹⁶

Kierkegaard's 1846 acknowledgement, however, does not address the larger question of what, if any, relationship there is between the pseudonymous writings and the edifying speeches. Instead Kierkegaard provides an initial account of what he takes to be the significance of the pseudonyms (a topic we will return to below in section 2.5). It is not until a couple of years later, as Kierkegaard began contemplating (yet again) the idea of giving up writing altogether in order to become a rural pastor,¹⁷ that he starts to reflect more systematically about his authorship as a whole and about what he takes to be the precise relationship between the two classes of his writings.¹⁸ The end result of these reflections are the two works we are considering, *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*.¹⁹ As with "My Task," these two works are written in a manner reminiscent of the way that Socrates addresses his jurors in Plato's *Apology*, where Kierkegaard steps back from his engagement of his fellow citizens and offers an account of the nature of the interactions that he's had with them.²⁰ He is aware that by presenting an account of his authorship he may come across as someone who is trying to justify or defend his activities as a writer and thinker, as though he himself were on trial and needed to offer an explanation of why his authorship has taken the form that it has in order to avoid the censure of his fellow citizens or any other punishment that the public at large might try to administer. Kierkegaard denies, however, that what he is offering is "a defense" in any narrow juridical sense or that his allotted role is that of a defendant:

What I write here is for orientation and attestation—it is not a defense or an apology. In this respect, if in no other, I truly believe that I have something in common with Socrates. When he was accused and was to be judged by "the crowd," he who was conscious of being a divine gift, his *daimonion* forbade him to *defend* himself.²¹ Indeed what an impropriety and self-contradiction that would have been! Likewise there is something in me and in the dialectical nature of my relationship [to my work]

that makes it impossible for me, and impossible in itself, to conduct a "defense" of my authorship....[I]n relation to my authorship it is not I that need to defend myself before my contemporaries; for if I am anything in this regard, I am not the guilty party, nor counsel for the defense, but counsel for the prosecution.²²

While these two books often have the character more of religious confessional works than indictments, this has if anything simply increased the level of interest they have elicited. Embraced by some and rejected by others for the claims they develop about Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole, these works also make for fascinating reading and seem to speak quite intimately to the reader, offering her the chance to go behind the scenes, so to speak, of this enormous, elusive, often bizarre set of writings, and not only that but in the process to be given a guided tour by the playwright and director himself. While in our own individual encounters with some of Kierkegaard's texts we may have found them to be existentially moving or philosophically challenging or inherently ambiguous and cryptic, *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* seem to declare that the show is now over, the curtain has fallen, and we are invited to come backstage to see how things were constructed and to hear firsthand from the writer himself why he wrote what he wrote and to what end. Imagine the excitement a person might feel upon first encountering a text of this sort.²³ Here the author addresses you *qua* reader, instructs you on how best to understand his writings and the way they have unfolded and also speaks quite intimately with you about how he now understands himself and his personal development as a writer and thinker.

Despite the allure, however, of such a behind the scenes glimpse, these texts need to be approached with caution. As Kierkegaard would be the first to agree, the mere fact that it is the writer and thinker who offers us an interpretation of his work does not mean that this interpretation will thereby be upheld by the texts themselves.²⁴ Some people make great artists but poor critics. The test for any interpretation, as always, will lie in how well it helps us to appreciate a given text and how much it deepens our understanding of that text. In Kierkegaard's case we need to be cautious precisely because he is in fact quite capable of offering extremely powerful interpretations of his own writings, interpretations that by their seeming plausibility and eloquence are in danger of blinding us to the complexity and richness that can actually be found in a given text. If, as I noted at the end of the previous chapter, it is Kierkegaard's desire that we become readers who can give his writings the sort of careful inspection he thinks they

require, then we have to take care lest his own orienting remarks and interpretations mislead us and help to foster in us bad habits of reading. Kierkegaard's accounts can seem so convincing at times that there is a real danger of their fostering a dogmatic manner of approach, one which imposes a particular scheme on his body of writings and in the process simplifies and flattens the individual texts we encounter.

In response to those who take their lead from what Kierkegaard says about his authorship and who, as a consequence, often end up adopting a more dogmatic approach, it may seem quite natural to want to challenge the legitimacy of Kierkegaard's own readings, to note that his interpretations develop and change over time, are not always consistent, etc., perhaps calling into question in the process the very idea of offering general remarks about a body of writing.²⁵ Perhaps, such an approach suggests, there is no single interpretation that best characterizes Kierkegaard's works, even one offered and developed by the author himself. As much as I can appreciate the value that this type of approach can have for helping us to free ourselves of existing dogmas and prejudices, it too—if left unchecked—can also interfere with our goal of becoming good readers of Kierkegaard's texts.²⁶ I think we should attach real significance to the fact that Kierkegaard made repeated efforts to provide an overview of his activity as a writer and thinker, suggesting that he truly thought that such an overview might be informative and that it was possible to obtain such an overview. Perhaps a middle course is best: we should try to remain alert to the danger of becoming dogmatic while nevertheless considering more closely whether or not Kierkegaard's general, methodological remarks succeed in helping us to discern certain patterns in his writing and thinking.

The first thing to note about the content of *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* is that in each of these texts Kierkegaard makes what can appear to be a rather surprising claim. Despite the impressive variety of books he had published (some literary, some philosophical, some religious), with the appearance of *On My Work as an Author* Kierkegaard's contemporaries were confronted with the claim that his "authorship, regarded as a *totality*, is religious from first to last."²⁷ In *The Point of View* Kierkegaard puts it this way: "the content, then, of this little book is: what I in truth am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that the whole of my work as an author pertains to Christianity, to the issue of becoming a Christian."²⁸ While no one would deny that he had written religious works, the claim that he has been a religious author and only that initially appears quite implausible. One has only to think of

Kierkegaard's most notorious and famous work, "The Seducer's Diary" (from the first volume of *Either/Or*), to begin to wonder how some of the things he has written could possibly be categorized as the work of a religious author. What exactly does a narrative about deception and seduction (with no Dostoevskian moment of redemption at the end) have to do with the religious?²⁹ While it is clearly the case that as his authorship develops Kierkegaard's writings become more and more pronouncedly concerned with religious topics and with Christianity in particular, it certainly does not seem to follow from this that he has been a religious author from the start or that his authorship is religious "from first to last." To say that "the whole of [his] work as an author" pertains to Christianity simply seems incredible, especially in the face of the pseudonymous works, many of which do not appear to be about Christianity at all.

Kierkegaard himself is aware of the apparent implausibility of his claim that he has always been a religious author. For our purposes, it is his attempt to meet this difficulty (whether or not this attempt is ultimately found to be convincing) that will assist us in our search for the Socratic within his authorship. Kierkegaard agrees that there is some truth in the objection that the pseudonymous writings do not seem in themselves to be the work of a religious author. But rather than taking this as evidence against his claim, he instead argues that this is by design, that the pseudonymous works represent a kind of *deception* on his part, aimed at capturing a reader's attention in order, ultimately, to lead her towards the religious and the specifically Christian. Furthermore, it is this deceptive manner of proceeding that Kierkegaard explicitly ties to Socrates:

But a deception, that is indeed something rather ugly. To that I would answer: Do not be deceived by the word "deception." One can deceive a person out of the truth, and—to recall old Socrates—one can deceive a person into the truth.³⁰

Thus in response to the objection that some of his writings do not appear to be the work of a religious author, Kierkegaard readily concedes this but then turns things around and suggests that his pseudonymous writings nevertheless, in virtue of their seemingly non-religious character, play a Socratic role within what he contends is a religious authorship. This perhaps startling and certainly ingenious reply leads to some additional questions that we will need to investigate further: What exactly does Kierkegaard mean by his claim that the pseudonymous works represent a kind of deception into the truth? Moreover, even if these works do represent some sort of deception on Kierkegaard's part, is there anything particularly Socratic about deceiving

one's interlocutors or one's readers?³¹ Before, however, we can begin to examine these questions in greater detail, we will first need to discuss more fully Kierkegaard's conception of his authorship and the manner in which he thinks that this has developed. Since we are seeking the Socratic in particular within Kierkegaard's writings, we will need to pay special attention to the pseudonymous works and how these have unfolded within the larger authorship.

2.2 Kierkegaard's Aesthetic Production

Kierkegaard's classification of his writings as either edifying or pseudonymous is certainly not meant to be exhaustive (for example, this scheme excludes his dissertation and earlier juvenilia).³² Moreover, he also further differentiates among his writings within each class or genre. He claims for instance that the edifying speeches fall into two groups: (1) the directly religious (*det ligefremme Religiøse*), those edifying works that he published from 1843-1845;³³ and (2) the purely religious production (*den blot religiøse Productivitet*), those edifying works that he published from 1847-1851.³⁴ As the edifying writings develop, they become more and more pronouncedly concerned with Christianity (moving from the more generic reflections about the religious in the first group to reflections in the second group about the specifically Christian).³⁵ Kierkegaard divides the pseudonymous writings into three groups: (1) the aesthetic production (*den æstetiske Productivitet*), those pseudonymous works published from 1843-1845 (*Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Prefaces*, *Stages on Life's Way*);³⁶ (2) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, published in 1846, which he claims is "not aesthetic production but also not, in the strictest sense, religious";³⁷ and (3) *Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*, published in 1849 and 1850, which he calls "poetic" but also claims represent a "higher pseudonymity."³⁸ If we align the two groups of edifying speeches with the three groups of pseudonymous works, we wind up with three principal phases of writing in Kierkegaard's authorship:³⁹ (1) 1843-1845, in which Kierkegaard published several pseudonymous works (the aesthetic production) together with the directly religious (but not specifically Christian) speeches;⁴⁰ (2) 1846, in which he published the pseudonymous *Postscript*, which serves as a "turning point" in the authorship;⁴¹ (3) 1847-1851, in which he published a series of works under his own name, which he calls the "exclusively religious production," together with "a little aesthetic article" by a pseudonym, the "gleam" of

which was “meant to...bring to consciousness that from the beginning the aesthetic was what should be left behind, what should be abandoned,” as well as the two pseudonymous works by Anti-Climacus that arguably have a more explicitly religious focus than their predecessors.⁴²

When Kierkegaard says that his pseudonymous works are a kind of deception, he principally has in mind those works that he published from 1843-1845 and that he characterizes as “aesthetic” in both *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*.⁴³ Since he frequently contrasts the aesthetic with the ethical and the religious, some commentators have taken his classification of these pseudonymous works as “aesthetic” to indicate that these works do not represent his considered views about the ethical and the religious or adequately investigate these matters. On their view, whether these works engage in an aesthetic playing with possibilities or a speculative contemplation, they do not truly come into contact with their purported topics of investigation. Rather than being put forward by Kierkegaard in order genuinely to illuminate the ethical and the religious, these works are instead meant to awaken the reader to her own neglect of these matters by themselves *failing* to engage them properly. James Conant nicely raises this issue as follows:

Can the categories of the ethical and the religious be clarified through an aesthetic mode of treatment? More precisely: in so far as the considerations concerning the ethical and the religious are conceived under the aspect of the category of the aesthetic, is the pseudonymous author of a work such as the *Postscript* not involved in a performative contradiction—a contradiction between his (aesthetic) mode of treatment and his aim (to clarify the categories of the ethical and the religious)?⁴⁴

Conant's suggestion is that in calling his pseudonymous works “aesthetic,” Kierkegaard means to draw attention to the existential (and so epistemological) limitations of his pseudonyms and their corresponding inability to shed light on ethical and religious matters. They may claim that they want to investigate these matters, only to reveal through the manner in which they set about doing so that they simply are not up to the task. The hope is that if the reader can discover this, then she may also come to recognize her own analogous limitations.

While this is certainly one way to interpret what Kierkegaard means by calling the 1843-1845 pseudonymous works “aesthetic,” I don't think this is compulsory. The term “aesthetic” actually plays a number of different roles in Kierkegaard's corpus and it may be worth distinguishing some of the different senses he attaches to this term before we proceed further.⁴⁵ This will also provide an opportunity for me to introduce some of Kierkegaard's philosophical

terminology. In one sense, when Kierkegaard calls something “aesthetic,” he simply has in mind that which concerns itself with the realm of the fine arts: poetry, drama, literature, music, and so on. For example, the aesthetic article he published pseudonymously in 1848, “The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress,” is largely a meditation about what makes a great stage actress. The first volume of *Either/Or* contains, among other things, aesthetic essays about Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and about the difference between ancient and modern conceptions of tragedy.⁴⁶ These sorts of writings are arguably classified as “aesthetic” primarily due to the content of what is being discussed. But to call the bulk of the pseudonymous works “aesthetic” in this sense would clearly be misleading. While there are certainly aesthetic insights to be gleaned in places, if you really want to learn about the arts then the 1843-1845 pseudonymous works (not to mention Kierkegaard’s writings more generally) are not the obvious place to look (Kierkegaard’s chief concerns lie elsewhere).

A second, related sense of “aesthetic” that Kierkegaard makes use of attaches to a particular conception of what matters in life, to what he calls a life-view (*Livs-Anskuelse*). A “Livs-Anskuelse” or view of life might be compared to the German notion of a *Weltanschauung* or world-view.⁴⁷ Both notions point to an individual’s fundamental outlook, to the stance from which a person takes in the world or by means of which she conceives of her life and what she takes to be most important. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author Judge William claims that “every human being...has a natural need to formulate a life-view, a conception of the meaning of life and of its purpose.”⁴⁸ We might treat a person’s life-view as that which serves as the basis of her life (her “center of gravity” so to speak) or that which serves to structure her life and that indicates the ideal she thinks her life ought to instantiate.⁴⁹ While a number of life-views are discussed within Kierkegaard’s corpus, the three that receive the most attention are the aesthetic life-view, the ethical life-view and the religious life-view.⁵⁰ For example, the pseudonymous editor Victor Eremita claims that the two pseudonymous authors of *Either/Or* (*A* and Judge William, otherwise known as *B*) exhibit, respectively, an aesthetic life-view (insofar as that is possible) and an ethical life-view: “*A*’s papers contain a multiplicity of approaches to an aesthetic view of life [*Livs-Anskuelse*]. A coherent aesthetic view of life can hardly be presented. *B*’s papers contain an ethical view of life [*Livs-Anskuelse*].”⁵¹ Elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s corpus these three life-views and the categories to which they are tied are sometimes characterized in terms of either “spheres of existence” (where the sphere one is said to inhabit will vary

depending on one's life-view) or a series of "stages" that designate the degree of development in a person's life (where a person who occupies the aesthetic stage is taken to be the least developed while those who occupy either the ethical or the religious stages are held to be increasingly more developed).⁵² The pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus maintains that each of these life-views possesses something like a defining characteristic that structures a given person's life: "Whereas aesthetic existence is essentially pleasure [*Nydelse*] and ethical existence is essentially struggle and victory, religious existence is suffering."⁵³ This has consequences, in turn, for the kind of person or self one becomes. While the one whose life is governed by pleasure has the dialectic of his life "outside himself" (and so in effect cannot be said to possess a proper self), the ethically-minded person "is dialectically turned inward in self-assertion" and the religiously-minded person is "dialectically turned inward in self-annihilation before God."⁵⁴

It's important to appreciate that the capacities associated with each of these life-views are not mutually exclusive.⁵⁵ That is, while the person who tries to organize her life around an aesthetic outlook will, on Kierkegaard's view, remain ethically and religiously undeveloped, those who organize their lives around the ethical or the religious or the specifically Christian are not thereby excluded from developing and exercising capacities associated with the life-views that fall lower on the existential hierarchy. So someone whose life is ethically structured can also possess aesthetic capacities, while someone whose life is religiously structured can possess both aesthetic and ethical capacities.⁵⁶ What this means in practice is that even as Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms rank the different types of life (indexing them in terms of life-views), with Kierkegaard saying things like "the aesthetic was what should be left behind, what should be abandoned," this is not to say that he rejects the aesthetic mode of engaging the world outright.⁵⁷ It simply means that when it comes to developing oneself as a person, to the kind of self one becomes, the aesthetic is treated as a kind of lower limit (where a self properly speaking has not yet come into existence) and it is one of Kierkegaard's aims in his authorship to trace a path from the aesthetic towards first the ethical, then the religious and ultimately the Christian.⁵⁸

Kierkegaard's category of the aesthetic, while rooted in the sense of the word that is tied to the fine arts, is frequently characterized more generally as a disinterested and personally detached mode of engaging the world, one that may be suitable for the aesthetic appreciation of something (at least by Kierkegaard's lights) but that also encompasses more broadly other "intellectual" forms of thought that are aimed at objects (including the sciences and abstract

philosophical reflection).⁵⁹ When one employs aesthetic capacities in this broad sense the emphasis, then, falls not on the subject who observes something in the world but rather on the object being observed. Consider this passage from the pseudonym Anti-Climacus:

When one shows a painting to a person and asks him to observe it, or when in a business transaction someone looks at, for example, a piece of cloth, he steps very close to the object, in the latter case even picks it up and feels it—in short, he comes as close to the object as possible, but in this very same movement he in another sense leaves himself entirely, goes away from himself, forgets himself....In other words, by observing I go into the object (I become objective) but I leave myself or go away from myself (I cease to be subjective).⁶⁰

In contrast to the disinterestedness that is characteristic of the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious both involve what the pseudonym Johannes Climacus calls an “infinite interestedness” on the part of the subject. While the ethical individual is “interested infinitely in his own actuality,” the religious individual through her supposedly deeper self-development becomes “infinitely interested in the [divine] actuality of another (for example, that the god actually has existed).”⁶¹

For Kierkegaard to hold that the pseudonymous works published from 1843-1845 are “aesthetic” in the sense tied to this notion of a life-view would be to suggest that each of these works is written in effect from an aesthetic point of view and so presumably disinterested in character. If this were the case then the various reflections of the pseudonyms would ultimately be governed by an aesthetic outlook and involve, as Conant suggests, an illicit use of “an aesthetic mode of treatment” to illuminate non-aesthetic matters (the ethical and the religious) that only properly come into view if the individual is infinitely, personally interested.⁶² On the face of it, however, this way of characterizing what Kierkegaard means by calling these works “aesthetic” would seem to be a non-starter. While A and Johannes the Seducer from *Either/Or* and the party of aesthetes in the first part of *Stages on Life's Way* are all certainly represented as holding to various degrees an aesthetic life-view, there are a whole host of pseudonyms, beginning with Judge William, whose life-views are patently represented to be non-aesthetic.⁶³ Are these life-views somehow falsely or confusedly attributed to some of the pseudonyms? Is Kierkegaard's deception of the reader supposed to involve leading her to think that some of his pseudonyms are existentially positioned to illuminate the categories of the ethical and the religious, when in fact they are only capable of aesthetic modes of reflection? M. Holmes

Hartshorne has adopted an approach to Kierkegaard's texts that is akin to the one advocated by Conant and that approximates this way of thinking, though not by embracing the concept of a life-view but instead by rejecting the idea that the pseudonyms serve as idealizations of different stages of human development:

It is not true, as some contend, that Kierkegaard thought of individuals as passing through the aesthetical stage to the ethical and then on to the religious. [In *Either/Or*,] the aesthetical (as portrayed by "A") and the ethical (as set forth by Judge William) are not, as such, human possibilities; they are abstractions *from* human existence. Juxtaposed to each other, they describe the tension in which we live. In themselves they are simply ironic caricatures.⁶⁴

On Hartshorne's view, none of the pseudonyms is meant to exemplify a fundamental outlook around which a person could genuinely organize her life. Instead Hartshorne thinks that the pseudonyms are—by design—existentially confused and so truly lack the capacity to illuminate the topics they claim to be investigating. What is attractive about such an approach is that it provides us with a fairly straightforward way of conceiving what Kierkegaard means when he calls the 1843-1845 pseudonymous works deceptive. While several of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms represent themselves as leading lives that are structured by non-aesthetic life-views and so make themselves out to be capable of illuminating the ethical and religious categories that supposedly inform their lives, if the works in which they appear are in fact governed through and through by an aesthetic point of view, then what may look to be genuine insights about the ethical and the religious will turn out to be no such thing. Hartshorne maintains, for example, that *Either/Or* is not (as it is commonly conceived) a work that partly addresses what the aesthetic life-view consists of and partly addresses what the ethical life-view consists of. Instead he insists that "both of the standpoints set forth in *Either/Or* are unreal. Kierkegaard regarded the entire book as an aesthetical production."⁶⁵ Similarly he contends that *Fear and Trembling* only "pretends to be a serious analysis of faith" while its real goal is to lead its readers from a position where they (falsely or confusedly) imagine that the pseudonym Johannes de silentio's reflections about faith are making genuine progress to one where they begin to see how these reflections in no way engage with the subject matter allegedly under investigation: "The absurdities of Johannes' thoughts about faith are put forward as good money, with the intent that the reader will accept them as such and then gradually be deceived into the truth of their illusory nature."⁶⁶ While I am not at all convinced by Hartshorne's approach (since I think there are simply too

many places in Kierkegaard's corpus where the concept of a life-view and the associated notions of distinct spheres of existence or stages of development are taken at face value), I think it and the related considerations raised by Conant very helpfully put pressure on the idea of what Kierkegaard could mean by calling the bulk of his pseudonymous works "aesthetic" and thereby serve to stimulate further reflection on the part of those like myself who remain unconvinced by these considerations.

So far we've considered two senses in which Kierkegaard employs the term "aesthetic." The first sense was associated with the fine arts and the aesthetic content of a work. The second was associated with the notion of a life-view and the disinterested aesthetic point of view from which a work might be written. In my view, neither of these two senses adequately captures what Kierkegaard means by calling the 1843-1845 pseudonymous works "aesthetic." I do not think that all of these works exhibit aesthetic content nor do I think that they all are written from an aesthetic point of view. But where does that leave us? There remains a third sense of "aesthetic" that Kierkegaard sometimes makes use of (no doubt related to the other two senses) that may be more to the point. Oftentimes when he speaks of an aesthetic work he simply has in mind a work that is meant for aesthetic *consumption* (something that has been produced to be read or watched, as with a novel or a play). To call his pseudonymous works "aesthetic" in this sense would not be to compare them to works of aesthetic criticism but rather to what such criticism seeks to illuminate.⁶⁷ It would be to claim that these works are akin to those produced by the other arts, especially literature, and would be to point perhaps to the dramatic nature of the pseudonymous works, to what George Pattison calls their "theatricality."⁶⁸ When we read a pseudonymous work we encounter a whole host of different characters, narratives unfold, stories are told and so on. In short, we encounter a work that exhibits an aesthetic, literary form that is bound to seem familiar to those among Kierkegaard's readers who frequent the theater and regularly read works of literature: "all the novel readers, male and female, the aesthetes, the beautiful souls."⁶⁹ To call the pseudonymous works "aesthetic" in this sense, then, is to suggest that they possess some of the same literary elements that these readers are in the habit of consuming. If they regularly enjoy reading works of literature and watching plays, then they may also take an interest in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. If it is this sense of aesthetic as literary production that Kierkegaard has in mind when he characterizes the 1843-1845 pseudonymous works as "aesthetic," then a number of things fall into place. First off, this is perfectly compatible with

some of the pseudonymous works' actually exhibiting aesthetic content (such as is found in the critical essays in the first volume of *Either/Or*), but it certainly isn't a requirement that there be such content. Second, this is also compatible with the dramatization of a number of different life-views in the pseudonymous works, with bringing onto stage so to speak individuals whose lives are structured by different fundamental outlooks (whether aesthetic, ethical, religious or some other life-view to which they are committed). And when these individuals are represented to be (pseudonymous) authors, then it is perfectly consistent with Kierkegaard's calling the pseudonymous works "aesthetic" that a given work may turn out to be written from a non-aesthetic point of view. This is not to say that the Conant/Hartshorne approach has thereby been ruled out, only that it need not be compulsory. That is, I think that when Kierkegaard characterizes a pseudonymous work as "aesthetic," he doesn't thereby determine what the life-view is of that work's pseudonym, and so leaves open the extent to which a given pseudonym can genuinely illuminate ethical and religious matters. To settle whether or not an individual pseudonymous author does make illicit use of an aesthetic mode of treatment is something that we will only be able to determine by taking a close look at a given pseudonymous work.

2.3 Indirect Communication and the Illusion of "Christendom"

We are now in a better position to return to the question of what makes the pseudonymous works a deception according to Kierkegaard and to consider further why he thinks that the nature of this deception is Socratic: "From the total point of view of my whole work as an author, the aesthetic production is a deception, and herein is the deeper significance of the pseudonymity."⁷⁰ In simplest terms, if Kierkegaard's authorship truly is directed at becoming a Christian (that is, at a person's coming to exercise her religious capacities more fully), then to present a reader with a work that apparently is designed to exercise her aesthetic capacities alone is to keep hidden from her that the author's real interest lies elsewhere, that his true aim is to get his reader to exercise her ethical and religious capacities. When a reader first encounters a pseudonymous book and it appears in virtue of its literary form to be an aesthetic work, she will no doubt approach this text in the way that she is accustomed to approach works of this sort, exercising her aesthetic capacities and thereby adopting a disinterested frame of mind in which she becomes absorbed in the work and so loses track of herself *qua* ethical and religious individual. The pseudonym

Johannes Climacus puts it this way: "Poetry and art are not essentially related to an existing person, since the contemplation of poetry and art, 'joy over the beautiful,' is disinterested, and the observer is contemplatively outside himself *qua* existing person."⁷¹ This is so regardless of the reader's own life-view. If one in fact has an aesthetic work before one, then (at least according to Kierkegaard) the proper way to approach it and to position oneself so as best to appreciate it is to adopt a disinterested stance. Someone whose life-view is itself aesthetic will not even have to shift her frame of mind (for she is already in the habit of being "outside" of herself), whereas an ethically or religiously-minded person will have to shift from employing those capacities that presuppose an infinite personal interest on the part of the individual in question (where the focus is on the individual herself in her capacity as an ethical or religious agent) to employing those capacities that rightly lead her to disregard herself and focus solely on the aesthetic work before her.

But if Kierkegaard's ultimate aim is to get his reader to exercise her ethical and religious capacities, why would he write works that on the face of it seem to invite the reader to neglect those very capacities (and thereby to neglect herself *qua* ethical and religious agent)? If one's aim is to get one's reader to exercise capacities that presuppose an infinite personal interest on her part, then why would one present her with works that seemingly invite her to become disinterested? That would seem to be the last thing she needs, as if one were to offer sweets to a person who stands in need of a more healthy diet. But suppose that a person didn't realize that she was not living well and that a change in diet was in fact just what the doctor had ordered. Suppose, furthermore, that she was under the *illusion* that her present manner of eating actually was supremely healthy. What would be the best way to set about informing her of her condition? If one simply went up to her and said, "You are not eating well; you must change your diet," she would in all likelihood become defensive, perhaps even feel insulted. How dare someone tell *her* that she needs to improve her diet, she who perhaps even prides herself on having always made a point of eating three square meals per day. The illusion that she presently follows a healthy diet stands in the way of directly informing her to the contrary. More indirect means are required.⁷²

Similarly, Kierkegaard thinks that his readers lead lives that fall far short of the Christian ideal; they are ethically and religiously flabby and stand in need of spiritual exercise. He also thinks that part of what keeps them in a spiritually undeveloped state is that they too are under an *illusion*, the illusion that the lives they presently lead are in fact Christian lives. Consider this

passage from *The Point of View*, in which Kierkegaard sketches for the reader what he takes to be the “unhealthy” condition of nineteenth century Christendom:

“Christendom” is an Enormous Illusion

Everyone who in earnest and also with some clarity of vision considers what is called Christendom, or the condition in a so-called Christian country, must without any doubt immediately have serious misgivings. What does it mean, after all, that all these thousands and thousands as a matter of course call themselves Christians! These many, many people, of whom by far the great majority, according to everything that can be discerned, have their lives in entirely different categories, something one can ascertain by the simplest observation! People who perhaps never once go to church, never think about God, never mention his name except when they curse! People to whom it has never occurred that their lives should have some duty to God, people who either maintain that a certain civil impunity is the highest or do not find even this to be entirely necessary! Yet all these people, even those who insist that there is no God, they are all Christians, call themselves Christians, are recognized as Christians by the state, are buried as Christians by the Church, are discharged as Christians to eternity!

That there must be an enormous underlying confusion here, a dreadful illusion, of that there can surely be no doubt.⁷³

Kierkegaard maintains that when people are under the illusion that their lives are in accord with the Christian life-view while the actual character of their lives suggests otherwise, then the normal means of “spreading the word” of Christianity will be ineffective. If a more traditional “religious enthusiast” takes note of the spiritual poverty of people’s lives and then tries to address this using direct means, his efforts will inevitably fall short:

Every once in a while a religious enthusiast appears. He makes an assault on Christendom; he makes a big noise, denounces nearly all as not being Christian—and he accomplishes nothing. He does not take into account that an illusion is not so easy to remove. If it is the case that most people are under an illusion when they call themselves Christians, what do they do about an enthusiast like that? First and foremost, they pay no attention to him at all, do not read his book but promptly lay it *ad acta* [aside]; or if he makes use of the Living Word [e.g., preaching on a corner], they go around on another street and do not listen to him at all....They make him out to be a fanatic and his Christianity to be an exaggeration.⁷⁴

Not only will this more direct approach be ineffective, it may even make matters worse: “By a direct attack he only strengthens a person in the illusion and also infuriates him....If one in any

way causes the one ensnared to set his will in opposition, then all is lost....He shuts himself off from one, shuts himself up in his innermost being—and then one merely preaches to him.”⁷⁵

Kierkegaard claims that in order to make genuine contact with a person under an illusion indirect means must be employed: “An illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly. If it is an illusion that all are Christians, and if something is to be done, it must be done indirectly.”⁷⁶ This distinction between direct and indirect means of engaging a person points to Kierkegaard's often celebrated (but frequently misunderstood) notion of indirect communication.⁷⁷ In simplest terms, direct communication is appropriate in those circumstances where a person “is ignorant and must be given some knowledge” (that which is to be communicated)⁷⁸ and her “ability to receive [what is to be communicated] is entirely in order.”⁷⁹ Kierkegaard compares this sort of person to an “empty vessel that must be filled” or a “blank sheet of paper that must be written upon” (where direct communication is akin to the act of “writing on a blank piece of paper”).⁸⁰ Indirect communication, by contrast, is appropriate in those circumstances where a person is under an illusion or “a delusion [*en Indbildning*] which first must be taken away.”⁸¹ Here, the recipient's ability to receive what is to be communicated is therefore clearly *not* “in order.” Since the “delusion is an obstacle” then “the first step of the communication is to take away [*at tage bort*] the delusion.”⁸²

Given Kierkegaard's comparison of the ignorant person to a blank sheet of paper (upon which whatever is communicated may be inscribed), you might expect that he would compare the person who is deluded to a blank piece of paper that only appears to have been written on (that is, where the deluded person is under the illusion that she is knowledgeable, so thinks she has something substantive inscribed in her soul, when she actually is both ignorant—a blank sheet—and unaware of her ignorance). Somewhat surprisingly, however, this is not the case. Kierkegaard instead compares the person under a delusion not to a blank piece of paper but to a piece of paper that has two layers of writing. The removal of a person's delusion is then said to be akin to “bringing out by means of a corrosive some writing that is concealed under other writing.”⁸³ Since writing was compared to knowing, the image implies that once a person's illusion has been removed (the topmost layer of writing) there will then exist something that she truly knows (a second layer of writing that can now be read). As Kierkegaard's chief concern is to address those who are under the illusion that their lives are Christian “while they live in aesthetic or, at most, aesthetic-ethical categories,” the removal of this illusion will leave a person

with a knowledge of the true character of her life as it is presently constituted.⁸⁴ Removing illusions, then, facilitates self-knowledge. While it may also be true of a person that once an illusion has been removed her ability to receive criticism from another (in the form of direct communication) will then be “in order,” Kierkegaard seems to think that this kind of self-discovery is best left to the individual herself: “a direct attack...contains the presumptuousness of demanding that another person...face-to-face...make the confession that actually is most beneficial when the person concerned makes it to himself secretly...the confession that he has been living in an illusion.”⁸⁵

The person who is under an illusion, then, is taken by Kierkegaard to be someone whose ability to receive direct communication is impaired. To speak directly to her about how her life does not square with what she imagines may simply antagonize her and certainly won't get through. Her ability to hear and truly comprehend any criticism of her life is impaired by the illusion that her life is in fact quite exemplary. It is in response to this condition that Kierkegaard maintains that a deception may be in order. Since straightforward criticism cannot be received as such, one must first seek to remove the illusion that stands in the way: “a corrosive must first be used, but this corrosive...in connection with communicating is precisely to deceive.”⁸⁶ When faced with a reader who is under an illusion, “one does not begin *directly* with what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value”:

One does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely aesthetic categories. No, one begins this way: Let us talk about the aesthetic. The *deception* consists in one's *speaking this way* precisely *in order to arrive* at the religious. But according to the assumption, the other person is in fact under the delusion that the aesthetic is the essentially Christian, since he thinks he is a Christian and yet he lives in aesthetic categories.⁸⁷

While Kierkegaard grants that many may find his use of deception “indefensible” (even those who, “according to their own statements, are accustomed to using the Socratic Method”), he says that he will “calmly stick to Socrates.”⁸⁸ Whatever precisely turns out to be involved in “taking the other's delusion at face value,” the end result is that the reader will be deceived into the truth, thereby obtaining a more accurate understanding of her life as it is, together with a deeper understanding of the Christian ideal that she incorrectly had thought already informed her life.⁸⁹ Kierkegaard's authorship thus has a dual-purpose: “it makes manifest the illusion of Christendom and provides a vision of what it is to become a Christian.”⁹⁰

Since Kierkegaard's principal means of engaging his fellow citizens is through writing, his chief concern becomes determining what writings a religious author should publish once she has become aware of the illusion of Christendom. To begin straightaway with religious writings runs the risk of being dubbed a fanatic and having one's writings remain unread. Because he holds that many of his readers have an aesthetic life-view and are in the habit of enjoying aesthetic productions, Kierkegaard claims that it is here where he or any like-minded religious author should try to make initial contact:

The religious author must first of all try to establish rapport with people. That is, he must begin with an aesthetic piece. This is earnest money. The more brilliant the piece is, the better it is for him....[I]f you are able to do so, portray the aesthetic with all its bewitching charm, if possible captivate the other person, portray it with the kind of passionateness whereby it appeals particularly to him, hilariously to the hilarious, sadly to the sad, wittily to the witty, etc.—but above all do not forget one thing...that it is the religious that is to come forward....[I]f you can very accurately find the place where the other person is and begin there, then you can perhaps have the good fortune of leading him to the place where you are.⁹¹

Kierkegaard's initial aim, then, is to produce writings that he thinks will attract his reader's attention. If she is in the habit of engaging the world from a disinterested, aesthetic standpoint, then he will need to write works that engage this outlook, even if that is not his ultimate aim. One further advantage of writing aesthetic works, especially if one is capable of writing "brilliant" aesthetic works, is that one will thereby increase the initial size of one's potential reading public. Kierkegaard in fact suggests that what is optimal is if the author is so brilliant that his writings cause a "sensation" when they are published, and thereby gain in the process the attention of "the public, which always joins in where something is going on."⁹² In his own case, Kierkegaard claims that the publication of *Either/Or* in particular played just this role within his authorship: "The book was an enormous success, especially 'The Seducer's Diary.'"⁹³ The pseudonym Johannes Climacus concurs with this view, adding that "The Seducer's Diary" was "read most and of course contributed especially to the sensation."⁹⁴

But how exactly is this supposed to help readers to overcome the illusion that they are Christians? It may be the case that those readers who are under this illusion are not, in their present condition, in the habit of exercising their ethical and religious capacities. If one presented them with a work about Christianity and how to become a Christian they would arguably not be

in a position to appreciate it, nor would they think that they were in need of such edification. So Kierkegaard instead publishes a series of works that he dubs his “aesthetic production.” Suppose he attracts some readers. What then? Kierkegaard’s initial answer to this question is somewhat surprising. He claims that his readers’ “being engrossed in the aesthetic” creates a certain “momentum” that the astute religious author knows how to make use of:

[The authorship] begins with the aesthetic, in which possibly most people have their lives, and now the religious is introduced so quickly that those who, moved by the aesthetic, decide to follow along are suddenly standing in the midst of decisive definitions of the Christian and are at least prompted to become *aware*.⁹⁵

Initially this sounds like some sort of bait-and-switch tactic. The successful religious author is someone who is able “to win and capture” her reader “by means of aesthetic portrayal” and who then “knows how to introduce the religious so swiftly that with this momentum of attachment [the reader] runs straight into the most decisive categories of the religious.”⁹⁶ On this picture of things, the main reason for writing aesthetic works is that they enable a religious author to get and hold the attention of a certain aesthetically-inclined reader until suddenly—before she knows it—she no longer is reading aesthetic works and instead finds herself reading and reflecting about the religious and ultimately the specifically Christian. It’s as though you went to what you thought would be an entertaining night at the circus and suddenly found yourself in the midst of a religious revival meeting. But while we might readily imagine such a strange event taking place over the course of a night’s performance or within a single book (where, say, a book started out as a novel but suddenly switched gears and took on the guise of a self-help manual), what Kierkegaard alleges has taken place within his authorship is something that purportedly develops over a number of years and involves several, often quite lengthy books.⁹⁷

It’s important to distinguish two functions that an individual pseudonymous work may serve. On the one hand, it is designed to appeal to a certain reader, to attract her interest by engaging her aesthetic capacities and by taking her “delusion” that she is living a Christian life “at face value.” At the same time, it also plays a role within Kierkegaard’s larger authorship, helping to generate the “momentum” that carries the reader towards a true engagement with the religious and specifically Christian. The reader can thus be deceived in several respects. Insofar as she thinks that a particular work is simply meant for her aesthetic consumption (so really is akin to those aesthetic works that she is in the habit of consuming, where her only role is to be a disinterested spectator who takes enjoyment in the artistry), then she will have been deceived

about this work's having a fundamentally different aim: to engage her, to make her aware that her life is not what she imagines it to be. She will fail to appreciate, in short, that this is an aesthetic work that uncharacteristically requires of its reader that she take up an *interested* stance with respect to her own life. Insofar as she thinks that a particular work is what it is and only that, then she will have been deceived about this work's being but one step in a larger process, where the ultimate aim of the authorship to which it is but one element is to lead her towards the religious. In *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard does not address in any detail how he thinks individual pseudonymous works achieve the aim of engaging and either removing or contributing to the removal of a reader's illusion (we will address this further in sections 2.4 and 2.6). He simply notes that if one is dealing with an illusion, then indirect communication is necessary. Since the reader is under an illusion, one will not be able to start straightaway with one's real concern, but must instead start where the reader is, engage her illusion and only later, after significant work on her part (the nature of which is largely left unspecified in *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*), will one be able to engage her more directly.

Kierkegaard's aim in these two works consists of an attempt to provide his readers with something like an architectonic of the entire authorship and to convince them in the process that his authorship as a whole has a religious point of view. In fact, at one point, Kierkegaard even suggests that if you want to understand *him* and his activity as an author, then what is crucial is not whether you understand a given aesthetic work in itself but that you come to appreciate its significance within the larger authorship:

How far a so-called aesthetic public has found or would be able to find some enjoyment [*Nydelse*] through reading aesthetic works, or through reading aesthetic works in the authorship [*den Produktivitet*], which are an incognito and a deception in the service of Christianity, is naturally a matter of complete indifference to me; for I am a religious author. Supposing that such a reader perfectly understands and judges a particular aesthetic publication, he will [nevertheless] totally misunderstand *me* since he does not understand *it* in the religious totality of my work as an author. Supposing, on the other hand, that someone who understands my work as an author in its religious totality does not, perhaps, understand a particular aesthetic publication in the authorship—then this misunderstanding is only incidental.⁹⁸

Kierkegaard in fact invites readers of *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* to conceive of the first group of pseudonymous works (the aesthetic production published from 1843-1845) as jointly constituting a path along which he hopes to lead his reader: from the aesthetic life-view, where he locates many of his contemporaries, towards the determinately Christian view of life. Furthermore, he claims that the second group of pseudonymous works, consisting solely of the *Postscript*, has as one of its concerns first to draw attention to the path being traced by the first group of pseudonymous writings and then to trace a second path from what might be called the speculative life-view (the outlook typically adopted by modern, Hegelian-style philosophers).⁹⁹ Thus, according to Kierkegaard, the first two groups of pseudonymous writings chart two paths, either of which a person living in nineteenth century Christendom may need to follow if she is to arrive at a more authentic relationship with Christianity:

The movement the authorship describes is: *from* “the poet”—from the aesthetic, *from* “the philosopher”—from the speculative *to* the indication of the most inward determination of the essentially Christian; **from** the *pseudonymous Either/Or* **through** *Concluding Postscript*, with *my name as editor*, **to** *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*.

After first having appropriated all of the pseudonymous aesthetic production as a description of one way along which one may go to becoming a Christian—*back* from the aesthetic to becoming a Christian, [the *Postscript*] describes the second way—*back* from the system, the speculative, etc. to becoming a Christian.

The task that is to be assigned to most people in Christendom is: [to move] *from* “the poet” or from relating oneself to and having one’s life in what the poet recites, *from* speculation [or] from the fantasy (which, in addition, is impossible) of having one’s life in speculating (instead of existing) *to* becoming a Christian....The movement is **back**, and even though it is all done *without authority*, there is still something in the tone that is reminiscent of a policeman when he says to a crowd: Move back! This is indeed why more than one of the pseudonymous writers calls himself a policeman, a street inspector.¹⁰⁰

The image of a path along which his reader needs to travel suggests that Kierkegaard envisions that she must undergo over the course of several books a kind of existential journey, in which she slowly is weaned away from the kind of life she has been leading and reacquainted with or introduced for the first time to lives that are existentially more developed.¹⁰¹ So, for example,

Kierkegaard argues that in his first pseudonymous work the reader is led part of the way along the first path: “The transition made in *Either/Or* is really from a poet existence to existing ethically.”¹⁰² He contends, however, that “understood in the totality of [his] entire work as an author, it of course holds true that one must move away from or back from ‘the poet’ in a far deeper sense than the second part of *Either/Or* could explain.”¹⁰³ He seems to imagine that his reader will begin with *Either/Or* and continue reading all of the pseudonymous works that make up the aesthetic production as they’re published and in the order in which they’re published.¹⁰⁴ In the process, she will encounter dramatic depictions of lives that place a greater and greater emphasis on the ethical and religious development of the individual until finally she is brought face to face with what Kierkegaard holds to be authentic Christianity. He notes that “as early as *Fear and Trembling* [1843], the earnest observer who himself has religious presuppositions at his disposal...became aware that this surely was a very singular kind of aesthetic production.”¹⁰⁵

While the 1843-1845 pseudonymous works are held by Kierkegaard to jointly delineate one path back to Christianity (back from the aesthetic life-view, where the path’s trajectory is traced over seven books), he claims that the *Postscript* (and arguably by implication *Philosophical Fragments*, to which it is a postscript) serves to trace a second path along which some readers may need to be led (back from the speculative): “*Concluding Postscript*..., by means of indirect fencing and Socratic dialectic, mortally wounds ‘the system’—from behind, fighting against the system and speculative thought....”¹⁰⁶ Recall, however, that Kierkegaard denies that the *Postscript* is either an aesthetic production or strictly speaking a religious work.¹⁰⁷ He claims that it serves as a kind of “turning point in the whole authorship,” marking both the end of the aesthetic production and the transition from the directly religious edifying speeches to the purely religious ones.¹⁰⁸ It is this book, according to Kierkegaard, that for the first time explicitly “deals with and poses ‘the issue,’ the issue of [his] entire work as an author: becoming a Christian.”¹⁰⁹ One difference, then, between the aesthetic production and the *Postscript* that may help to explain why Kierkegaard denies that the latter is an aesthetic work is that the *Postscript* makes explicit what only remains implicit as a final goal in the earlier pseudonymous writings.

From a bird’s-eye view, then, Kierkegaard conceives of the first two groups of his pseudonymous writings as serving to lead his readers along two paths towards Christianity. Insofar as a reader does not realize this when she takes up one of these works, then she may be

deceived. While Kierkegaard claims that the best way for a religious author such as himself to begin is by writing an aesthetic work that causes a huge sensation (as *Either/Or* did in his own case), he also acknowledges that he fully expects the total number of his readers to dwindle as his books develop (moving from the superficial many to the more existentially dedicated few). The aim is to make initial contact with the larger public, ensuring that he reaches as many as possible of those who are only accustomed to reading aesthetic works and whose lives are organized around aesthetic categories. But as the pseudonymous works progress, leading readers further along the path towards the specifically Christian (beginning arguably even as early as the second volume of *Either/Or*), Kierkegaard maintains that these works will begin to “shake off ‘the crowd’ in order to get hold of ‘the single individual,’ [ethically and] religiously understood.”¹¹⁰ One result of this individuating process, according to Kierkegaard, is that many of the readers who were initially titillated by “The Seducer’s Diary” will simply become bored by his increasing emphasis on ethical and religious matters:

Gradually, as I moved ahead [with the pseudonymous works] and that public of [so-called] Christians became aware, or came to suspect...that I might not be so downright bad, the public dropped off more and more, and little by little I began to fall into the boring categories of the good—while I, who walked alongside in the upbuilding discourses, saw with joy that “that single individual, whom I with joy and gratitude call *my* reader,” became more than one, a somewhat more numerous category, but certainly not any public.¹¹¹

Kierkegaard seems to think that by the time of the exclusively religious writings (beginning in 1847) many of his initial readers have fallen away, but he still remains hopeful that a few of them might eventually begin reading his works again. This is one of the reasons he gives for publishing the 1848 aesthetic article:

It was all right with that little article....[P]erhaps the habit of thinking that I have become earnest will be broken and the thrust will be all the more powerful. Those who live aesthetically here at home have no doubt given up reading me since I “have gone religious and do not write anything but sermon books.” Now maybe they will peek into the next book, hoping to find something for them—and perhaps I will get the attention of one or two of them.¹¹²

This does not mean, however, that Kierkegaard thinks that what his readers are being asked to leave behind as they make the existential journey through the pseudonymous works is therefore

trivial. In fact he claims that since one “does not reflect himself into being a Christian but out of something else in order to become a Christian...the nature of the something else determines how deep, how significant the movement of reflection is.” The greater “the value and significance of what is left behind,” the greater the existential “distance” that a person must travel on her way to becoming a Christian.¹¹³ This is also why, in Kierkegaard's view, his task as an a writer and thinker has been so difficult: “Precisely because it centered upon reflecting Christianity out of an extreme sophistication, refinement, scholarly-scientific confusion, etc., I myself had to have all that refinement, sensitive in one sense as a poet, [while also possessing] pure intellect as a thinker.”¹¹⁴

2.4 Socratic Midwifery

In the previous section we examined Kierkegaard's claim that the pseudonymous works were written in response to a situation in which his contemporaries have fallen under the illusion that they are Christians while they lead lives that are structured by what Kierkegaard takes to be existentially less developed life-views. We saw that in *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* Kierkegaard describes in general terms the paths along which he thinks his readers must be led, but does not discuss in much detail how his individual pseudonymous works actually engage their readers. He does not, for example, address the significance of these works' being *pseudonymous* and how this might bear on the type of interaction that is possible between a given reader and the fictional character who is represented to be the (pseudonymous) author of the work in question, not to mention how this might bear on the reader's relationship to the author behind the pseudonymous authors, to Søren Kierkegaard himself. Even though Kierkegaard does not address in any detail in these two books about his authorship the specific means by which his individual pseudonymous works are designed to engage the reader, he does provide us with what I take to be a small hint or clue about where to look if we want to investigate further the Socratic nature of these writings. What I have in mind is Kierkegaard's use in *On My Work as an Author* of the Socratically-charged term “maieutic.” In addition to his claim that the Socratic aim of the pseudonymous works is “to deceive [the reader] into the truth,” Kierkegaard also characterizes this aim by appealing to Socrates' art of midwifery (*maieutikê technê*): “It began, maieutically, with aesthetic publication, and the entire pseudonymous

production is maieutic in nature. Therefore this production was also pseudonymous, whereas the directly religious...carried my name."¹¹⁵ It's worth noting that Kierkegaard claims here that it is *because* these works are "maieutic in nature" that he has chosen not to publish them under his own name and instead has made them pseudonymous. The maieutic, then, is expressly tied to the use of pseudonyms and thereby to indirect communication: "I began with pseudonyms, who represent indirect communication, which I have not employed under my own name."¹¹⁶ Thus while in "My Task" Kierkegaard openly claims that it is he who has adopted the Socratic stance of someone who denies that he is a Christian, here he seems to restrict the use of what might be called a Socratic method to what unfolds by way of the pseudonymous works and his use of pseudonyms. Even as Kierkegaard may be the creator of literary characters (the pseudonyms) who employ a means of engaging their readers that involves Socrates' art of midwifery, it seems important to him at this point in the development of his thinking that he personally not be identified with the use of such methods (we will return to this topic below in section 2.6).

In the first instance what Kierkegaard draws our attention to here is simply the structural relationship that we investigated in the previous section, where, according to him, the pseudonymous works (most notably those that make up the aesthetic production) serve as a deception in relation to the religious aim that purportedly informs his authorship as a whole: "The maieutic lies in the relation *between* the aesthetic production as the beginning and the religious as the *telos* [goal]."¹¹⁷ In keeping with the image of there being a path that these works jointly constitute, Kierkegaard also seems to hold that each pseudonymous work prepares the way for the next work:

[A]fter five years of having the chance to learn from me how maieutically I proceed....these confounded people [the speculative philosophers and some of the clergy] muddle into one speech all that I develop piece by piece in big books, always leaving behind in each book one stinger that is its connection with the next.¹¹⁸

This emphasis on the structural relationships that the pseudonymous works have both with the religious writings and with each other also squares with Kierkegaard's later claim that he does not in fact address the nature of the pseudonyms themselves in any detail in either *The Point of View* or *On My Work as an Author*: "I do not discuss the pseudonyms directly in the books about my authorship or identify with them but merely show their significance with respect to the maieutic."¹¹⁹ But Kierkegaard also points, or so I want to argue, to a further sense in which an individual pseudonymous work might itself have a maieutic aim. In describing what he calls "the

movement” of his authorship (from the aesthetic or the speculative towards the Christian), Kierkegaard ties the maieutic effects of his unfolding authorship to a process whereby readers are singled out as individuals:

Here the beginning is made, maieutically, with a sensation, and what belongs to it, the public...; and the movement was, maieutically, to shake off “the crowd”¹²⁰ in order to get hold of “the single individual,” religiously understood.¹²¹

It is this idea, that the maieutic nature of the pseudonymous works equips them with the Socratic ability to get “hold of people individually,” that I think contains a clue for our continuing search for the Socratic within Kierkegaard’s authorship.¹²² Since, however, Kierkegaard does not address these matters in any detail in either *The Point of View* or *On My Work as an Author*, if we want to get clearer about what it might mean for an individual pseudonymous work to be maieutic or for a pseudonym to enter into a maieutic relationship with the reader, then we will have to look elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s corpus to clarify his conception of maieutic method. With that end in view, it may be helpful to begin by examining the passage in Plato’s *Theaetetus* where the image of Socrates as a midwife is first introduced.¹²³

One of the central images that guides Kierkegaard’s thinking about Socrates and the Socratic more generally is that of the philosophical midwife.¹²⁴ Socrates maintains in Plato’s *Theaetetus* that in addition to being “the son of a good hefty midwife” (his mother, Phaenarete), he is also himself a practitioner of the art of midwifery.¹²⁵ This revelation comes as a surprise to the young Theaetetus. While he has certainly “heard reports of the questions” that Socrates asks and how people often say that he is a “very odd sort of person” who is always “reducing people to perplexity,” he has never heard it said about Socrates that he is a midwife or that he employs a maieutic method.¹²⁶ Socrates admits that this is not something that is well known about him (he even claims that it is “a secret” that he possesses this art), but he nevertheless suggests that by comparing what is commonly known about midwifery to his manner of doing philosophy he will be able to explain to Theaetetus why people say the sorts of things they sometimes say about him.¹²⁷

Let’s recall briefly a few of the chief points that Socrates draws attention to. First off, he notes one important difference between his art and that characteristically practiced by midwives such as his mother: “The difference is that I attend men and not women, and that I watch over the labor of their souls, not of their bodies.”¹²⁸ According to Socrates, midwives are able to detect

“whether women are pregnant or not” and have “the power to bring on [labor] pains, and also, if they think fit, to relieve them; they do it by the use of simple drugs, and by singing incantations. In difficult cases, too, they can bring about the birth; or, if they consider it advisable, they can promote a miscarriage.”¹²⁹ Socrates claims that in his own case, he too can determine whether or not the person he converses with is (intellectually or spiritually) pregnant. In those cases where people “do not seem to [him] somehow to be pregnant,” he concludes that they have “no need of [him].”¹³⁰ For those, such as Theaetetus, who do seem “pregnant and in labor,” Socrates claims that his maieutic art “is able to bring on, and also to allay” the pains that are associated with this condition.¹³¹ Critical to this image is the fact that the midwife is not involved in procreating. Her (or his) role is to detect when someone else has become pregnant and to assist that person in giving birth. Socrates notes that he himself is “barren of wisdom”:

The common reproach against me is that I am always asking questions of other people but never express my own views about anything,¹³² because there is no wisdom in me; and that is true enough. And the reason of it is this, that the god compels me to be a midwife [*maieuesthai*], but has prevented me from procreating [*gennan*]. So that I am not in any sense a wise man; I cannot claim as the child of my own soul any discovery worth the name of wisdom.¹³³

In addition to his being intellectually childless, Socrates maintains that this barrenness (his ignorance) also keeps him from intellectually impregnating others. His role is strictly that of a midwife. Yet he admits that occasionally some of “those who associate with [him],” the ones “whom the god permits,” are “seen to make progress.” Socrates denies, however, that this is “due to anything they have learned from [him]” (and so rejects any attributions of paternity), instead maintaining that those who make progress “discover *within themselves* a multitude of beautiful things, which they bring forth into the light.”¹³⁴ But while he denies that he is the intellectual source of what they discover within themselves, it still remains his role in his capacity as midwife (“with the god’s help”) to “deliver them of this offspring.”¹³⁵ Socrates underlines the importance of having a midwife such as he by noting that sometimes those who seem to make progress take “all the credit to themselves” and “leave [him] sooner than they should.” In such cases, “what remain[s] within them” frequently miscarries while they neglect and often lose “the children [he] helped them to bring forth.”¹³⁶

In addition to the fact that Socrates’ maieutic art concerns itself with souls rather than bodies, Socrates notes one further respect in which philosophical midwifery differs from its

medical counterpart. While both types of midwifery concern themselves with detecting pregnancy, regulating labor pains and assisting a person to give birth, the philosophical midwife's job does not stop once the child has been delivered since, unlike in the case of bodily pregnancy, those who are intellectually pregnant are "sometimes delivered of phantoms and sometimes of realities" and "the two are hard to distinguish."¹³⁷ It is the philosophical midwife's job, according to Socrates, to determine whether what has been given birth to has genuine intellectual worth, or whether it is something false or confused that only has the appearance of being true:

The most important thing about my art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth.¹³⁸

By means of this claim, Socrates makes clear to Theaetetus that in conversing with him not only may he have to undergo the pains associated with being in labor and giving birth, but even after undergoing such an endeavor that which he gives birth to may not always turn out to be a genuine intellectual child. In fact, while the possibility of giving birth to a genuine intellectual child is allowed for, one might expect that a typical encounter with Socrates will result in the determination that what a person has given birth to is in fact a phantom or what Socrates later calls "a wind-egg."¹³⁹

By alerting Theaetetus to this possibility, Socrates prepares the ground for those cases where despite one's having engaged in a great deal of self-examination and intellectual work what emerges nevertheless still does not stand up to philosophical scrutiny. In such a case the philosophical midwife's job then becomes that of separating the phantom offspring from its perhaps unduly proud new parent: "When I examine what you say, [Theaetetus,] I may perhaps think it is a phantom and not truth, and proceed to take it quietly from you and abandon it."¹⁴⁰ But not all new parents are so readily willing to part with their children, and many may find it difficult to acknowledge that what they have given birth to are mere wind-eggs. Socrates therefore asks Theaetetus to try not to become too protective or possessive of such things, noting that in the past some interlocutors have become so defensive and riled up as to want to attack him when he tries to take away from them a confusion or falsehood:

Now if this happens, you mustn't get savage with me, like a mother over her first-born child. Do you know, people have often before now got into such a state with me as to be literally ready to

bite when I take away some nonsense [*lêron*] or other from them. They never believe I am doing this in all goodwill;...I don't do this kind of thing out of malice, but because it is not permitted to me to accept a lie and put away the truth.¹⁴¹

Despite the difficulties that may be involved in getting a person to give up a phantom child, Socrates notes that the process whereby a person gives birth to this, exposes it to philosophical examination and ultimately has it taken from her is still an undertaking that improves her overall condition. At the end of the *Theaetetus* Socrates concludes that while his art of midwifery has helped them to determine that all of the children to which Theaetetus has given birth are “wind-eggs” and so “not worth bringing up” (this is perhaps the quintessential Socratic outcome), this activity has nevertheless left Theaetetus in an improved condition where his “companions will find [him] gentler and less tiresome.”¹⁴² Addressing Theaetetus, Socrates draws attention to what he takes to be the chief result of his art of midwifery: “You will be modest and not think you know what you don't know. That is all my art can achieve—nothing more.”¹⁴³ Even though he has not given birth to any genuine intellectual children, Theaetetus now has a greater awareness of his own limitations (he has increased his self-knowledge) and has become less prone to that disgraceful form of ignorance characteristically targeted by Socrates.

For our present purposes, it is important to note two things. First, even if a person does not give birth to a true intellectual child this is not to say that this process has been fruitless. Those cases where what one gives birth to turns out to be a wind-egg or a confusion that must be taken away nicely correspond to the type of case that concerns Kierkegaard, where a person is under the illusion about what kind of life she is living. She thinks she knows something that she does not, and only by examining herself and giving expression to what she discovers (and then having this tested) will she gain a greater self-awareness and acquire better habits of mind. Second, the philosophical midwife's role has two aspects to it: (1) a *diagnostic* aspect, involving the ability to detect pregnancy in the first place and later to determine whether that which has been given birth to is a truth or a confusion; and (2) a *therapeutic* aspect, involving the ability to bring about the birth and to take any confusions away from the interlocutor. While the diagnosis of what ails his fellow citizens is something that is on display in many of Kierkegaard's works, including the works about his authorship that we've been considering, Kierkegaard tends to emphasize in his discussions of maieutic method what all is involved with the successful

therapeutic engagement of an interlocutor, together with what he thinks an interlocutor gains from such an encounter.

It's also worth noting that unlike Socrates, who seems to allow in his discussion with Theaetetus that some human beings might be capable of impregnating others intellectually (even as he claims that he himself is incapable of this due to his ignorance), Kierkegaard holds that at least when it comes to the ethical and the religious no one can do more for another person than to serve as a midwife.¹⁴⁴ Speaking of Socrates, he writes:

This noble rogue had understood in the profound sense that the highest [task] one human being can perform for another is to make him free, help him to stand by himself—and he had also understood himself in understanding this, that is, he had understood that if this is to be done the helper must be able to make himself hidden, must magnanimously will to annihilate himself. In the spiritual sense he was, as he called himself, a midwife.¹⁴⁵

This thought is echoed by Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus, who maintains that “*between* one human being and another” the “highest” relation that one can have is that of being a midwife:

Socrates remained true to himself and artistically exemplified what he had understood. He was and continued to be a midwife...because he perceived that this relation is the highest relation a human being can have to another.¹⁴⁶

This is to treat what Socrates ties to his ignorance (that those with whom he converses do not learn from him—or become impregnated by him with—whatever they discover within themselves) as an essential characteristic of the human condition; on this view, no human being is *capable* of intellectually impregnating another with the truth (ethically and religiously speaking).¹⁴⁷ Climacus seems to restrict this capacity to the divine: “giving birth [*at føde*] indeed belongs to the god.”¹⁴⁸ In his translation of *Fragments*, David Swenson translates “at føde” in this passage as “begetting,” which better captures what is being assigned to the god: the capacity to impregnate a person in a spiritual or intellectual sense.¹⁴⁹ This line of interpretation is also arguably supported by *Tht.* 150d, where Socrates ties any real progress that is made by those with whom he converses to what has been granted to them by the god. Of course, we might want to restrict any attributions of paternity to the god to those cases where genuine intellectual children are the result, while wind-eggs (so the illusions people fall under) are perhaps best

thought of as having been produced by a given individual herself (possibly with the assistance of some sophistical companion).

Kierkegaard maintains that the chief benefit that an interlocutor obtains from interacting with a Socrates is a kind of freedom, in which she is thrown back on her own resources and thus comes (ethically and religiously) to stand on her own.¹⁵⁰ The pseudonym Anti-Climacus puts it this way: “a maieutic teacher [seeks]...to turn the other person away from him, to turn him inward in order to make him free.”¹⁵¹ Kierkegaard notes, however, that this seemingly involves a kind of paradox. The interlocutor is supposed to become “self-active” (to come to exercise her own capacities of self-reflection and self-examination), but she remains dependent on the midwife’s assistance, giving us the following structure: “to stand alone—through another’s help.”¹⁵² In Kierkegaard’s view, for this process to work the midwife must *hide* the fact that she is helping the interlocutor: “this is the art, to have been able to do everything for the other person and pretend as if one had done nothing at all.”¹⁵³ She must disguise herself and not appear to be someone to whom another might look for guidance:

The communicator in a sense disappears....This deception signifies that the communicator first and foremost does not seem to be an earnest man. There is really nothing people want to do more than to mimic....[I]f [the interlocutor] is going to stand alone—through another’s help, then he must by no means have any conception of this other as advantageous, for this...usually becomes a hindrance to his standing alone.¹⁵⁴

Thus there is a certain kind of “moral character which is needed in order to be a maieutic.”¹⁵⁵ Once the midwife takes on the appearance of one who “seems much lowlier” than she is, in effect deceiving the interlocutor about her true inner nature by assuming a disguise, part of the moral test for her becomes whether she can maintain this disguise: “the art consists in enduring everything while remaining faithful to character in the deception and faithful to the ethical.”¹⁵⁶ For example, if she is a religious individual the test becomes whether she can “endure being regarded as the only one who [is] not religious.”¹⁵⁷ Of Socrates Kierkegaard adds, “how much misunderstanding he had to endure from the one he helped by taking away from him his fatuities and tricking him into the truth.”¹⁵⁸ While the idea of disguising oneself might seem dubious or perhaps even unethical, Kierkegaard maintains that “if it is true that every human being has to help himself, if it is the ideal to stand alone, then it is entirely valid to prevent the one who is being helped from becoming dependent upon the helper—for in that case he is not helped.”¹⁵⁹

Kierkegaard's view that the therapeutic aspect of Socratic midwifery involves the assuming of a disguise or incognito on the part of the midwife arguably stems from another Platonic image of Socrates, this time taken from the *Symposium*. In his speech about Socrates, Alcibiades compares him to a hollow statue of the satyr Silenus, whose outward appearance (a Dionysian figure who enjoys playing the flute) stands in contrast to the "tiny statues of the gods" that are to be found inside.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Alcibiades claims that Socrates' outward appearance sharply contrasts with his true inner nature:

In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game—a game of irony. I don't know if any of you have seen him when he's really serious. But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus' statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing.¹⁶¹

When Socrates appears as someone who is "crazy about beautiful boys," always following "them around in a perpetual daze," and as someone who likes to say "he's ignorant and knows nothing," this stands in contrast, according to Alcibiades, to "what a sober and temperate man he proves to be."¹⁶² While Kierkegaard does not necessarily endorse everything Alcibiades says here, he does happily take on board the image of Socrates as one who has mastered the art of appearing other than he is.¹⁶³ For Kierkegaard, this is but a further aspect of the "time and industry and art" that are required "to deceive the other into the truth."¹⁶⁴

2.5 Kierkegaard's Incognito and the Role of "Governance"

Before we examine further the topic of what it might mean for an individual pseudonymous work to be maieutic or for one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms to enter into a maieutic relationship with the reader, I want to address a related notion that arises in the context of Kierkegaard's conception of Socratic midwifery and that constitutes a second aspect of what I've been calling Kierkegaard's Socratic method. In addition to his use of a pseudonymous manner of writing to Socratically deceive his readers, Kierkegaard also claims to have assumed a series of disguises or incognitos in his personal interactions with his contemporaries. In a passage where he once again invokes Socrates, Kierkegaard maintains that a full understanding of his authorship is bound up with an understanding of the manner in which he has personally existed *qua* author:

What also belongs to an understanding of the totality of my work as an author, its maieutic purpose, etc. is an understanding of my personal existence as an author, what I *qua* author have done with my personal existence to support [*understøtte*] my authorship, illuminate it, conceal it, give it direction, etc., something which is more complicated than and just as interesting as the whole literary activity. . . . That Socrates belonged together with what he taught, that his teaching ended in him, that he himself was his teaching, in the setting of actuality was himself artistically a product of that which he taught—we have learned to rattle this off by rote but have scarcely understood it.¹⁶⁵

Kierkegaard devotes an entire chapter in *The Point of View* to this topic, and seems to model his understanding of himself on the image of Socrates that we discussed at the end of the last section, where the sense in which Socrates “belonged together with what he taught” was captured by Alcibiades’ comparison of him to a hollow statue of Silenus, whose coarse outer appearance keeps hidden something divine within.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Kierkegaard claims to have assumed a particular disguise or incognito in “the way [he] existed publicly” during the period when he was publishing the (pseudonymous) aesthetic production:

Here was a religious author, but one who began as an aesthetic author, and this first part was the incognito, was the deception.

If Copenhagen was ever of one single opinion about someone, I dare say it has been of one opinion about me: I was a street-corner loafer, an idler, a *flâneur*, a frivolous bird, a good, perhaps even brilliant pate, witty, etc.—but I completely lacked “earnestness.” I represented the irony of worldliness, the enjoyment of life, the most sophisticated enjoyment of life—but of “earnestness and positivity” there was not a trace; I was, however, tremendously interesting and pungent.

The irony consisted in just this, that in this aesthetic author and under this *Erscheinung* [appearance] of worldliness the religious author concealed himself, a religious author who at that very time and for his own upbuilding perhaps consumed as much religiousness as a whole household ordinarily does.¹⁶⁷

On the face of it, it might seem as though Kierkegaard means to equate this appearance of being a loafer and of being someone who acquired a certain “vogue” with the public by “proclaiming a gospel of worldliness” with whatever significance he thinks should be tied to the pseudonymous works.¹⁶⁸ It can look, that is, as if the contrast he wishes to draw between appearing to be an aesthete while secretly being a religious individual nicely corresponds to the contrast he draws between his two genres of writing, the pseudonymous works (most of which he calls “aesthetic”)

and the edifying speeches (which represent the religiousness that Kierkegaard claims to have initially kept hidden).¹⁶⁹

This is certainly how this disguise has often been treated by readers of *The Point of View*. Kierkegaard claims that by assuming this incognito in public, he thereby sought to “support the aesthetic production”: “By means of my personal existing I attempted to support the pseudonyms and the entire aesthetic production.”¹⁷⁰ One way to understand what Kierkegaard means here by “support” is to take him to be claiming that he adopts the guise of an aesthete because that is the life-view that informs the pseudonymous works. But that would be to treat these works as aesthetic in the second sense of “aesthetic” that we discussed above, which I argued was certainly not compulsory and in my view does not adequately capture what Kierkegaard means when he calls these works his “aesthetic production” (see section 2.2). While it is true that the issue of becoming a Christian is not explicitly addressed in the aesthetic production, this is not to say that these pseudonymous works should be conceived of as merely representing the worldly and the life of enjoyment or to have been written from an aesthetic point of view. In fact, Kierkegaard seems to have assigned a different significance to his having adopted the incognito of a loafer. He claims that the main value of “being seen at every time of day, living, so to speak, on the street, associating with every Tom, Dick, and Harry and in the most casual situations” is that this is a way “to *weaken* the impression of oneself in the world....If the author just lives in this way, he will in a very short time have safeguarded himself against worldly esteem and against the bestial flattery of the crowd.”¹⁷¹ To demonstrate the lengths to which he would go to uphold this incognito, Kierkegaard describes what he did just prior to the publication of *Either/Or*:

When I was reading proof pages of *Either/Or*, I was so busy that it was impossible for me to spend the usual time strolling up and down the street. I did not finish until late in the evening—and then...I hurried to the theater, where I literally was present only five to ten minutes. And why did I do that? Because I was afraid that the big book would bring me too much esteem. And why did I do that? Because I knew people, especially in Copenhagen; to be seen every night for five minutes by several hundred people was enough to sustain the opinion: So he doesn't do a single thing; he is nothing but a street-corner loafer [*Dagdriver*].¹⁷²

The desire to avoid worldly esteem might seem to be in tension with Kierkegaard's earlier claim that he wrote aesthetic works in order to engage the public and to draw in readers who are

accustomed to conceiving of their own lives primarily through the use of aesthetic categories (see section 2.3). Doesn't he in fact want the public's esteem? In effect Kierkegaard seems to be trying to walk a fine line between, on the one hand, desiring that his writings produce a "sensation" with the public in order to attract potential readers, while he also claims here to have adopted the incognito of a loafer to limit how much public esteem he receives. No attention, no readership; too much attention or the wrong sort and perhaps this will interfere with the maieutic aim of the pseudonymous works. In particular Kierkegaard seems to have in mind a desire to avoid appearing as someone who others might try to imitate, since the whole point of the maieutic relationship is that the interlocutor is thrown back on herself and helped to become self-active and to stand alone: "An author essentially educated by Socrates and the Greeks and with a grasp of irony begins an enormous literary activity; he specifically does not want to be an *authority* and with that in mind quite properly sees that by continually walking the streets he must inevitably minimize the impression he makes."¹⁷³

For our purposes it will suffice if we can see our way past the idea that Kierkegaard conceives of the "support" that his incognito provides the pseudonyms as the mere underwriting of a kind of worldliness that they supposedly represent. Instead I think we need to keep in mind that Kierkegaard conceives of the first two groups of the pseudonymous works (the aesthetic production and the *Postscript*) as serving to lead readers from the outermost existential regions of the aesthetic and the speculative towards the Christianly religious (by way of the ethical and the more generically religious—see section 2.3). While part of the seriousness of the pseudonymous works is their supposed ability to engage the illusions of readers and to generate a kind of momentum such that before they know it they are suddenly face to face with the religious, this is not to say that readers will have no genuine encounters with the ethical or the religious within the pseudonymous works themselves. Consider the significance Kierkegaard attaches to his appearing as a loafer in relation to the publication of the pseudonymous work *Fear and Trembling*:

Oh, once I am dead, *Fear and Trembling* will be enough for an imperishable name as an author. Then it will be read, translated into foreign languages as well. The reader will almost shrink from the frightful pathos in the book. But when it was written, when the person thought to be the author was going about in the incognito of an idler [*flâneur*], appearing to be flippancy, wittiness, and irresponsibility personified, no one was able to grasp its

earnestness. O you fools, the book was never as earnest as then. Precisely that was the authentic expression of the horror. For the author to appear earnest would have diminished the horror....[W]hen I am dead, an imaginary character will be conjured up for me, a dark, somber figure—and then the book will be terrifying.¹⁷⁴

Here Kierkegaard draws a contrast between the “frightful pathos” found in *Fear and Trembling* and his appearing in public as a flippant, witty gent. The contrast, then, is not between a so-called aesthetic work (supported by Kierkegaard’s appearing as an aesthete) and the signed religious writings, but between the topic under investigation in a pseudonymous work (in this case whether or not there can be religious trials that seemingly require a person to suspend the moral law, as when Yahweh commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac) and Kierkegaard’s appearing to be a loafer, someone who presumably wouldn’t have the wherewithal to compose such profound and existentially challenging works.

In my view Kierkegaard’s incognito during this period of his life is best conceived of as analogous in function to that of the aesthetic literary form that he gives to some of his pseudonymous works. Both are akin to Socrates’ outward appearance as someone whose life is “one big game—a game of irony.”¹⁷⁵ At the same time, both Kierkegaard himself and the pseudonyms conceal behind this aesthetic form an ethical and religious seriousness that is akin to the “sober and temperate” nature that Alcibiades claims Socrates keeps hidden.¹⁷⁶ While Kierkegaard never to my knowledge directly appeals to this image of Socrates to characterize how he conceives of his and the pseudonyms’ joint enterprise, he does claim that during this period “it was a Greek principle that [he] existentially expressed.”¹⁷⁷ He seems to conceive of his maintaining this incognito as itself an “artistic exertion,” a form of self-mastery that enables him to “support [his] production” and to “support the illusion that [he] was not an author.”¹⁷⁸ By weakening the impression that he makes on his contemporaries and by appearing as a loafer, and so as someone who would not be capable of producing a body of work as impressive and existentially challenging as the seven pseudonymous works that comprise the aesthetic production, Kierkegaard thereby ensured that he “could work as hard as [he] pleased, and as the spirit prompted [him], without being afraid of gaining too much esteem.”¹⁷⁹ With the shift in his authorship from the use of indirect communication and the pseudonymous works to the more exclusively religious works, Kierkegaard claims that it was necessary for him, in turn, to change his incognito, to seek “a supporting existence-form corresponding to that kind of work as an

author.”¹⁸⁰ Thus he draws a distinction between what we might call the Socratic mode that characterizes the pseudonymous works and the manner in which he presented himself during that time and a new mode of existence that better corresponds to his stepping forward more directly as a religious author: “The entire pseudonymous production and my life in relation to it was in the *Greek* mode. Now I must find the characteristic Christian life-form.”¹⁸¹

If we step back for a moment and consider some of the claims that Kierkegaard has developed about his authorship in *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*, it's hard not to wonder whether things could really have unfolded in the way he contends. If we are to believe Kierkegaard, then he has composed a Socratically structured body of writings on a scale perhaps never before encountered. Upon diagnosing that his fellow citizens were under the illusion that they were Christians while their lives were governed by much less existentially developed life-views, Kierkegaard claims that he proceeded to employ a maieutic method to treat this condition, both through his use of a pseudonymous manner of writing and through appearing to his contemporaries as a loafer. If, as I've argued, the pseudonyms are best conceived of as serving in partnership with him in this Socratic endeavor, then Kierkegaard almost seems to emerge as a kind of conductor of an elaborate symphony orchestra, someone who employs indirection and irony and who directs a whole host of fictional characters, all with the aim of making his readers aware of the present condition of their lives together with a clearer conception of what it is to be a Christian. But there is one further twist that I have not yet brought forward. Kierkegaard in fact denies that he was fully aware from the beginning that his authorship would have the overarching aim that he now thinks it has; instead, he seems to conceive of his authorship as something that has often unfolded without any clear intention on his part and that he only comes to understand through the writing process itself, frequently only after the fact when looking back at what he has written:

It has been inexplicable to me...that when I did something and could not possibly say why or it did not occur to me to ask why, when I as a very specific person followed the prompting of my natural impulses, that this, which for me had a purely personal meaning bordering on the accidental, that this then turned out to have a totally different, purely ideal meaning when seen later within my work as an author; that much of what I had done purely personally was strangely enough precisely what I should do *qua* author.¹⁸²

When readers first encounter *The Point of View* or *On My Work as an Author*, it is natural for them to come away with the impression that Kierkegaard is describing in those books some sort of master plan that he hatched early on and then slowly and systematically implemented. But that is not how he seems to conceive of things. While it is true that by the time of writing *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* he has become convinced that “there is a comprehensiveness in the whole production,” a “comprehensive plan” that he thinks informs his “authorship in its totality,” Kierkegaard does not maintain that he consciously adopted this plan straightway with the writing and publication of *Either/Or*: “It would be untrue if I were unconditionally to claim the whole authorship as *my intention* from the beginning....”¹⁸³

Instead of wanting us to think that his activity as a writer and thinker has merely been the implementation of a strategy directed at his readers (however impressive such an enterprise might be), Kierkegaard repeatedly maintains that this activity ought also to be understood as a record of his own personal development, as a kind of extended *Bildungsroman* in which his own understanding of his activity as a writer and thinker only comes about gradually:

This is how I *now* understand the whole. From the beginning I could not quite see what has indeed also been my own development.

In many ways it is true that the entire authorship is my upbringing or education.¹⁸⁴

In fact, Kierkegaard seems to conceive of his activity as a writer and thinker not just as a record of his development, but also the specific means by which that development has taken place, where writing becomes a tool for the formation of the self and reading becomes a tool for achieving an understanding of the self that he has become. Furthermore, Kierkegaard conceives of the writing process that makes possible this formation of the self as a religious endeavor that has been under the direction of what he calls “Governance” (*Styrelse*): “It is Governance that has brought *me* up, and the upbringing is reflected in the writing process.”¹⁸⁵ “Styrelse” might also be translated as “guidance” or “direction” and is etymologically related to the verb “at styre,” which in addition to meaning “to govern” or “to rule” can also mean “to steer.” Kierkegaard thus seems to conceptualize Governance as that aspect of God that he claims has played a regulating and administering role in his activity as a writer and thinker and that ultimately has made it possible for him to achieve an understanding of his authorship:

If...I were to...say that from the very beginning I had had an overview of the whole dialectical structure of my entire work as an

author...it would be a denial and an unfairness to God...I can now understand [the whole] and yet by no means dare to say that I understood it so accurately at the beginning.¹⁸⁶

Rather than conceiving of his output as either “an outburst of genius” or the result of having called upon “the muse in order to get ideas,” Kierkegaard conceptualizes his work as an author as something that is characterized by his “unconditional obedience” to God, where he has in effect “lived like a scribe” and “the writing has had an unbroken evenness, as if [he] had done nothing other than to copy each day a specific part of a printed book.”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, with respect to himself and his own development, Kierkegaard tends to place the emphasis not on his being an author, but on his being someone who himself reads and profits from what has been written: “I regard myself as a *reader* of the books, not as the *author*.”¹⁸⁸ Rather, then, than conceiving of himself as someone who stands in the relationship of a teacher to his readers, Kierkegaard finds it more natural to call himself a fellow student:

Am I then the teacher, the one who does the upbringing? No...I am the one who himself has been brought up, or the one whose authorship describes what it means to be brought up to become a Christian;...as the upbringing puts pressure on me, I in turn put pressure on the age, but teacher I am not—only a fellow-pupil.¹⁸⁹

By Kierkegaard's lights, the role of being the Socrates of Copenhagen is perfectly in accord with the idea of his being the one who is educated by his writings: “This is a genuinely Socratic approach. Just as he was the ignorant one, so here: instead of being the teacher, I am the one who is being educated...a poetic and philosophic nature is set aside in order to become a Christian.”¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard thus argues that he is only able to compose *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* because he has reached a certain point in his development. Though he did not begin with a determinate plan, he now claims to be capable of looking back at what he has produced and discerning certain patterns, both in the structure of his writing as well as in his self-development.

2.6 The Socratic Nature of Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms

In the final section of this chapter I want to close by returning to the topic of what it might mean for an individual pseudonymous work to have a maieutic aim or for one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms to enter into a maieutic relationship with the reader. Note that this is distinct from

Kierkegaard's claim that his aesthetic production as a whole plays a maieutic role for the reader in relation to her being brought face to face with what it is to be a Christian (see the beginning of section 2.4). That is a structural relationship between his two genres of writing that arguably leaves open what the particular means are by which a given pseudonymous work engages its reader. Provided that such a work plays its designated role in helping to generate the "momentum" that Kierkegaard claims is necessary to propel readers towards the religious (see section 2.3), it is perfectly possible that we might conclude upon closer examination that the means by which a particular work engages its reader are not notably maieutic in nature.¹⁹¹ Such a work might contribute to an overall maieutic effect of a body of writing (helping to make a reader aware that her life as she presently leads it does not square with the Christian ideal) without self-consciously (and so rigorously) employing a maieutic method itself. That would seem to involve a much higher standard. Kierkegaard's picture of the philosophical midwife suggests that the one who employs a maieutic method will possess a high degree of awareness about what she is doing as well as sufficient self-mastery to carry this out, since it presumably takes tremendous art and discipline to maintain one's incognito while interacting with a given interlocutor in such a way that one helps the other to stand alone (see the end of section 2.4).

We saw in the last section that Kierkegaard maintains that he has only become fully aware of what he takes to be the religious aim of his authorship through the process of writing itself and often only after the fact when he reflects on what he has written. This means, in short, that while Kierkegaard eventually comes to feel justified in asserting that there is a point of view that informs his authorship as a whole (when he comes to write *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* in the late 1840s), much of his initial activity as a writer and thinker unfolds without being explicitly guided by this aim. I think something similar may hold true concerning Kierkegaard's use in his pseudonymous writings of a maieutic method and Socratic indirection more generally. When Kierkegaard first begins using pseudonyms and experimenting with a number of different literary devices and strategies in his pseudonymous writings, he does not (at least initially) conceive of them to have a maieutic significance for his larger authorship (in part because he has not yet come to conceive of his writings as jointly constituting an authorship). While he argues that the aesthetic production is a deception (serving to Socratically deceive the reader into the truth) and stands in a maieutic relationship to the religious writings, he concedes that this is not something he was fully aware of from the beginning:

To that extent, then, what was developed earlier, that the whole of the aesthetic production is a *deception*, proves to be in one sense not entirely true, since this expression concedes a little too much to consciousness.

This is how I understand the totality *now*; by no means did I have this overview of the whole from the beginning, no more than I dare say that I immediately perceived that the *telos* of the pseudonyms was maieutic....¹⁹²

Kierkegaard seems to allow here that when he initially begins using pseudonyms it is not with the self-conscious idea of their serving a maieutic function. But he also seems to think that even if he was not entirely conscious of their playing such a role, this does not preclude their coming to play such a role for his reader:

It would be untrue to say unconditionally that from the very beginning I maieutically made use of the aesthetic production, but for the reader it actually will still be maieutic over the whole of the authorship in relation to the religious.¹⁹³

This suggests that whatever maieutic role the pseudonymous works may eventually come to play within the authorship is not part of their original design. If, for example, Kierkegaard had quit writing after he published *Either/Or* and instead acted on his desire to become a rural pastor, then this work would not have been the beginning of a larger maieutic process. Any effects it had on its readers would simply be due to its own internal character, which need not involve the self-conscious use of a maieutic method at all.¹⁹⁴

Kierkegaard's more explicit reflections about the pseudonyms and the philosophical significance he attaches to his use of a pseudonymous manner of writing really only begin to appear with the publication of the *Postscript* in 1846 (thus after he has already published the seven pseudonymous works that make up the aesthetic production). In addition to the maieutic function that he claims the pseudonymous works serve within the unfolding of his larger authorship, Kierkegaard identifies a second function, claiming that the pseudonyms also serve to remind readers of what it is like to encounter a genuine individual who properly employs the first personal "I." With the rise of the mass press and a cultural fascination with Hegelian-style philosophy, Kierkegaard thinks that communication in his day has become abstract and impersonal: "the public has become the authority; the newspapers call themselves the editorial staff; the professor calls himself speculation; the pastor is mediation—no human being, none, dares to say 'I'."¹⁹⁵ He thinks that in such a setting people are no longer able to "hear" the first

person (and have no doubt fallen out of the habit of meaningfully employing it themselves); he claims that in response to this condition his pseudonyms are expressly designed to help his readers to overcome this peculiar form of deafness:

One of the tragedies of modern times is precisely this—to have abolished the “I,” the personal “I.” For this very reason real ethical-religious communication is as if vanished from the world. For ethical-religious truth is related essentially to personality and can only be communicated by an *I* to an *I*...Personality is what we need. Therefore I regard it as my service that by bringing poetized personalities who say *I* (my pseudonyms) into the center of life's actuality I have contributed, if possible, to familiarizing the contemporary age again to hear an *I*, a personal *I* speak.¹⁹⁶

Kierkegaard seems to think that people have grown so unfamiliar with genuine individuals that they may not, at least initially, even be capable of encountering one first hand (not to mention the fact that they may also have fallen out of the habit of encountering themselves first personally). He suggests that his use of “poetic personalities” (the pseudonyms) may provide through the medium of words a kind of transitional case that may be more readily attended to than an actual individual:

[S]ince the world was so corrupted by never hearing an *I*, it was impossible to begin at once with one's own *I*. So it became my task to create author-personalities and let them enter into the actuality of life in order to get people a bit accustomed to hearing discourse in the first person.

But precisely because the whole development of the world has been as far as possible from this acknowledgment of personality, this has to be done poetically. The poetic personality always has a something which makes him more bearable for a world which is quite unaccustomed to hearing an *I*.¹⁹⁷

Whether the pseudonyms in fact serve this role will depend, in part, on Kierkegaard's literary skill, on the extent to which they appear to the reader as realized literary characters whose lives are structured by a given life-view. And while helping a reader to become reacquainted with first personal discourse might conceivably play a role in a larger maieutic enterprise (since the aim of philosophical midwifery is to help a person to become self-active), this certainly does not seem necessary. Kierkegaard himself in fact seems to treat these as two distinct functions: “My service in using pseudonyms consists in having discovered, Christianly, the maieutic method....[t]ogether with having placed *I*'s into the middle of life.”¹⁹⁸

In 1849 and 1850, with the exclusively religious writings well under way, Kierkegaard published two works by a new pseudonym, Anti-Climacus; he is Kierkegaard's Christian pseudonym and his writings serve a different function within the authorship than the other pseudonymous works (his name is related to Johannes Climacus, the final pseudonym of the earlier writings, and signifies, according to Kierkegaard, a "coming to a halt" in reverse).¹⁹⁹ We saw earlier that in *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* Kierkegaard claims that the use of indirection and Socratic deception within his authorship is restricted to the first two groups of the pseudonymous works (those published from 1843-1845 and in 1846, and that serve to lead the reader back from the aesthetic or the speculative—see the last part of section 2.3). While Kierkegaard contends that all of the pseudonyms found in the first two groups represent various life-views, each of which is lower in existential development than his own position, he claims that Anti-Climacus is existentially more developed and represents a kind of upper limit in relation to his own life:

All the previous pseudonymity is lower than "the edifying author"; the new pseudonymity is a higher pseudonymity...something higher is shown, which simply forces me back within my boundary, judging me, that my life does not meet so high a requirement.²⁰⁰

This points to a third function that the pseudonyms play within Kierkegaard's corpus. They allow him to explore and represent life-views and levels of existential development that do not correspond to how he conceives of his own life. Just as he is interested in helping to reacquaint his contemporaries with the correct use of the first personal "I," so Kierkegaard also only seems committed to publishing things under his own name that he can fully stand behind and that represent his own level of existential development: "With respect to ethical-religious communication..., I am not permitted to communicate more [or less?] than what I, the speaker, am, that is, in my own factual first person, no more than what my life existentially but fairly well conforms to."²⁰¹ Whereas the "lower" pseudonyms may fall short of Kierkegaard's own life in various respects, he seems to conceive of Anti-Climacus as coming closer to the Christian ideal than he is prepared to say is true of himself: "There is something that is lower and is pseudonymous (the aesthetic), and something that is higher and is also pseudonymous, because as a person I do not correspond to it."²⁰²

In a related vein, I think it might also be argued that Kierkegaard makes use of pseudonyms as a way of giving expression to impulses that he may have but that he thinks are

not in keeping with who he is or wants to become. He claims that one of the reasons that he made the aesthetic production pseudonymous from the beginning is because he was attempting to live a life that was governed by religious categories while, at the same time, he also had certain aesthetic impulses that he wanted to try ridding himself of by giving expression to them in writing:

While the poet-productions were being written, the author was living in decisive religious categories....My idea was to empty myself of the poetic as quickly as possible....I felt alien to the whole poet-production, but....in me the need to write was so great that I could not do otherwise.

Here one will see the significance of the *pseudonyms*, why I had to be pseudonymous in connection with the aesthetic production, because I had my own life in altogether different categories and from the very beginning understood this writing as something temporary, a deception, a necessary emptying out.²⁰³

Because Kierkegaard found that his desire to write had not run its course with the completion of *Either/Or*, he claims that he eventually “came to an understanding with Governance.” He would be granted “time for poet-production...but continually in the custody of the religious, which kept its eye on [him] as if to say, ‘Aren’t you soon finished with that?’ ”²⁰⁴ Even as he continued to publish edifying speeches under his own name, Kierkegaard thus found a way to give expression to those parts of himself that did not seem to accord with his own self-conception. In short, the pseudonyms also provide Kierkegaard with a means of displacing and idealizing parts of himself that he does not feel he can authentically express in the first person: “The voice of the one speaking comes from me, but it is not my voice.”²⁰⁵ Kierkegaard’s two final pseudonyms are a case in point. While Kierkegaard claims that existentially speaking he would place himself “higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus,” he also seems to identify with each literary character, as though they each represented in ideal form a part of his own personal nature: “There is something inexplicably felicitous in the antithesis: Climacus—Anti-Climacus, I recognize so much of myself and my nature in it that if someone else had invented it I would believe that he had secretly observed my inner being.”²⁰⁶ While Kierkegaard represents Anti-Climacus as giving voice to the Christian ideal in a more rigorous manner than he himself feels capable of doing, he seems to recognize in Climacus the other half of his nature, that part of him that identifies most closely with Socrates and the maieutic method. Earlier in the same

passage, Kierkegaard adds: "It is not at all surprising that Socrates made such a deep impression upon me. It may be said that there is something Socratic in me."²⁰⁷

Throughout much of his life Kierkegaard struggled with the question of whether and to what extent giving expression to this Socratic side of himself was consistent with his trying to live an authentic Christian life.²⁰⁸ Part of the ingenuity of the device of the pseudonym is that it allows Kierkegaard to explore and give expression to the Socratic by means of writing, without requiring him to commit himself fully to being such a Socratic figure. In part this is also due to his conviction that the ideal maieutic partner may not even be humanly or ethically possible. Kierkegaard seems to think, for example, that some of what may be effectively rendered as part of a literary character would take on a different, more disturbing aspect if these qualities were literally thought to belong to a living human being:

The poeticized author has his definite life-view, and the lines [that he utters], which understood in this way could possibly be meaningful, witty, stimulating, would perhaps sound strange, ludicrous, repulsive in the mouth of a particular factual person.²⁰⁹

Kierkegaard also acknowledges that in creating the pseudonyms he has been guided strictly by literary considerations (where the sole aim of the poet, according to the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, is "psychological truth and the art of presentation"), in such a way that there may sometimes creep into the pseudonymous works a seeming moral recklessness or disregard that he does not think a person should allow with respect to herself:

My pseudonymity...has not had an accidental basis in my *person* (certainly not from a fear of penalty under the law...) but an *essential* basis in the *production*, which, for the sake of the lines [uttered by the different pseudonyms] and of the psychologically varied differences of the individualities, poetically required a recklessness [*Hensynsløshed*] with regard to good and evil, brokenheartedness and gaiety, despair and overconfidence, suffering and elation, etc. that is ideally limited only by psychological consistency, and which no factually actual person dares to allow himself or can want to allow himself in the moral limitations of actuality.²¹⁰

The "recklessness" in question seems twofold. Kierkegaard seems to be claiming, first of all, that for the pseudonymous works to succeed as literature he, the author of the pseudonymous authors, must set to one side certain moral considerations for the sake of art that he would not be willing to do (nor thinks one ought to do) with respect to his own life. He also seems to be claiming that the recklessness that may be required for literary purposes may, in addition, perhaps find

expression in what is said and done by the pseudonyms themselves. Hence Kierkegaard's need for pseudonymity. Even as he may recognize that the maieutic relationship with the reader requires that the pseudonyms be so constituted, he may nevertheless remain personally unwilling to be more closely identified with this enterprise. At the same time, Kierkegaard also maintains that the reader herself may be better served by a "cultivated association with a distancing ideality."²¹¹ Instead of being "encumbered with [Kierkegaard's] personal actuality" (or any other living human being for that matter), the reader will, according to Kierkegaard, obtain the greatest maieutic benefit if she is presented with "the light, doubly reflected ideality of a poetically actual author to dance with."²¹²

As should now be clear, the philosophical significance that Kierkegaard attaches to his use of pseudonyms is multifaceted and something that develops along with his understanding of his authorship and what he takes to be his task as a writer and thinker. Collectively, the pseudonyms of the first two groups of pseudonymous writings seek to lead the reader from the aesthetic or the speculative life-views towards the Christianly religious life-view. In the process, each pseudonym may also help to contribute to the reader's becoming reacquainted with first personal discourse (with employing the first personal "I" in ethical and religious contexts), while also enabling Kierkegaard to explore and give expression to parts of himself (notably his affinity for the Socratic and his desire to be a writer) that he may ultimately be unwilling to include in his final conception of who he essentially is. In our search for the Socratic within Kierkegaard's corpus it has become clear that Kierkegaard associates the use of Socratic deception and indirection with those situations where a person is under an illusion about the kind of life she leads such that she remains unable and unwilling to be directly informed to the contrary. We saw that on Kierkegaard's view, the Socratic art of truly engaging such a person will require an ability to assume and maintain an incognito in an effort to help the interlocutor to become self-active and so come to exercise her ethical and religious capacities; if this maieutic relationship is successful, the interlocutor will ideally come to abandon the disinterested stance that she is in the habit of adopting towards herself in favor of an ethically and religiously more interested stance.

But if we want to explore this topic further, where should we turn next? One option would be to examine some of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms in greater detail. He has quite a few pseudonyms, however, and, as I suggested above, it is not obvious to me that they are all equally prone to employ Socratic techniques in their books. No doubt there are Socratic elements to be

found to varying degrees in all of the pseudonymous works. In the beginning of the authorship, however, Kierkegaard arguably is not yet operating with a clear conception of what he takes to be his own authorial aim and why he thinks this calls for a maieutic method. It is only by experimenting with a number of different literary techniques and by employing pseudonyms for a whole host of different reasons, many perhaps not fully conscious, that Kierkegaard's own grasp of the maieutic begins to crystallize and take shape. If this is right, then the best place for us to turn may be to one of Kierkegaard's last, most developed pseudonyms, to a pseudonym who was conceived and created at a time when Kierkegaard himself had become highly conscious of the fact that something had gone seriously awry in Christendom and that what his reader needed most of all was to be engaged in a Socratic manner:

If it is an illusion that all are Christians, and if something is to be done, it must be done indirectly, not by someone who loudly declares himself to be an extraordinary Christian, but by someone who, better informed, even declares himself not to be a Christian. That is, one must approach the person who is under an illusion from behind. Instead of wanting to have the advantage of being the rare Christian, one must let the person who is ensnared have the advantage of being a Christian, and then have enough resignation oneself to be the one who is far behind him.

Thus one does not begin (to hold to what is essentially the theme of this book) in this way: I am Christian, you are not a Christian—but this way: You are a Christian, I am not Christian.... The deception consists in one's speaking this way precisely in order to arrive at the religious.²¹³

This is the exact stance that Kierkegaard claims in "My Task" that he has adopted in relation to his contemporaries. But at this stage in his thinking, where he still seems to restrict the use of indirect communication and maieutic method to the pseudonyms, Kierkegaard does not yet seem willing to step forward and declare in his own voice that he is himself a Socratic figure. In a footnote to the first of these two passages, Kierkegaard instead provides us with a clue about where he thinks we should look if we are seeking further illumination about the role of the Socratic within his authorship: "One recalls *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, whose author, Johannes Climacus, directly declares that he himself is not a Christian."²¹⁴ Kierkegaard later makes this same point in a bit more detail in *On My Work as an Author*:

The situation... makes an indirect method necessary, because the task here must be to take measures against the illusion: calling oneself a Christian, perhaps laboring under the delusion that one is

that, without being that. Therefore, the one who introduced the issue [of becoming a Christian] did not *directly* characterize himself as a Christian and the others as not being that; no, *just the reverse*—he denies being a Christian and grants this to the others. This Johannes Climacus does.²¹⁵

Climacus is thereby seemingly marked by Kierkegaard as a figure who approaches his reader in just the Socratic manner that the situation requires. He might be called Kierkegaard's Socratic pseudonym *par excellence*, and it is to him and his two books, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, that we will turn in the second part of this dissertation.

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Before we conclude our examination of *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*, it may be worth considering briefly what the relationship is between Kierkegaard's claim in these two works that he has employed a Socratic method over the course of his authorship and what he accomplishes in the process by drawing attention to this very fact. Doesn't Kierkegaard's having written these books about his authorship spoil any Socratic value his writings may have for his reader? Joakim Garff has nicely drawn attention to this issue, claiming that the end result of a work like *The Point of View* is "a deactivation of the maieutic function."²¹⁶ Since a Socratic engagement of the reader, however, "is supposed to be the *raison d'être* of the aesthetic writings," Garff is right to question whether these works about the authorship serve to undercut Kierkegaard's maieutic enterprise. He draws attention to a passage from Kierkegaard's journals, dated February 19, 1849, in which Kierkegaard is deliberating about whether or not he should publish anything about his authorship. Kierkegaard worries that if he refrains from publishing anything, then perhaps no one will come to appreciate the exact nature of how his authorship hangs together:

If I do nothing at all directly to assure a full understanding of my whole authorship (by [e.g.] publishing "The Point of View for My Work as an Author")...—then what? Then there will be no judgment at all about my authorship in its totality, for no one has sufficient faith or time or competence to look for a comprehensive plan in the entire production.... This distresses me. I am deeply convinced that...there is an integral comprehensiveness in the whole production.²¹⁷

This worry is akin to the one that Kierkegaard later raises in “My Task,” when he claims to be the only one who is capable of interpreting his work (see Chapter 1, section 1.4). At the same time, Kierkegaard also appreciates that there can seem to be something almost self-defeating about trying to explain to the reader the deceptive nature of an authorship whose very effectiveness at removing the reader’s illusion about the kind of life she presently leads seems to rest on her genuinely being deceived by that authorship: “When something is supposed to be captivating, it is of course a mistake to explain this. A fisherman certainly would not say to the fish, with reference to the bait: ‘This is bait’.”²¹⁸ Thus Kierkegaard is seemingly torn between publishing nothing (with the risk that no one will come to understand him and the point of view that he claims informs his authorship) and publishing an actual explanation of his authorship (with the risk that he will then undercut the maieutic dimension of his writings).

In *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard acknowledges that there may in fact be a certain cost to his having disclosed what he takes to be the overarching point of his authorship, but he not only seems to think that this is still worth doing but even suggests that there would be a greater cost if he did not speak directly about his work as an author. He is aware that prior to encountering such a work, the reader may have found him to be a kind of enigma, unsure just where he stands or why he has written such strange, cryptic books:

“But what have you done?!” I hear someone say. “Don’t you see what you have now lost in the eyes of the world by making this explanation and attestation?” To be sure, I see this quite well. I have lost thereby what in a Christian sense it is a loss to possess, namely every worldly form of the interesting. I lose the interesting distinction of proclaiming the seductive subtlety of pleasure and the enjoyment of life, the joyful gospel of the most sophisticated enjoyment of life, and mockery’s overweening pride. I lose the interesting distinction of being an interesting possibility, of whether it was not just possible that the one who represented the ethical with enthusiasm and warmth—whether it was not just possible that he was exactly the opposite, *either* in one way *or* another, since, interestingly enough, it is impossible to say for sure which he is. I lose the interesting distinction of being a riddle, of whether this thorough-going defense of Christianity was not the most subtly devised form of an attack.²¹⁹

To the reader who takes a special delight in the various ways that Kierkegaard can seem to be an enigma, works like *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* may come across as rather disappointing and perhaps as a kind of failure of nerve. It’s as though Kierkegaard’s delightful

game of indirection and frequent use of masks and incognitos has been prematurely brought to a halt; "Wouldn't a true ironist," such a reader might ask, "have been able to remain in disguise to the very end?" But for Kierkegaard this type of disappointment is itself indicative of "a lack of earnestness and an infatuation with mystification in and for itself."²²⁰ This is to lose track of the question of why an author might make use of deception and does not seem to allow for the genuine possibility of ever arriving at a correct interpretation of an approach that may, on occasion, make use of devices of indirection. Kierkegaard claims that, in a case like his own, "where a mystification...is used in the service of earnestness, it will be used in such a way that it only wards off misunderstandings and preliminary understandings, while the true explanation is available to the person who is honestly seeking."²²¹ Thus there is a natural end to the game of irony; it is not merely put forward for the delight of the reader, but only in the service of her becoming aware that her life is not as she imagines it to be.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that these two methodological texts about Kierkegaard's authorship are written in a manner that is reminiscent of the way that Socrates addresses his jurors in Plato's *Apology*. While it may be true that by offering an account of his interactions with his contemporaries, Kierkegaard thereby undercuts part of the Socratic effectiveness of his authorship, he also remains keenly aware of the possibility that his works will not be understood without such assistance. The same charge might be leveled at Socrates. Would the attempt to explain what he has been doing all these years undercut his ability to engage his jurors in his characteristic way (perhaps helping them to acknowledge their ignorance about him and what it is to live as a philosopher)? Perhaps, but Socrates also faced the parallel worry that if he did not attempt to explain himself, then perhaps no one would understand the larger significance of his life and what he took to be the point of his philosophical activity. When Socrates described himself as a gadfly who was sent by the god to awaken his fellow citizens, this might have helped a few of his jurors (or Plato's readers) to join together what can appear on the face of it to be rather annoying behavior with a religious aim they might respect. And while this might have undercut his ability to engage them as such a gadfly, in the manner he was "accustomed to use in the marketplace," I don't think this revelation completely took away the sting of his presence.²²² Kierkegaard, of course, is certainly not on trial in these books, but he does think he has reached a stage in his development as a writer and thinker where he can no longer remain silent about his authorship: "A point has been reached in my authorship where it is

feasible, where I feel a need and therefore regard it now as my duty: once and for all to explain as directly and openly and specifically as possible what is what, what I say I am as an author."²²³ He feels compelled to speak and seems willing to run the risk that some of the Socratic ingenuity of his authorship may suffer as a result.

**Part Two:
Kierkegaard's Socratic Pseudonym
(Johannes Climacus)**

Chapter 3: Climacus' Diagnosis of What Ails Christendom

In the first part of this dissertation we examined some of the respects in which Kierkegaard conceives of himself as a Socratic figure. We saw in Chapter 1 that at the end of his life, in “My Task,” Kierkegaard steps forward and proclaims in his own voice that he has been engaged in a Socratic task. He maintains that by denying that he is a Christian in the midst of Christendom (where by Kierkegaard’s lights it has become common practice for people to think they are Christians while they nevertheless lead lives that frequently are governed only by aesthetic categories), he has been able to engage his fellow citizens in a way that is analogous to the way that Socrates, through his stance of ignorance, was able to engage the people of Athens.¹ I argued in Chapter 2 that in his earlier reflections about his authorship (found in *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*) Kierkegaard maintains that he has employed a Socratic method principally through his use of pseudonymous writings. These works, in virtue of their artistic literary form, seek to attract readers who are in the habit of approaching the world (including themselves) in a disinterested manner, with the ultimate aim of maieutically engaging the individual reader (getting her “to stand alone—through another’s help”) and thereby assisting her to approach herself in a more personally interested manner.² We saw that the device of pseudonymity allows Kierkegaard to engage his readers in a Socratic fashion without requiring that he personally present himself as a Socratic figure (and so perhaps come into conflict with his own individual Christian pursuits). I argued that this manner of writing may allow Kierkegaard to give expression to a Socratic part of his nature without requiring him, ultimately, to identify himself and who he fundamentally is with this aspect of himself. Because Kierkegaard’s conception of maieutic method is something that develops and crystallizes in his thinking over time (together with his conception of his authorship more generally), I suggested that a fruitful place for us to turn next would be to examine in greater detail one of the pseudonyms that

Kierkegaard crafted fairly late in this process, at a time when he had become highly conscious of the need for a maieutic engagement of his readers and of what is involved in successfully doing this (including the rigorous use of an incognito). Furthermore, I argued that Kierkegaard himself provides us with a clue about which pseudonym he thinks most fruitfully sheds light on the Socratic nature of his authorship, namely the pseudonym Johannes Climacus (see the end of section 2.6).

In the second part of this dissertation we will therefore focus on Climacus and his two books *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).³ Climacus is often held to be Kierkegaard's most philosophical pseudonym and his writings, in turn, are often taken to be the most philosophical works within Kierkegaard's authorship.⁴ His two books have generated a substantial body of secondary literature (including several book-length studies) and have given rise in the process to numerous disputes about how they are to be understood and what exactly Climacus' status is with respect to what is being investigated in them.⁵ Our examination of Climacus' texts will of necessity be selective and be guided by our more general search for the Socratic within Kierkegaard's authorship. My chief aim in the second part of this dissertation will be to make the case that Climacus is a Socratic figure and represents what I've elsewhere called "Kierkegaard's idealization of the Socratic within the context of nineteenth century Danish Christendom."⁶ While there are a few studies that have previously examined this topic, I do not think that it has received the kind of attention that it deserves.⁷ We will draw on these earlier studies when they seem helpful, but otherwise our procedure will simply be to approach these texts with Socrates and his maieutic method ever before our eyes; that is, we will always be working with the hypothesis that Climacus *is* a Socratic figure in order to see how far this thought can take us in trying to understand him and the manner in which he engages his reader in his two books.

In the previous chapter we discussed the image of the philosophical midwife (section 2.4), where I drew attention to two aspects of the midwife's role: diagnosis and therapeutic treatment. I argued that the successful midwife has both the ability to diagnose her patient's condition (allowing her to determine whether her interlocutor is pregnant, and whether that which she gives birth to is genuine or a phantom), and the ability to treat her patient using the correct therapeutic procedure (allowing her to help bring about the birth, and to take away any

phantoms). In his discussion of despair, the pseudonym Anti-Climacus also employs a medical analogy and draws a distinction between diagnosis and treatment:

A physician's task is not just to *prescribe remedies*, but first and foremost to *diagnose the sickness* [at *kjende Sygdommen*], and so again, first and foremost, to *determine* [at *kjende*] whether the supposedly sick person is really ill, or whether the supposedly healthy person is perhaps in fact ill. Similarly with the one who is knowledgeable about souls [*Sjelekyndig*] in relation to despair.⁸

I think it will be helpful for our present purposes if we also distinguish those elements in Climacus' writings that are diagnostic in nature from those that are principally therapeutic. In this chapter we will thus address Climacus' diagnosis of what he thinks ails his reader (and the age more generally) and tie this to his account of how he became an author. In later chapters we will consider two methods of treatment that he employs in his maieutic interactions with his reader.

3.1 Climacus' Authorship

Let's begin by considering a bit further the scope of our investigation. Our concern is Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus, who is represented as the author of two books. Climacus' first book is a rather slender volume that hypothetically investigates the difference between a Socratic conception (broadly construed) of the individual's relation to the truth and a Christian conception (though the latter is never identified as "Christian" until the very end of the book).⁹ In the preface to *Fragments*, Climacus calls this work a "pamphlet" and denies that it makes "any claim to being a part of the scientific-scholarly [*videnskabelige*] endeavor" that modern philosophers have undertaken (notably Hegel and his followers).¹⁰ Climacus' second book is a kind of sequel to *Fragments* in the form of a postscript (though at over six times the length of the original work it is certainly not your typical postscript).¹¹ He also calls this work a "pamphlet" and together with his use of "uvidenskabelig" (unscientific, unscholarly) in the title again seems to be trying to designate his books as somehow different in kind from the systematic philosophical treatises that are the norm of his day.¹² The *Postscript* is a multifaceted work that has a number of different aims. Climacus claims that the relatively short first part of the work (*CUP* 19-57; *SKS* 7, 27-61) constitutes "the promised sequel" to *Fragments*, while the

significantly longer second part (*CUP* 59-623; *SKS* 7, 63-566) is “a renewed attempt in the same vein” as his first book; he also, however, notably claims that this second part of the book represents “a new approach to the issue of *Fragments*.”¹³ While *Fragments* principally consists of Climacus' therapeutic engagement of a particular kind of reader (we will examine *Fragments* in more detail in Chapter 4), the *Postscript* has much greater ambitions. In this work, in addition to employing what I will argue is a second means of therapeutically engaging his reader (the “new approach” mentioned above, which we will discuss in Chapter 5), Climacus also presents his diagnosis of what he thinks has gone wrong in Christendom. In the process, he provides the reader with an account of how he became an author (thereby anticipating the several accounts that Kierkegaard will later write about himself and his larger authorship that we discussed in the first part of this dissertation); critically responds to a review of his first book and provides us with his own conception of *Fragments* and how he thinks it ought to be read;¹⁴ and develops both an account of indirect communication (which helps to explain how he conceives of his different means of engaging his reader) and a conception of philosophy that he ties to the ancient Greeks and Socrates in particular.¹⁵ Even as he denies that his philosophical enterprise should be associated with the modern, Hegelian-style of doing philosophy, Climacus seems to want to tie what he is doing to this ancient conception of philosophy, where, on his view, the chief result obtained by a thinker is not a written work but a particular kind of life: “In Greece a thinker was not a stunted existing person who produced works of art, but he himself was an existing work of art.”¹⁶

As a literary character, Climacus is also multifaceted and often elusive. He was “born and bred” in Copenhagen and says in the *Postscript* that he is thirty years old (which would make him twenty-eight when he published *Fragments*).¹⁷ He characterizes himself as a “dialectician” who shares with earlier thinkers from antiquity a “passion for distinctions.”¹⁸ This means that in general we should expect him to be philosophically rigorous when he discusses and defines particular concepts.¹⁹ Writing in response to the publication of Martensen's *Dogmatics*, Kierkegaard seems to endorse this picture of Climacus wholeheartedly: “My most popular book is more stringent in definition of concepts, and my pseudonym Johannes Climacus is seven times as stringent in definition of concepts.”²⁰ At the same time, despite the fact that he is “not without a certain dialectical competence,” Climacus is bound to strike first time readers as quite unlike most thinkers they have encountered.²¹ Both in his personal presentation and in the manner in

which he writes, Climacus remains an elusive yet stylistically intriguing figure. He is someone who frequently employs irony and humor in his writings while also insisting that this is not incompatible with the deepest seriousness. In fact, he seems committed to upholding an ideal that he also attributes to the German thinker Gotthold Lessing, where both his writings and how he presents himself to the reader combine “a mixture of jest and earnestness that makes it impossible for a third person to know definitely which is which—unless the third person knows it by himself.”²² According to the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, this is to employ a type of indirect communication:

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.²³

The need for a certain self-activity on the part of the reader “to untie the knot” herself recalls the maieutic ideal that we discussed in the previous chapter, where the individual comes to stand alone (through another’s help—see section 2.4). Climacus ties the use of irony specifically to ethical matters: “If anyone says that this is only an exercise in elocution, that I have only a bit of irony, a bit of pathos, a bit of dialectic with which to work, I shall answer: What else should the person have who wants to present the ethical?”²⁴ Humor, on the other hand, has a special connotation in the *Postscript* (and Kierkegaard’s writings more generally) and is held to be concerned specifically with religious matters.²⁵ While Climacus frequently appeals to Socrates as his chief example of someone who employs irony to help illuminate the ethical, he calls himself a humorist and so invites us to treat him as someone who serves an analogous role with respect to the religious.²⁶

Because Climacus assigns such philosophical importance to irony and humor and because his writings frequently exhibit these literary devices (and the existential stances he associates with them), readers who seek to understand him and his two books will thus be faced with certain interpretive demands that are not normally encountered when reading more standard philosophical prose (compare some of the difficulties involved with reading a Platonic dialogue). In a draft to one of the lectures on indirect communication that he planned to deliver, Kierkegaard seems to acknowledge that readers have found it particularly difficult to appreciate the manner in which his pseudonymous works combine earnestness and jest:

The really right kind of earnestness, especially as regards ethical communication, would certainly appear to most people to be jesting....In pseudonymous books published by me the earnestness is more vigorous [than can be expressed in these lectures], particularly in those passages in which the presentation will appear to most people as nothing but jest. This, as far as I know, has not previously been understood at all.²⁷

This may also thus help to explain why there have been such radical disagreements about what to make of *Fragments* and the *Postscript* in particular, together with their elusive fictional narrator/pseudonymous author. As with Socrates, Climacus comes across as someone who combines a dialectical rigor with an unusual, often elusive sensibility that keeps the reader on her toes.

Before turning to consider Climacus' account of how he became an author, let me say something further about the scope of our investigation and the manner in which we are going to proceed. Our focus is on the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus and the two books attributed to him. While there is much to be said for simply trying to present each of these works on their own terms (so, e.g., trying to make sense of *Fragments* primarily by appeal to what unfolds within that work), I think our search for the Socratic and the sense in which Climacus is a Socratic figure will be better served if we utilize the methodological remarks that he develops about his authorship to frame our investigation (as we earlier drew upon Kierkegaard's methodological remarks for thinking about his larger authorship). This means, however, that even as we allow our approach to *Fragments* and the *Postscript* to be guided by Climacus' remarks about his authorship, we should also remain alert to the possibility that these remarks, however insightful they may seem, could in some cases actually wind up interfering with our goal of reading these texts well.²⁸

This also means that we will not be addressing in any detail Kierkegaard's unfinished manuscript *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, which is usually thought to have been written circa 1842-1843 (and so prior to the 1844 publication date of *Fragments*).²⁹ While this work is sometimes taken to provide a sort of "intellectual biography" of Climacus, I am in agreement with C. Stephen Evans that "we have no real basis for assuming that the subject of [*De Omnibus*] is identical with the author of *Philosophical Fragments*" or the *Postscript*.³⁰ It's true that there is a character who appears in this work who is named "Johannes Climacus," but he is quite unlike the literary character who narrates *Fragments* and the *Postscript* and who is

represented as the pseudonymous author of those two works. One danger of tying this work more closely to Climacus' writings is that there may be a tendency to read these later works through the lens of this manuscript and its particular concerns. The Johannes of *De Omnibus* is called "a young student," someone who is "now in his twenty-first year" and who is "ardently in love...with thinking."³¹ His name is clearly associated in the text with the Greek monk of the same name from early antiquity (circa 525-616) who wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (*Klimax tou paradeisou* in Greek; *Scala paradisi* in Latin).³² The activity that the young Johannes appears to enjoy more than anything else is going up and down the rungs of the ladders of thought that he constructs:

It was his delight to begin with a single thought and then, by way of coherent thinking, to climb step by step to a higher one, because to him coherent thinking was a *scala paradisi*, and his blessedness seemed to him more glorious than the angels'. Therefore, when he arrived at the higher thought, it was an indescribable joy, a passionate pleasure, for him to plunge headfirst down into the same coherent thoughts until he reached the point from which he had proceeded...If he was successful, he would be thrilled, could not sleep for joy, and for hours would continue making the same movement, for this up-and-down and down-and-up of thought was an unparalleled joy....[H]is whole life was thinking.³³

Though Kierkegaard did not complete the adventures of the young Johannes, his plan seems to have been to create a character who "thinks that to philosophize is not to talk or to write but in all quietness to do honestly and scrupulously what the philosophers say one should do."³⁴ Young Johannes sets his sites on the thesis "*de omnibus dubitandum est*" (everything must be doubted) and decides to spend however long it takes to "think it through," resolving not "to let go of it" prior to this "even though it were to cost him his life."³⁵ Kierkegaard thus seems to conceive of the young Johannes as a character who will naively try to follow the dictates of modern philosophy and who will suffer the consequences accordingly:

The plan of this narrative was as follows. By means of the melancholy irony, which did not consist in any single utterance on the part of Johannes Climacus but in his whole life, by means of the profound earnestness involved in a young man's being sufficiently honest and earnest enough to do quietly and unostentatiously what the philosophers say (and he thereby becomes unhappy)—I would strike a blow at [modern speculative] philosophy. Johannes does what we are told to do—he actually doubts everything—he suffers through all the pain of doing that, becomes cunning, almost acquires a bad conscience. When he has

gone as far in that direction as he can go and wants to come back, he cannot do so. He perceives that in order to hold on to this extreme position of doubting everything, he has engaged all his mental and spiritual powers....Now he despairs, his life is wasted, his youth spent in these deliberations. Life has not acquired any meaning for him, and all this is the fault of philosophy.³⁶

While it is certainly possible to maintain that there is some sort of family resemblance between the 21-year-old Johannes who falls victim to modern philosophy and the 28/30-year-old pseudonym we encounter in *Fragments* and the *Postscript*, I think we need to be careful not to let the young Johannes' vulnerability to corruption by modern philosophy color how we conceive of Climacus' own relation to philosophy. If Climacus is the Socratic figure that I maintain him to be, then we should expect that he will not be similarly vulnerable to corruption but instead, through having obtained what he calls a certain "dialectical intrepidity," will turn out to be someone who is in a position to combat the corrupting influence of this type of philosophy.³⁷ He is someone who, like Socrates, may even be able to help the young Johanneses of his day.³⁸

One thing that the manuscript of *De Omnibus* does seem to have in common with Climacus' works is the sense that something has gone seriously wrong in modern philosophy, where a kind of philosophical reflection has arisen that "differs from the older philosophy by having discovered that it is ludicrous to do what a person himself said he would do or had done."³⁹ Like Climacus, the unnamed narrator of *De Omnibus* seems to want to distinguish what he is doing from modern philosophical practice (especially in his case through the use of a "narrative form" of writing):

Someone who supposes that philosophy has never in all the world been so close as it is now to fulfilling its task of explaining all mysteries may certainly think it strange, affected, and scandalous that I choose the narrative form and do not in my small way hand up a stone to culminate the system. But someone who has become convinced that philosophy has never been so eccentric as now, never so confused despite all its definitions...—that person will surely find it in order that I, too, by means of the form seek to counteract the detestable untruth that characterizes recent philosophy.⁴⁰

In *De Omnibus*, then, the story of the young Johannes and how he becomes a victim of modern philosophy is a means by which the unnamed narrator seeks to combat this particular conception of philosophy.⁴¹ While I think that Climacus employs different, more Socratic means in his two

books, the target remains the same: Hegelian-style modern philosophy. That this common target is forever joined in Kierkegaard's mind with the name "Johannes Climacus" can perhaps best be seen by examining an early passage from the journals, dated January 20, 1839 (so two years before Kierkegaard published his dissertation):

Hegel is a Johannes *Climacus* who does not storm the heavens as do the giants—by setting mountain upon mountain—but *climbs up* to them by means of his syllogisms.⁴²

Here the emphasis is on Hegel and his potentially blasphemous desire to "storm the heavens" by means of his manner of doing philosophy. The phrase "Johannes Climacus" does not function as a name but rather helps to pick out the concept "is a Johannes Climacus" (cf. "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy"). The young Johannes is arguably a further instance of this concept (not identical with Hegel, but someone who helps to bring out what might be objectionable about the specific manner in which Hegel is here held to be a Johannes Climacus). As I hope to show in what follows, it is my view that the pseudonymous author of *Fragments* and the *Postscript* is a further instance of this concept, a Socratic Johannes Climacus.

3.2 How Climacus Became an Author

Of all Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, Climacus is the only one who shares with Kierkegaard a desire to develop an account of his authorship and to explain to the reader why he, Johannes Climacus, began writing and why his works take the peculiar form that they do.⁴³ Climacus describes two important events that preceded his beginning to write and also recounts the circumstances surrounding the publication of his first book. These moments within the text appear at the end of two chapters in the second part of the *Postscript* and in an appendix to the second of those chapters, and are set apart from the rest of the text in part by being written in the past tense.⁴⁴ They are also analogous to the account that Socrates gives in the *Apology* of his life and how he became a philosopher. Just as Socrates warns his jurors that he will speak in the manner he is "accustomed to use in the marketplace," so Climacus' narration arguably exhibits the peculiar manner he seems to have of combining jest with earnestness.⁴⁵

3.2.1 Climacus Discovers His Task

The first time that Climacus takes up the topic of how he became an author, towards the end of the chapter entitled “Becoming Subjective,”⁴⁶ he begins by noting that “it is now about four years since the idea came to [him] of wanting to try his hand as an author.”⁴⁷ Since the *Postscript* was published in 1846, this would take us back to 1842 (which is about when Kierkegaard probably first began writing *Either/Or*, and means that two years will elapse after this event before Climacus will publish his first book, *Philosophical Fragments*, in 1844). Climacus draws attention to the fact that the event in question took place on a Sunday while he sat smoking a cigar in front of the café in Frederiksberg Gardens. Immediately the reader is alerted, then, to the fact that our narrator is not spending his Sunday at church or doing quiet penance at home, but is out on the town and visibly enjoying himself in public.⁴⁸ He adds that this has been his “usual” practice.⁴⁹ Climacus describes himself as a kind of perpetual graduate student, someone who “had been a student for a half score of years,” and while he denies that he has ever been “lazy” he does admit that all of his activity has been “like a splendid *inactivity*,” noting that he still much prefers to occupy himself this way and that with respect to this he may even “have a little genius.”⁵⁰ Over the years his normal practice has been to read a great deal and then spend “the rest of the day loafing and thinking, or thinking and loafing,” without there ever being much to show for how he has spent his time.⁵¹ In case the reader isn’t quite yet settled in her opinion of him, Climacus adds that the principal reason that he hasn’t been more productive is because he has been “continually constrained” by what he calls “an inexplicable power of persuasion”: “This power was my indolence.”⁵² Climacus thereby marks himself as a loafer, a non-productive good-for-nothing who may even be religiously suspect.

In contrast to himself, who is “getting on in years...and becoming an old man⁵³ without *being* anything and without actually *undertaking* anything,” Climacus is struck by how he is surrounded by people who have made it their personal mission to benefit the age. Speaking to himself, he observes:

Wherever you look in literature or in life, you see the names and figures of celebrities, the prized and highly acclaimed people, prominent or much discussed, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit humankind by making life easier and easier, some by railroads, others by omnibuses and steamships, others by telegraph, others by easily understood surveys and brief publications about everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who by virtue of thought systematically

make spiritual existence easier and easier and yet more and more meaningful—and what are *you* doing?⁵⁴

After momentarily having his reflections interrupted by the need to light a new cigar, Climacus suddenly has the thought that he too “must do something.” But what? Since his “limited capacities” will keep him from being able to “make anything easier than it has become,” he concludes that he “must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others have, take it upon [himself] to make something more difficult”!⁵⁵ Climacus reports that this idea “pleased [him] enormously,” adding that it also “flattered [him] that for this effort [he] would be loved and respected, as much as anyone else, by the entire community.”⁵⁶ While the reader may have her doubts about this, Climacus is quick to point out that when all of society’s benefactors are seeking to make things easier, there remains “one possible danger,” that things will become “all too easy.” In such a situation “only one lack remains, even though not yet felt, the lack of difficulty.”⁵⁷ Climacus thus claims to have “comprehended that it was [his] task to make difficulties everywhere.”⁵⁸

Having impressed upon the reader that he is a loafer who has never really amounted to anything and having tied this to his indolence, Climacus now seems to be trying to convince her that this is all for the best. Far from making him an object of scorn, his being an indolent loafer is actually a good thing! Not only has this helped to ensure that there is at least one person who has the time to work against the tendencies of the age (meaning that there is at least one person who may be able to produce new material for the benefactors to try to remedy, that is, one person who will be able to create difficulties), but this very condition may also help him to address his “awkward predicament of having achieved nothing.” Climacus claims, in fact, that it is precisely his indolence that he credits with helping him to secure this particular task: “I must...assume that my indolence, by preventing me from opportunely proceeding to make things easy, has forced me into doing the only thing that remained.”⁵⁹ But as the reader may be laughing slightly to herself at the ridiculous figure before her, whose life story seems to be all jest and no earnestness, Climacus gives things a slight twist. Claiming to have found his task, he says that he, too, is “striving toward the lofty goal of being hailed with acclaim—unless [he] should be laughed to scorn or perhaps crucified.”⁶⁰ With the sudden jolt of these words the reader, if she is paying attention, may find that her pleasant state of amusement has now been disturbed. Socrates will after all be put to death. But what does this have to do with our graduate student loafer? Climacus maintains that “even if [his] endeavor fails to be appreciated,” it still remains “as noble

as the endeavors of others.” Since the reader may not immediately see wherein lies the purported nobility of such a task, Climacus introduces the following rather Socratic image:

When at a banquet where the guests have already gorged themselves, someone is intent on having more courses served and someone else on having an emetic ready, it is certainly true that only the former has understood what the guests demand, but I wonder if the latter might not also claim to have considered what they might require.⁶¹

With this image, a distinction is introduced between what a person may say she wants (e.g., having things “made easier”) and that which is actually conducive to her health. While Climacus’ initial portrait of the age seemingly draws a contrast at his own expense between the benefactors (especially the “true benefactors of the age who...make spiritual exercise easier and easier”) and loafers such as himself, the image of the banquet invites us to redescribe this situation, to examine more closely whether those who are being celebrated as benefactors may merely be those who are willing to serve the next course to an “already gorged” populace, while those who refuse to do so, those who may even set about trying to make things more difficult, may actually turn out to be the true benefactors.⁶² And it is not always going to be the case that one who provides what is needed (rather than what is asked for) will even be understood, let alone welcomed with open arms, by those whose demands are not being met.⁶³ Climacus thereby invites his reader to consider whether his being a loafer might be something, as he puts it in the preface to *Fragments*, that he is *both* “out of indolence, *ex animi sententia* [by inclination], *and* for good reasons.”⁶⁴ The reader is now also alerted to the real possibility that what she may be in the habit of conceiving of as earnest and serious may not actually be that (may, rather, be contributing to an unhealthy condition), while what can at first strike her as frivolous and ridiculous may in fact be an expression of a task that is directed at what the age (and the individual reader herself) truly needs. She must, in short, remain alert to the possibility that when it comes to Climacus and the texts he writes, jest and earnestness will often be combined.

3.2.2 Climacus Makes a Resolution

Climacus returns to the topic of how he became an author towards the end of the chapter entitled, “Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity.”⁶⁵ At the end of the first episode, he had concluded that his task was to make something difficult, but what precisely he was to make difficult was left unspecified. Two months have passed and a second momentous event takes

place, also, as it happens, on a Sunday.⁶⁶ The scene is a graveyard (“the garden of the dead”).⁶⁷ It is “rather late, toward evening,” and Climacus is there “contrary to [his] usual practice.” The place is nearly deserted; “most of the visitors had already gone home.”⁶⁸ Climacus notes that one thing he likes about this garden is “there is always the beautiful agreement among the visitors that one does not go out there in order to see and be seen, but each visitor avoids the other.”⁶⁹ He does not explain why he has gone to the graveyard (though one might suspect that he has a desire to be alone), instead offering the reader his reflections about the “eloquence” of the dead and his praise for “the living person who externally relates himself as a dead person to his inwardness and thereby maintains it, not as the excitement of a moment..., but as the eternal, which has been gained through death.”⁷⁰ The mood established, then, is reflective and a bit somber, perhaps a bit too somber for our often jesting narrator.

Tired from walking, Climacus sits down on a bench to rest and marvels at “how the sun in its brilliant departure casts a transfiguring glow over the entire surroundings.”⁷¹ As he gazes “beyond the wall enclosing the garden into that eternal symbol of eternity—the infinite horizon,” his reverie is suddenly disturbed when, much to his surprise, he hears “a voice just beside” him.⁷² As it turns out, the trees that had hidden Climacus from others have also hidden them from him. And in case the reader has allowed herself to become too taken up with the reflective, poetic mood that Climacus has been creating (instead of always keeping a bit of herself in reserve, with which to remain cognizant of who it is who is telling this tale), the ensuing slightly comical twist should serve to wake her up. Climacus now finds himself in a bit of a predicament. On the one hand, he claims that his sense of human modesty bids him to withdraw; at the same time, he reflects that the act of leaving might itself be disturbing and he also finds the words being spoken to be quite captivating, leading him to conclude that perhaps he’d better stay:

It has always wounded my modesty to witness the expression of the kind of feeling that another person surrenders himself to only when he thinks he is not being observed, because there is an inwardness of feeling that out of decency is hidden and is manifest only to God...—therefore I decided to move away. But the first words I heard held me captive, and since I feared that the noise of my leaving might disturb more than my staying there quietly, I chose the latter and then became a witness of a situation that, however solemn it was, suffered no infringement because of my presence.⁷³

This particular moment of indecision on Climacus' part nicely illustrates how difficult it can be to judge whether we are to find earnestness in what he says or jest (or both). What he says about not wanting to interfere with another's private expression of feeling can appear quite serious; at the same time, when he first hears the other's words (words that he acknowledges that by their very nature require that they not be listened to by another), he claims that they "held [him] captive" such that he decides to remain, purportedly because the "noise" of his leaving might be more disturbing than staying but perhaps simply so he could continue listening! This scene and what follows has been called "one of the most moving sections of Kierkegaard's writings" by C. Stephen Evans, while Stephen Mulhall, in contrast, thinks he detects something more akin to a comically contrived "give-away," in which Climacus supposedly takes a certain "relish" in inventing the story of how he was inspired to become an author that is "almost palpable."⁷⁴ Who is right? That may be the wrong question to ask. While both responses perhaps exhibit to us the respective judgments of Evans and Mulhall, each interpretation can also seem one-sided when what we should be striving for is a way of reading Climacus' texts that remains alert to and expectant of his constantly combining the serious with the comical, earnestness with jest. This can often be uncanny but also serves to keep the reader on her toes and invites her to reexamine just what constitutes something's being truly serious.⁷⁵

Climacus observes two figures standing beside a fresh grave, "an old man with chalk-white hair and a child, a boy of about ten years," who is his grandson; the recently deceased is the boy's father and the old man's son.⁷⁶ Climacus claims that the "old man's august form became even more solemn in the transfiguring glow of twilight, and his voice, calm and yet fervent, rendered [his] words clearly and distinctly with the inwardness they had in the speaker, who paused now and then when his voice choked with weeping or his mood ended in a sigh."⁷⁷ Two things occupy the old man. On the one hand, he is concerned for the child and tries to impress upon his grandson that even though he no longer has any one "to cling to except an old man, . . . who himself longed to leave the world," there is "a God in heaven" and a savior in "Jesus Christ." At the same time, he is grieving over the loss of his son, who he thinks had lost his faith despite (or as a result of) "all his wisdom."⁷⁸ The old man doesn't want his grandson to suffer the same fate and so finds himself trying to warn him of what he thinks befell the father:

He spoke again with the child and told him that there was a wisdom that wanted to fly past faith, that on the other side of faith there was a wide range like the blue mountains, a specious

continent, which to the mortal eye looked like a certainty greater than that of faith, but the believer feared this mirage as the skipper fears a similar mirage at sea, feared that it was a sham eternity in which a mortal cannot live, but in which, if he steadily stares into it, he will lose his faith.⁷⁹

In what Climacus calls “the most heartrending scene [he has] ever witnessed,” the old man then asks the boy to promise him that he “will hold fast to this faith in life and death, that [he] will not let [himself] be deceived by any phantom.”⁸⁰ Climacus admits that someone might find the idea that an old man would speak this way to a child (in whom he “could not presuppose the maturity to understand” while nevertheless, given his own advanced age, he “did not dare to wait for the advent of maturity”) to be grounds for considering “the whole thing a fiction,” but insists that this is precisely what made things so moving to him: “the old man’s suffering found its strongest expression in what poetically might be called an improbability—that an old man has his one and only confidant in a child, and that a sacred promise, an oath, is required of a child.”⁸¹

Clearly moved by this entire scene, Climacus finds himself identifying with the different figures involved:

Although only a spectator and a witness, I was deeply affected. At one moment it seemed to me as if I myself were the young man whom the father had buried in terror. At the next moment it seemed to me as if I were the child who was bound by the sacred promise.⁸²

At this point, however, another shift in tone takes place. If the aesthetically-inclined reader may be wondering to herself what the appropriate response might be to something that she too finds so very moving (and has perhaps forgotten that its being recounted to her at all rests on our narrator’s having overheard what he admits was in no way intended for his, and thus her, ears), Climacus suddenly switches directions and comically makes clear to the reader the manner in which he did *not* respond:

I felt no urge to rush forward and emotionally express my sympathy to the old man, assuring him with tears and quivering voice that I would never forget this scene, or perhaps even beseeching him to put me under oath.⁸³

Climacus frequently distinguishes in the *Postscript* between these sorts of momentary outpourings, which he thinks have become habitual in his age, and a person’s really taking to heart something in such a way that it truly is reflected in her future actions. In the present case he

draws a distinction between two senses in which a person might express her intention never to forget such a moving scene:

In my opinion, "to want never to forget this impression" is different from saying once in a solemn moment, "I will never forget this." The former is inwardness, the latter perhaps only momentary inwardness. And if one never forgets it, the solemnity with which it was said does not seem so important, since the sustained solemnity with which one day by day keeps oneself from forgetting it is a truer solemnity....A tender handshake, a passionate embrace, a tear in the eye are still not exactly the same as the quiet dedication of resolution.⁸⁴

Since Climacus denies that he indulged in any kind of momentary outpouring to the old man, while nevertheless maintaining that he truly was moved, the reader may begin to suppose by process of elimination that perhaps he was able to keep from forgetting this scene through some other, more sustained activity, an activity quite different in kind from those she is accustomed to engage in when only employing aesthetic capacities and which may be tied to the development of an inner life.

Climacus informs us that he immediately understood the old man's concerns, in part because his earlier studies had also "led [him] to notice a dubious relation between modern Christian speculative thought [*Speculation*] and Christianity," though he admits that prior to this event this "dubious relation" had "not occupied [him] in any decisive way."⁸⁵ Now, however, he feels differently. Not only does he believe that the old man has been wronged but he is especially moved by the old man's inability (given his apparent lack of higher education) to explain how exactly his son's "wisdom" had corrupted his faith:

The august old man's pain over losing his son, not only through death, but, as he understood it, even more terribly through speculative thought, moved me deeply, and at the same time the contradiction in his situation, that he could not even explain how the enemy force was operating, became for me a decisive summons to find a definite clue. The whole thing appealed to me like a complicated criminal case in which the very convoluted circumstances have made it difficult to track down the truth. This was something for me.⁸⁶

Climacus claims, then, that with this event he "gained a more definite understanding of his whimsical idea that [he] must try to make something difficult."⁸⁷ How he informs us of this, however, again seems designed to work on the reader. Perhaps to temper any undue sentiment

that may have arisen in the reader, he once again tacks back towards the comic, describing his thinking as follows:

You are quite bored with life's diversions, bored with girls, whom you love only in passing; you must have something that can totally occupy your time. Here it is: find out where the misunderstanding between speculative thought and Christianity lies. This, then, was my resolution.⁸⁸

Having earlier drawn the reader's attention to the need to distinguish between momentary outpourings and "the quiet dedication of resolution," Climacus now leaves his reader somewhat unsettled with respect to his own resolution.⁸⁹ Is it genuine? Merely a whim?⁹⁰ He claims that upon making his resolution he did not speak to anyone about it, nor did he promise anyone anything, leaving him free to "undertake the matter entirely *con amore* [with love] and proceed altogether *methodice* [methodically], as if a poet and a dialectician kept [his] every step under surveillance."⁹¹ Perhaps most importantly, even as his studies "now definitely became more organized" and he "sought through [his] own reflection to pick up a clue to the ultimate misunderstanding," what repeatedly helped him to keep from transforming his "deliberations into learned knowledge" was "the old gentleman's august figure," which "always hovered before [his] thoughts."⁹² All three figures of this story in fact seem to have significance for Climacus and help to structure his activity as a writer and thinker. The grandfather represents a traditional religious simplicity that seems under threat while the young man, who is in effect the murder victim in this "criminal case," serves as a warning to the reader about what can happen to a person who becomes too taken up with speculative philosophy (cf. the young Johannes of *De Omnibus*). The grandson represents the future generation. If he is to retain his religious faith, he will need help. Tradition, as found in the grandfather, will seemingly not be enough. He seems to require something more if he is to protect himself from the corrupting influence of speculative philosophy. Before we consider how Climacus, in his capacity as philosophical midwife, might be able to help such a figure, let's first examine what his diagnosis of the underlying problem is.

3.3 Climacus' Diagnosis and the Need for Indirect Communication

Having discovered a task (to make something difficult) and having resolved to try to determine how an involvement with speculative philosophy may have led to the spiritual death of the old

man's son, Climacus reports that after "many mistakes" he finally traced the source of this problem to what he takes to be a more general tendency of the age:

I need not report my many mistakes, but it finally became clear to me that the deviation of speculative thought and, based thereupon, its presumed right to reduce faith to an element [*et Moment*] might not be something accidental, might be located far deeper in a tendency of the whole age—probably in this, that because of much knowledge [*den megen Viden*] people have entirely forgotten what it means to *exist* and what *inwardness* is.

My main thought was that, because of much knowledge [*den megen Viden*], people in our day have forgotten what it means to *exist*, and what *inwardness* is, and that the misunderstanding between speculative thought and Christianity could be explained by that.⁹³

Let's unpack this a bit. Climacus both identifies a condition to which the age is prone (a condition of forgetfulness) and points to what he takes to be the source of this condition (a large quantity of knowledge). Because people "know too much" (about what?) they have forgotten something (but what exactly?).⁹⁴ Perhaps the most natural way initially to take this claim is that people are overwhelmed by so many things to know that they wind up forgetting some of them (a kind of modern day information overload). But Climacus seems to have in mind something slightly different, which we can bring out by recalling the distinction between aesthetic capacities and ethical/religious capacities that we discussed in the previous chapter (see section 2.2). Recall that when one employs aesthetic capacities (broadly construed, so aimed not only at works of art but other objects, notably the objects of the natural sciences and abstract philosophical reflection) the emphasis falls on the object and the character of the subject's relationship is supposedly disinterested, whereas when one employs ethical and religious capacities the emphasis falls on the subject and the character of the relationship is supposed to be one of interestedness (whether with respect to oneself or a divine other). Given Kierkegaard's view that people are often under the illusion that they are Christians while they lead lives that are governed by aesthetic categories, a provisional understanding of the respect in which Climacus thinks people know too much is that they one-sidedly exercise their aesthetic capacities. When he claims that people have forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is, he seems to have in mind just those parts of a person's nature that involve the use of ethical and religious capacities. Having fallen into the habit of approaching the world in a disinterested fashion, as though it were merely an objective realm to be known, people have lost track of the sense in

which they *qua* ethical and religious beings are something other than this. They have forgotten what kinds of creatures they are (or can become) and so are lacking in the kind of self-knowledge that Socrates took a particular interest in. The knowledge they possess then becomes what the pseudonym Anti-Climacus calls an “inhuman knowledge,” since its growth does not help to foster a corresponding growth of self-knowledge:

The law for the development of the self with respect to knowing, insofar as it is the case that the self becomes itself, is that the increase of knowledge corresponds to the increase of self-knowledge, that the more the self knows, the more it knows itself. If this does not happen, the more knowledge increases, the more it becomes a kind of *inhuman* knowledge, in the obtaining of which a person's self is *squandered*, much the way people were squandered on building pyramids.⁹⁵

A condition of knowing too much, aesthetically speaking, seems to foster a condition of ethical and religious forgetfulness. By failing to cultivate these parts of themselves, people do not in effect *exist* as ethical and religious beings and so are lacking in inwardness (that is, they lack an inner life). The exclusive pursuit of aesthetic knowledge leads them to neglect themselves ethically and religiously speaking. The pseudonym Anti-Climacus puts it this way: “This is perhaps how a large number of people live: they contrive gradually to obscure their ethical and ethico-religious knowledge, which would lead them into decisions and consequences not endearing to their lower natures; on the other hand, they expand their aesthetic and metaphysical knowledge, which is ethically a distraction.”⁹⁶

Climacus complicates this picture, however, by seeming to allow that in a setting where people are awash with (aesthetic) knowledge, these habits of thought spill over into the ethical and religious realms. It is not simply that because they are in the habit of approaching things in a disinterested fashion they have lost sight of what can only come into view if approached in an interested fashion, but they also seemingly come to know a lot about the ethical and religious (and specifically Christian) even as they fail to make proper use of this knowledge in their individual lives. He maintains, for example, that with respect to Christianity, people have become so knowledgeable about it that it no longer makes an impression on them:

Because everyone knows the Christian truth, it has gradually become such a triviality that a primitive impression of it is acquired only with difficulty.

In an age of knowledge, in which all are Christians and know what Christianity is, it is only all too easy to use the holy names without

meaning anything thereby, to rattle off the Christian truth without having the least impression of it.⁹⁷

Here Climacus relies on a distinction between what we might call *mere* knowledge of an ethical or religious truth and action-generating knowledge. It might seem that since ethics and religion are inherently practical in nature (and so ought to be reflected in the character of a person's inner life and how she stands in relation to her actions), it simply makes no sense to attribute knowledge to someone whose life nevertheless does not reflect what she supposedly "knows." Can a person truly be knowledgeable about ethics or religion and yet lead a life that is governed by, for example, an aesthetic life-view? For Climacus, the answer seems to be no, but he nevertheless wants to deny that such a person must be entirely lacking in knowledge about the ethical and the religious, maintaining only that her relationship to what she knows is such that it fails to make an appropriate, action-guiding impression on her. Another passage from the pseudonym Anti-Climacus nicely helps to bring this out:

It is enough to drive one both to laughter and to tears, all these declarations about having understood and grasped the highest, plus the virtuosity with which many *in abstracto* know how to expound it, in a certain sense quite correctly—it is enough to drive one both to laughter and to tears to see that all this knowledge and understanding exercises no power at all over people's lives, that their lives do not express in the remotest way what they have understood, but rather the opposite.⁹⁸

It's as though a person through upbringing and the like were exposed to ethics or Christianity but, against the backdrop of a habit of one-sidedly employing aesthetic capacities, doesn't adequately integrate what she comes to know into her life; that is, she fails to "appropriate" what she knows: "Where the subjective is of importance in knowledge...appropriation is therefore the main point."⁹⁹ She may be able to "expound" what she has learned even though this "exercises no power" over her life. Climacus characterizes this as a situation where what a person knows is something that she knows only "by rote" (*udenad*).¹⁰⁰

Climacus seems to think that modern speculative philosophy is a particularly striking example of this larger tendency of the age. While he does not object to abstract philosophical reflection per se (for it too has its appropriate applications and objects of inquiry),¹⁰¹ he does draw attention to how the proper exercise of the speculative philosopher's aesthetic capacities requires him to "lose himself in objectivity, [to] disappear from himself."¹⁰² This is fine when

one seeks to illuminate and comprehend a given object, but is not the appropriate means for reflecting about a subject, namely the individual herself *qua* ethical and religious agent:

For the speculating thinker the question of his personal eternal happiness cannot come up at all, precisely because his task consists in going away from himself more and more and becoming objective and in that way disappearing from himself and becoming the gazing power of speculative thought.¹⁰³

This can have particular consequences for ethics and religion, since by regularly engaging in speculation the speculative philosopher may fall out the habit of attending to herself and conceiving of herself as a practical agent. One result of abstraction, according to Climacus, is that it “removes the very locus of the decision: the existing subject.”¹⁰⁴ A steady diet of this type of reflection may result in what James Conant calls “a particular form of *blindness* as to the character of one’s life.”¹⁰⁵ By doing philosophy the individual “forgets” herself, effectively losing sight of herself as an ethical and religious being: “Alas, while the speculating, honorable Herr Professor is explaining all existence, he has in sheer absentmindedness forgotten what he himself is called, namely, that he is a human being, a human being pure and simple, and not a fantastical three-eighths of a paragraph.”¹⁰⁶ Not only that, but Climacus joins Kierkegaard in his concern about the disappearance of the proper use of the first personal “I” (an issue we discussed in the previous chapter—see section 2.6) and seems to think that modern philosophical prose has itself played an important role in undermining the genuine use of first personal discourse:

This is just about the case with the majority of people in our day, when one seldom or never hears a person speak as if he were conscious of his being an individual existing human being, but instead pantheistically lets himself become dizzy when *he*, too, talks about millions and the nations and world-historical development.

To be a human being has been abolished, and every speculative thinker confuses himself with humankind, whereby he becomes something infinitely great and nothing at all. In absentmindedness, he confuses himself with humankind, just as the opposition press uses “we.”¹⁰⁷

When speculative philosophy turns its attention to Christianity in particular, what it provides the reader with is something that will exercise her aesthetic capacities while seemingly leading her not only to neglect herself ethically and religiously but even to acquire a certain superior attitude towards the activity of attending to herself and to attaching any particular importance to the category of the individual:

Assistance is given in long, systematic introductions and world-historical surveys... [, which] in relation to the decision for Christianity [is] utter procrastination. One becomes objective and more objective, the sooner the better. One *scorns* being subjective, *despises* the category of individuality, wants to console oneself with the category of the race, but does not comprehend what cowardice and despair there are in the subject's grabbing for a glittering something and becoming nothing at all. One is a Christian as a matter of course.¹⁰⁸

Climacus ties this neglect of first personal discourse to the way that modern philosophy has come to be written. He thinks it is characterized above all by what he calls a “didactic paragraph-pomposity,” which he directly ties to his claim that the age is suffering from too much knowledge: “the confusion of our age...is due simply to large quantities of the didactic [*den megen Doceren*].”¹⁰⁹

Climacus reports that after he came to the conclusion that “the misfortune with [the] age was just that it had come to know too much and had forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is,” he also concluded that to write about this he would have to employ an “indirect” form of communication:

When I had comprehended this, it also became clear to me that if I wanted to communicate anything about this, the chief thing was that my presentation must have an *indirect* form.¹¹⁰

Notice that Climacus seems to think that he will only be able to communicate with readers who suffer from this condition of ethical and religious forgetfulness if he employs a non-straightforward manner of writing. That is, if he is to *remind* his readers of what they have forgotten, he will have to find a way to get around or past their present habits of thought and their current appetite for knowledge.¹¹¹ This means, in his view, that his writing must be given a non-didactic form and not come across as providing his readers with yet another thing to know: “This must not on any account be done didactically...If this is communicated as knowledge, the recipient is mistakenly induced to understand that he is gaining something to know” (versus, for example, being reminded of something he already knows).¹¹² One other thing worth noticing about this passage is that it is a pseudonym who concludes that *he* must make use of indirect communication. So while Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms may be one means of engaging in indirect communication, there presumably will be other means that can be used to try to deceive the reader into the truth, many of which the individual pseudonymous authors themselves may employ.¹¹³

In the context of Climacus' describing to the reader his diagnosis of what he thinks ails the age together with his conclusion that he will have to give his writings an indirect form, he also invokes Socrates and the concept of the maieutic (see Chapter 2, section 2.4).¹¹⁴ He draws a contrast between those teacher-student relationships that are direct in nature (and are prone either to a "spontaneous outpouring" on the part of the teacher or a "spontaneous devotedness" on the part of the student) and those that encourage "the self-activity of appropriation."¹¹⁵ In the latter case, "the teacher's inwardness" consists not of something he directly shares of himself with his student but of his "respect for the learner, that he in himself is his own inwardness."¹¹⁶ Similarly, the student who upholds the proper maieutic relationship will exhibit a "pious, silent agreement, according to which the learner personally appropriates what is taught, distancing himself from the teacher because he turns inward into himself."¹¹⁷ Because the teacher "truly disciplines" herself and tries to "prevent the direct relationship" with her students ("instead of comfortably having some adherents"), one consequence is that she will "dutifully have to put up with being accused of light-mindedness, lack of earnestness, etc."¹¹⁸ In his own case, Climacus somewhat mockingly invites this while providing us in the process with several examples of the sorts of things he may have to put up with as an author who gives his writings an indirect form:

Prominent assistant professors have made light of the pseudonymous books, also of my little pamphlet [*Fragments*] because it was not didactic. Many have concluded straightaway that it was because the authors and I, too, were incapable of rising to the heights required for instructing didactically....Be that as it may, it is always good to be known for something, and I ask for nothing more than to be singled out as the only person who is *unable* to instruct didactically, and thereby as the only person who does not understand the demands of the times.¹¹⁹

I ask for nothing better than to be known for being the only one who in our *earnest* times was not earnest.

The pseudonymous authors and I along with them were all subjective. I ask for nothing better than to be known in our *objective* times as the only person who was not capable of being objective.¹²⁰

Despite the whimsical manner in which he presents these examples, Climacus also acknowledges that the ability to put up with being thought frivolous and lacking in seriousness does not come easily. The philosophical midwife will have to "learn to constrain" herself and so practice a kind of self-resignation.¹²¹

Climacus turns to Socrates in this context to provide an example of someone who seems to have understood the need in the maieutic relationship for the teacher to do what she can to throw the student back on her own resources and so get her to turn inwards and examine herself. One potential obstacle is the student's becoming overly interested in the teacher, perhaps coming to "admire him" (so neglect herself) or to have her "clothes make in the same way," etc.¹²² According to Climacus, it is Socrates' understanding of the maieutic relationship, where "there is no direct relation between the teacher and the learner," that made him "so very pleased" with what Climacus calls his "advantageous appearance."¹²³ What kind of appearance? The fact that he was "very ugly, had clumsy feet, and more than that, a number of bumps on his forehead and other places, which were bound to convince everyone that he was a depraved character!"¹²⁴ This stands in sharp contrast to what is commonly taken to be an advantageous appearance in Climacus' day:

In our day, we say of a clergyman that he has a very advantageous appearance; we are pleased about this and understand that he is a handsome man, that the clerical gown is very becoming to him, that he has a sonorous voice and a figure that every tailor—but what am I saying—that every listener must be pleased with.¹²⁵

Socrates, too, might have been given "the pleasing appearance of a sentimental zither player, the languishing look of a *Schäfer* [amorous swain], the small feet of a dance director . . . , and *in toto* as advantageous an appearance as . . . a theological graduate who had set his hopes on a patronage appointment could possibly wish for himself."¹²⁶ But Socrates prefers to appear as he does, according to Climacus, because his ugliness, like his irony, can serve to repel his interlocutor and so help to keep her from being "caught in a direct relation to the teacher."¹²⁷ It is "through the *repulsion* of opposition" provided by Socrates' ugliness ("which in turn was his irony in a higher sphere") that the interlocutor may come to "understand . . . that the learner essentially has himself to deal with."¹²⁸ This recalls the image of Socrates as a Silenus statue that we discussed in the previous chapter (see the end of section 2.4 and the beginning of section 2.5). By Climacus' lights, there is a deeper significance to Socrates' ugliness and the fact that "in public . . . his whole life is one big game—a game of irony" than Alcibiades seems to appreciate.¹²⁹ His ugliness and his irony do not simply serve to keep "hidden" his ethical and religious nature, but also help to make clear to his interlocutor that ethical and religious truth, involving what Climacus calls "inwardness," is "not the chummy inwardness with which two bosom friends walk arm in arm

with each other but is the *separation* in which each person *for himself* is existing in what is true."¹³⁰

3.4 The Comic Fulfillment of Climacus' Resolution

Climacus concludes his account of how he became an author in a lengthy, rather peculiar appendix, which is entitled "A Glance at a Contemporary Endeavor [*Stræben*] in Danish Literature."¹³¹ This is one of the oddest yet most interesting stretches of text within Kierkegaard's body of writing, where we find Climacus, one of Kierkegaard's fictional characters, providing the reader with a kind of overview of Kierkegaard's entire corpus prior to the *Postscript*, so discussing both Kierkegaard's edifying speeches and each of the pseudonymous works that make up the aesthetic production (see Chapter 2, section 2.2). This is the first attempt within Kierkegaard's writings to try to discern an overriding aim or point of view for the authorship as a whole and in *The Point of View* Kierkegaard calls this "a section with which [he] would ask the reader to become familiar."¹³² If the reader has lost track over the previous pages of Climacus' tendency to combine earnestness with jest, perhaps having become unduly fascinated with the diagnosis that Climacus develops about what ails the age and with his claims about the need for indirect communication if he is to make anyone aware of this, then this appendix seems designed to remind her of the nature of his enterprise and the need to be alert to the manner in which he proceeds.

For starters, if what Climacus says is true (namely that due to too much knowledge people have forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is, and that because of their condition of forgetfulness and their overly developed appetite for knowledge this can only be communicated to them by using an indirect manner of writing), then what are we to make of his very performance as he recounts these things to the reader? The issue with which we closed the previous chapter, whether works like *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* serve to undercut the maieutic function of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous books, is here brought home with a vengeance. What are we to make of a pseudonymous author's direct report of his conclusion that he needs to write works that employ indirect communication? And if he thinks, as we'll see below, that the other pseudonyms have also written books that seek to engage their

readers indirectly, then what are we to make of his drawing attention to this in such a seemingly direct manner?

In fact, while the reader may already have been struck by this and perhaps even have begun to feel as though she has lost her bearings somewhat with respect to this jesting, elusive narrator, Climacus goes out of his way to make sure that she considers this issue by directly raising the matter as follows: "I sometimes wonder whether this matter of indirect communication could not be directly communicated."¹³³ He again appeals to Socrates, in this case noting that even as Socrates appears to be someone who typically engages his interlocutor using indirect means, he sometimes seems to break character and use a more direct approach:

I see that Socrates, who ordinarily held so strictly to asking and answering (which is an indirect method), because the long speech, the didactic discourse, and reciting by rote lead only to confusion, at times himself speaks at length and then states as the reason that the person with whom he is speaking needs an elucidation before the conversation can begin. This he does in the *Gorgias*, for example.¹³⁴

Rather than taking Socrates' purported use of direct communication as a license for him to do so as well, Climacus instead says that "this seems to [him] an inconsistency, an *impatience* that fears it will take too long before [Socrates and his interlocutor] come to a mutual understanding, because through the indirect method it must still be possible to achieve the same thing, only more slowly."¹³⁵ Given that the reader has earlier encountered what looks to be direct communication by Climacus about his diagnosis of what he thinks has gone wrong with the age and speculative philosophy in particular, it is bound to be bewildering, to say the least, to find him proclaiming later that anyone who departs from the strict use of indirect communication is inconsistent and does so out of impatience. Is that what is going on in Climacus' own case?

Let's set to one side for the moment how we are to understand Climacus' own activity in the light of these remarks. In raising this point, he seems most worried about the philosophical midwife's losing track of herself and her own self-development. He seems to think that acting on the impulse to speak directly about matters that have to be calibrated to another person's being under an illusion (and so to that person's being incapable of receiving direct communication) is to lose track of the need for the midwife to lower herself before her interlocutor and to remain fundamentally no more than an "occasion" for her interlocutor to make self-discoveries:

To me it seems better truly to come to a mutual understanding *separately* in inwardness, even though this occurs slowly. Yes,

even if it never did happen because time went by and the communicator was forgotten without ever being understood by anyone, it seems to me to be more consistent on the part of the communicator not to have made the slightest adaptation in order to have someone understand him, and first and last to *watch himself* lest he become *important* in relation to others, which, far from being inwardness, is external, noisy conduct. If he does that, then he will have consolation in the judgment when the god judges that he has made *no concessions* to himself in order to win anyone but to the utmost of his capability has worked in vain, leaving it to the god whether it should have any significance or not.¹³⁶

When encountering, then, what looks to be direct communication in a context where this seems to be inappropriate, the first thing to examine seems to be whether there are any signs of “impatience” on the part of the speaker or writer or whether there is any indication that this activity may betray a desire on her part to become inappropriately “important in relation to others.” But what if we aren’t able to detect anything that seems to indicate this? Interestingly, in an earlier discussion of indirect communication in the *Postscript*, Climacus actually seems to allow that it might be possible for an extremely competent philosophical midwife, someone who possessed both “art and self-control,” to step out of character for a period of time and speak directly about what he is doing:

The more art, the more inwardness—yes, if he had considerable art, it would even be quite possible for him *to say that he was using it* with the assurance of being able the next moment to ensure the inwardness of the communication, because he was infinitely concerned to preserve his own inwardness, a concern that saves the concerned person from all positive chattiness.¹³⁷

So there seem to be at least two possible explanations for why direct communication might appear when it doesn’t seem appropriate. It could be due to impatience and inconsistency on the part of the philosophical midwife, expressing a desire to be more important for the other person than the maieutic relationship allows, or it could be but a further expression of her capacity “to vary inexhaustibly, just as inwardness is inexhaustible, the doubly reflected form of the communication.”¹³⁸ We will return to this topic in Chapter 5 when we examine the therapeutic stance that Climacus adopts in the *Postscript* itself.

Climacus reports that once he had concluded that people had forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is, he then “resolved,” as part of his attempt to help remind them of what they’d forgotten, “to go back as far as possible in order not to arrive too soon at what it

means to exist religiously, not to mention existing Christianly-religiously.”¹³⁹ His desire not to arrive “too soon” at what will effectively become one of his central topics of inquiry in both *Fragments* and the *Postscript* is indicative of his more general sense that when it comes to the ethical and the religious (and the specifically Christian) there seems to be massive conceptual confusion in his day and the frequent running together of different terms and categories:

Just because in our day people perhaps know far too much, it is very easy to confuse everything in a confusion of language, where aestheticians use the most decisive Christian-religious categories in brilliant remarks, and pastors use them thoughtlessly as officialese that is indifferent to content.¹⁴⁰

Climacus reasons that if people “had forgotten what it means to exist religiously, they had probably also forgotten what it means to exist humanly” (that is, ethically).¹⁴¹ In order to avoid terminological confusion, he thinks it would be appropriate to “start from the bottom” and first portray the difference between someone who solely employs aesthetic categories (and so in effect lacks a proper self) and someone who is “a very specific human being existing on the basis of the ethical.”¹⁴² He says that his aim is first to define the nature of inwardness in more general terms and make clear what role it plays in the different stages of human development. That way, when he eventually arrives at a closer examination of Christianity itself and the precise nature of what it means to exist as a Christian, he will hopefully be able to avoid further conceptual confusion: “Christianity...is precisely inwardness, but, please note, not every inwardness, which was why the preliminary stages definitely had to be insisted upon—that was my idea.”¹⁴³ He claims that by the time he brings out *Fragments*, “existence-inwardness [had been] defined to the extent that the Christian-religious could be brought forward without being immediately confused with all sorts of things.”¹⁴⁴ Thus it is one of Climacus’ philosophical aims to help his reader to obtain a greater conceptual clarity about ethical and religious concepts and their proper employment. He hopes therefore to approach these topics in such a way that the order in which he discusses different matters will help to facilitate this aim and so enable his reader to become reacquainted with those parts of herself that she may have been neglecting.

If in reading the previous paragraph you were struck by the striking similarity between the point at which Climacus said he planned to begin his task (contrasting a life governed by an aesthetic life-view with one governed by an ethical life-view) and the plan of Kierkegaard’s first pseudonymous work *Either/Or*, you would certainly not be off base. In fact, Climacus claims

that before he was himself able to act on the first phase of his task, lo and behold, out came *Either/Or*:

The task was set, and I foresaw that the work would be copious enough, and above all that I would have to be prepared to remain still at times when the spirit would not support me with pathos....What happens? As I go on in this way, *Either/Or* is published. What I aimed to do had been done right here. I became very unhappy at the thought of my solemn resolution but then I thought once again: After all, you have not promised anyone anything; as long as it is done, that is just fine.¹⁴⁵

But, as he tells it, things get worse for our budding young author who, if you recall, may have a certain “genius” for the art of loafing.¹⁴⁶ He claims that “step by step, just as [he] wanted to begin the task of carrying out [his] resolution by *working*, there appeared a pseudonymous book that did what [he] wanted to do.”¹⁴⁷ Not only does Climacus claim that he is forever “intending to do what the [other] pseudonymous authors [end up] doing” (so that he himself is repeatedly—and predictably?—always “arriving too late when it comes to doing something”), but he also maintains that it is only by reading what the other pseudonyms have written that it becomes clear to him what his own intentions actually were:

There was something strangely ironic about it all. It was good that I had never spoken to anyone about my resolution, that not even my landlady had detected anything from my behavior, for otherwise people would have laughed at my comic situation, because it is indeed rather droll that the cause I had resolved to take up is advancing, but not through me. And every time I read such a pseudonymous book and thereby saw more clearly what I had intended to do, I was convinced that the cause had advanced. In this way, I became a tragic-comic interested witness of the productions of Victor Eremita and the other pseudonymous authors.¹⁴⁸

Climacus proceeds to give the reader a brief tour of the different pseudonymous works that preceded and followed *Fragments* (and which were all prior to the *Postscript*).¹⁴⁹ He draws attention to what he takes to be some of their overriding concerns, while always being sure to qualify his remarks by noting that these are only the observations of someone who has read these books: “Whether my understanding is that of the authors, I naturally cannot know for certain, since I am only a reader.”¹⁵⁰ Whatever you make of Climacus’ discussion of these individual works, one thing that does not vary throughout this discussion is his basic diagnosis. He frequently reminds the reader that it is his view that (1) people presently suffer from a peculiar

kind of forgetfulness (a forgetfulness concerning ethical and religious existence and inwardness); and (2) that this condition of forgetfulness is tied to their knowing too much.¹⁵¹

Climacus thus in effect treats the other pseudonymous books as “elements in the realization of the idea [he] had but which in an ironical way [he] was exempted from realizing” (at least before he somehow manages to write *Fragments* and later the *Postscript*).¹⁵² This means that regardless of how compelling we may find his interpretations of these works, his interpretative activity itself may also help to isolate some of his own concerns and what he takes to be appropriate tools for engaging his reader in a maieutic manner (and so may provide us with clues for what to look for in his own writings). Since it is his view that people have forgotten how to exist (namely how to exercise their ethical and religious capacities and to employ the first personal “I”), one of the chief things he draws attention to in the other pseudonymous works is how there is an attempt to remind the reader of what it is like to encounter individual existing human beings. Climacus claims, for example, that in *Either/Or* there is a qualitative difference between the various aesthetic pieces of *A* that are on display in the first part, which constitute the “distractions of a luxuriant thought-content” that “holds existence at bay by the most subtle of all deceptions, by thinking,” and the writings of Judge William, who by choosing himself has begun a process of self-consolidation:

This is the change of scene, or, more correctly, now the scene is there; instead of a world of possibility, animated by imagination and dialectically arranged, an *individual* has come into existence...that is, truth is inwardness, the inwardness of existence, please note, and here in ethical definition....The scene is the ethical inwardness in the existing individuality.¹⁵³

The Danish term “Scene,” which is translated here as “scene,” can also mean “stage,” as in a theatrical stage.¹⁵⁴ The reader, by Climacus’ lights, encounters (a literary representation of) an existing individual in the second half of *Either/Or*, as though he had appeared before an audience on a stage. But note that the stage in question concerns precisely what Climacus thinks his readers have forgotten about, namely the stage of existence, the scene or setting where the individual is an existing human being with ethical and religious capacities. If the reader has forgotten this, has departed from a setting where she exists by habitually indulging her aesthetic capacities (which require her to become disinterested and in effect to remove herself from the setting of herself), then she may be helped simply by being reacquainted with what Kierkegaard calls “poetized personalities who say *I*” (his pseudonyms; see Chapter 2, section 2.6).¹⁵⁵ And

whether or not we agree with Climacus' account of what unfolds in *Either/Or*, I think we should take Climacus' clear interest in works that he believes have this as one of their aims to indicate what one of his own authorial aims might be.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Climacus' discussion of the pseudonymous works. After drawing attention to the contrast between the lack and presence of an existing individual in the two halves of *Either/Or*, Climacus proceeds to point out how later pseudonymous works seem to build on this, shifting their focus from the ethical to the religious while continuing to represent for the reader various existing individuals. While different works examine different aspects of religious existence (such as the concepts of sin and suffering), one overriding difference between lives that are governed by a religious life-view and those governed by an ethical life-view seems to be that insofar as a person's life has a religious character, then it will appear to her that she "is not capable of fulfilling" the "infinite requirement" of the ethical and so stands in need of "divine assistance."¹⁵⁶ Thus the later pseudonymous works become more and more an exploration of "this powerlessness" and how, conceived religiously, this is not an accidental condition but due to the individual herself: "The dreadful exemption from doing the ethical, the individual's heterogeneity with the ethical, this suspension from the ethical, is *sin* as a state in a human being....Sin is a crucial expression for the religious existence....is itself the beginning of the religious order of things."¹⁵⁷

Recall that according to Kierkegaard what Climacus' discussion of the earlier pseudonymous works amounts to is "a description of one way along which one may go to becoming a Christian—*back* from the aesthetic to becoming a Christian" (see Chapter 2, section 2.3).¹⁵⁸ He maintains that once Climacus has "appropriated all the pseudonymous aesthetic writing," it then remains for him to describe "the second way—*back* from the system, the speculative, etc. to becoming a Christian."¹⁵⁹ Since, however, Climacus represents these various writings as serving to carry out part of his own task, "where the large pseudonymous books serve...[his] little fragment of production," it may not be surprising that he routinely thinks that he detects in these works what he calls their "indirect polemic against speculative thought."¹⁶⁰ He also approvingly draws attention to what he takes to be their constant "refraining from being didactic" and what he calls their "eye for the comic."¹⁶¹ In an age in which, according to Climacus, "a ludicrous sullenness and paragraph-pomposity...are called earnestness by assistant professors" and "anyone who does not have this appalling ceremoniousness is [thought to be]

light-minded,” he says that he regards “the power to employ the comic as a vitally necessary legitimation for anyone who is to be regarded as authorized in the world of spirit in [his] day.”¹⁶² If people are to be reminded of what they have forgotten, then, in his view, “one should not write for ‘paragraph-gobblers’ [*Paragraphsluger*],¹⁶³ but existing individualities must be portrayed in their distress when existence itself is confusing for them, which is something different from sitting safely in a corner by the stove and reciting *de omnibus dubitandum*.”¹⁶⁴

In his discussion of how the other pseudonyms seek to write in a non-didactic, indirect manner, Climacus especially draws attention to the tendency of some of the pseudonyms to cast their books in the form of “experiments” (what the Hongs render in their translations as “imaginary constructions”).¹⁶⁵ These experiments typically have both an experimenter (the pseudonym) and a character who is the subject of his experiment (a literary creation of the pseudonym).¹⁶⁶ David Gouwens calls those who play the role of experimenter “observer figures” and notes that “repeatedly we find a complex-relation between these observers...and the characters they observe.”¹⁶⁷ One thing in particular stands out. Somewhat reminiscent of the philosophical midwife’s tendency to lower herself in relation to her interlocutor, an unusual structural feature of the experiments typically found in the pseudonymous works is that the experimenter creates a character who is represented to be existentially more developed than he himself is.¹⁶⁸ While discussing the third part of *Stage’s on Life’s Way* (which is designated as a “Psychological Experiment” on the title page and whose pseudonymous experimenter, Frater Taciturnus, “defines himself as lower in existence” than quidam, the character he creates to be the subject of his experiment), Climacus expands on this point as follows:

Ordinarily one supposes...that the experimenter, the observer, is higher or stands higher than what he produces....Here it is the reverse; the subject of the experiment [*den Experimenterede*] discovers and makes manifest the higher—higher not in the direction of understanding and thinking but in the direction of inwardness.¹⁶⁹

In this particular case, Frater Taciturnus claims to have carried out his experiment “in order to become properly aware of what is decisive in the religious existence categories, since religiousness is very often confused with all sorts of things and with apathy.”¹⁷⁰ Yet he denies that he personally is a religious figure: “I myself am not religious[;]...with the pleasure of observation I only want to understand [the religious] by experimenting.”¹⁷¹ Claiming that “an experimenter is a calm and imperturbable man” who should not be confused with the subjects of

his experiments (“which is like confusing physician and patient”), he draws attention to “the dialectical difficulty and strenuousness of his task” and suggests that the type of reader he seeks is someone who is equally self-composed (or perhaps comes to be so through the activity of reading itself) and “whose head can take the dialectical exertion” his writings require if they are to be understood: “If it so pleased me to declare everything I wrote to be gibberish [*Galimathias*], the person who is to be my reader must be able to let himself not be disturbed by this but see to it that he reproduces the dialectical movements himself.”¹⁷²

It's worth noting that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms frequently use the terms “observer” and “observation” rather broadly. These terms are not restricted to those situations where aesthetic capacities are required, meaning that it doesn't immediately follow from someone's being designated an observer that she must be disinterested or that the idea of an ethical or religious observer is inherently a contradiction in terms. Kierkegaard in fact expressly ties a person's having the capacity to observe the subjective realm of the ethical and the religious to the degree to which she herself has developed her ethical and religious capacities:

Insofar as the object viewed belongs to the external world, then how the observer is constituted is probably less important, or, more correctly, then what is necessary for the observation is something irrelevant to his deeper nature. But the more the object of observation belongs to the world of the spirit, the more important is the way he himself is constituted in his innermost nature.¹⁷³

Climacus seems to be in agreement. He charges that by wanting to “contemplate [*betrachte*] Christianity” instead of developing a more personally-interested relation, the speculative philosopher exhibits an “objective indifference” that is incompatible with the genuine observation of Christianity:

With reference to a kind of observation in which it is of importance that the observer be in a definite state, it holds true that when he is not in that state he does not know anything whatever...If Christianity is essentially something objective, it behooves the observer to be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake if the observer is objective.¹⁷⁴

With respect to Christianity, Climacus seems to think that “only two kinds of people can know something about it: those who are impassionedly, infinitely interested in their eternal happiness...and those who with the opposite passion (yet with passion) reject it—the happy and unhappy lovers.”¹⁷⁵ He specifies two species of passionate rejection (each of which presupposes in his view significant “existence-inwardness”): (1) religious rejection (where, e.g., “the

Jew...had enough religious inwardness to be capable of being *offended* [*forarges*]” by Christianity); (2) philosophical rejection (where, e.g., the Greek philosopher’s “passion...of thought” leads him to find Christianity to be “*foolishness* [*Daarskab*]”).¹⁷⁶ He thinks that the speculative philosopher, on the other hand, “is perhaps the furthest removed from Christianity,” adding that “perhaps it is preferable to be someone who takes offense but still continually relates himself to Christianity, whereas the speculative thinker has [merely] understood it.”¹⁷⁷

Calling the experiment “a doubly reflected communication form,” Climacus makes clear that he conceives of this as an indirect form of writing and adds that “this form won [his] complete approval.”¹⁷⁸ While discussing *Repetition* (whose subtitle is “an experiment [*Forsøg*] in experimental psychology”), he claims that “by taking place in the form of an experiment, the communication creates for itself a chasmic gap between reader and author and fixes the separation of inwardness between them, so that a direct understanding is made impossible.”¹⁷⁹ Climacus draws a contrast between “an existing person who writes for existing persons” and “a rote reciter who writes for rote reciters,” claiming that the experimental form of writing both allows the proper expression of ethical and religious earnestness as well as providing the author with a maieutic means of testing her reader:

If what is said is earnestness to the writer, he keeps the earnestness essentially to himself. If the recipient interprets it as earnestness, he does it essentially by himself, and precisely this is the earnestness...If a person knows everything but knows it by rote, the form of the experiment is a good exploratory means; in this form, one even tells him what he knows, but he does not recognize it.¹⁸⁰

As we’ll see in Chapters 4 and 5, Climacus also conceives of his own works as having an experimental form and so seems to think of this form of writing as another way with which to distinguish what he is doing from the didactic, systematic manner of writing philosophy that remains the norm in his day.¹⁸¹

Even as Climacus seems to go out of his way to bring the comic into relief in this section of the *Postscript*, where his solemn resolution to get to the bottom of how speculative philosophy spiritually killed the old man’s son seems to be being carried out by the other pseudonyms while he looks on with a mixture of approval and a consciousness of the ridiculousness of his own situation, he also does make a number of substantive observations about these works and what he thinks their aims are. Before we turn to consider Climacus’ two manners of treatment for what he

thinks ails the age, let me conclude this chapter by addressing the nature of his remarks about the other pseudonymous works. That is, just as we considered above the status of his seemingly direct remarks about the need for indirect communication, it's also worth considering what we are to make of his seemingly being quite willing to discuss in direct terms the indirect nature of the other pseudonymous works. Isn't he also in danger here of undercutting any maieutic function these other works may have? Or is he perhaps simply exhibiting his own artistic competence, which may allow him to speak out of character for a time about these different books while simultaneously providing his readers with some hints for how to understand his own works? Climacus admits that he has reviewed the other pseudonymous works "after a fashion," but stops short of being willing to call what he has written a full-fledged review: "my discussion, simply by not becoming [extensively] involved in the contents, is actually no review."¹⁸² He in fact notes with approval the pseudonyms' having "again and again requested that there be no reviews."¹⁸³ He seems to think that if a work truly does have an indirect form (so presumably a maieutic aim), this is not something one will be able to illuminate or properly represent in a review or brief summary: "the contrast-form [*Modsætningsform*] of presentation makes it impossible to give a report, because a report takes away precisely what is most important and falsely changes it into a didactic discourse."¹⁸⁴ Since, according to Climacus, he and the other pseudonyms are trying to break with the didactic manner of writing that predominates in their age, it makes perfect sense that there might be a resistance to book reviews and summaries: their didacticism would simply feed the reader's existing habits of thought and might even provide her with an excuse for not taking up these very peculiar, highly non-didactic books themselves. With respect to his own work, *Fragments*, Climacus even seems to suggest that a proper review "to be consistent, would again have to be done in the indirect form of double reflection."¹⁸⁵ In the next chapter we will consider in greater detail a review of *Fragments* that did come out, and which Climacus treats as a paradigmatic example of how *not* to review an indirect, pseudonymous work.¹⁸⁶

Chapter 4: Climacus' Socratic Art of "Taking Away" (*Philosophical Fragments*)

In the remaining two chapters of this dissertation, we will shift our focus from what I've been calling Climacus' diagnosis of the problem facing Christendom to the manner in which he tries to go about treating this difficulty. Our goal will not be to provide a detailed discussion of how each of Climacus' books unfolds, but rather to draw attention to what I take to be his use of a Socratic method and to the way that he presents himself to the reader. We will begin in this chapter with his first book, *Philosophical Fragments*, and consider in some detail some of the difficulties that may stand in the way of reading this rather unusual work of philosophy.

4.1 The Difficulty of Reading *Fragments*

First time readers of Climacus' first book, *Philosophical Fragments*, quickly discover that this is an unusual work of philosophy. Climacus seeks to alert his reader to this up front. He denies that *Fragments* should be conceived of as a contribution to "the scientific-scholarly endeavor" that he seems to think most philosophers in his day have taken up; he maintains that what he is doing is something else.¹ Yet much of what he proceeds to develop over the course of the book certainly seems to be philosophical activity of a sort. Is it? And if so, how exactly does Climacus' practice of philosophy differ from the speculative philosophy that he thinks leads to self-forgetfulness and that may have corrupted the old man's son? We know from our discussion in the previous chapter that upon diagnosing the age's condition of ethical and religious forgetfulness, Climacus concludes that if he is to make his readers aware of their condition then he will have to employ indirect means (see section 3.3). So far, so good. While there may be some readers who simply read *Fragments* straight, entirely missing any irony or other devices that help to give the work a non-didactic, indirect form, most sophisticated readers realize that it is at least Climacus'

aspiration to write works that are suitably indirect. (Of course, whether he succeeds in doing this is another matter.) But this doesn't take us very far and can in fact create new interpretive problems. For one thing, if *Fragments* aspires to be a work of philosophy quite unlike what readers are accustomed to, then why should we expect that they will be able to understand such a work? Or, if we assume that Climacus nevertheless does want his books to be understood (and so may try to help educate his readers about what is involved in reading such a work well), we might ask to what extent their present habits of reading may remain a liability despite Climacus' best efforts; that is, we might ask what the dangers of misreading such a work of philosophy are. Philosophical training often aims at instilling the ability to assess such things as an author's conceptual clarity; whether she is consistent in the terms she employs and the claims she advances; and whether she develops convincing arguments to back up those claims (including whether these arguments are logically valid and sound). Climacus' claim to be a dialectician (see Chapter 3, section 3.1) suggests that at least some of what he is doing should be on familiar ground. If he develops a concept or gives an argument for a certain view, then readers should be able to draw upon their philosophical training to judge how well he does these things. But Climacus also seems to think that his readers suffer from a condition of knowing too much. This potentially means that the very intellectual capacities that normally are taken to lie at the heart of what it is to do philosophy are themselves contributing to the reader's condition of forgetfulness. Could exercising her philosophical capacities be part of the problem? If Climacus' aim is to treat this condition, and so to write in such a way that what he presents to his reader is not something she will merely try to consume as one more thing to know, then it is less clear how much her philosophical training will help her. Or perhaps a better way to put this is to say that it is not entirely clear what this book will require from its reader in addition to the proper use of her existing philosophical capacities.

I think most Kierkegaard scholars would readily agree that *Fragments* is an unusual work of philosophy. But there is very little agreement about what makes it so. While most scholars take it that it is supposed to be a work of indirect communication (some attributing this aim to Climacus as well as to Kierkegaard, others just to Kierkegaard), there is next to no agreement about how precisely this is supposed to work. Robert C. Roberts nicely characterizes Climacus' enterprise as "maieutic," calling the purpose of *Fragments* "not just theoretical but therapeutic," and ties Climacus' endeavor to Kierkegaard's larger aim of "reintroducing Christianity to

Christendom," a situation, he adds, in which Kierkegaard needed to "be a Socrates" and to try to dispel "the illusion that people are Christians—people whose vocabulary is Christian but whose concepts are roughly Hegelian, who discuss Christianity volubly but whose passions, emotions, and practice are left unshaped by Christian thoughts."² I think most Kierkegaard scholars would be in basic agreement with this picture, in part perhaps because it is sufficiently general and removed from the details of the text that most scholars may readily imagine that it is compatible with their particular conception of what is happening, so to speak, on the ground of the text itself. But when it comes to unpacking just wherein lies the indirectness of the work or in giving an account of how it is supposed to remove the reader's illusion that she is a Christian, there is little agreement. Roberts, for example, is of the view that Climacus frequently makes intentionally bad arguments for things that are true in an effort to get his readers to think for themselves:

Our analysis will reveal a pattern..., namely that of stating (or suggesting) a truth, even a very simple one, but arriving at that truth by poor arguments, or couching the truth so obscurely that each reader must think his way to it on his own.³

On Roberts' view, then, readers will "fall victim" to Climacus' irony if they read what he develops in his book "with a straight face."⁴ They should not treat what he develops as itself philosophically legitimate, but as "incitements" that are designed to "get [them] thinking" further about these matters.⁵

Stephen Mulhall, on the other hand, locates Climacus' indirection elsewhere. On his view, Climacus is best conceived of as someone who tries to engage his readers by himself "enacting the error to which he thinks that his readers are prone."⁶ Mulhall thinks that Climacus' readers are especially prone to converting the existential difficulties of Christianity into intellectual difficulties, allowing them to indulge their desire to exercise their aesthetic capacities while simultaneously fostering the illusion that they are thereby making ethical and religious progress. Philosophical reflection about Christianity is substituted for the true difficulties involved with living and existing as a Christian. Since Climacus' readers have such a large philosophical appetite (while they remain under the illusion that feeding this appetite constitutes making genuine ethical and religious progress), Mulhall contends that Climacus seeks to make his readers aware of this tendency by himself "disguising the existential challenge of Christianity as an intellectual challenge" and then proceeding to develop things "in a way which is gradually but increasingly distorted..., but in such a manner that the attentive reader gradually becomes

conscious of the distortion."⁷ In this way Climacus' text serves as "a mirror in which his readers might see an aspect of their own perversity, and thereby avoid its baleful consequences."⁸ The chief aim of the text, then, on this view is to help the reader to "inoculate" herself against this tendency; everything that Climacus develops over the course of the book is done simply with that aim in mind.⁹ According to Mulhall, the intellectual structure that is erected in *Fragments* is best conceived of as a kind of "parody of Christianity" (or, perhaps more precisely, a parody of speculative philosophy's (mis)understanding of Christianity), the "implications" of which ultimately "subvert its own foundations and bring down the whole edifice, leaving only the marginal adumbrations of the true Christian vision for those with eyes to see them."¹⁰

More recently, C. Stephen Evans has sought to block what he takes to be some of the consequences of a reading like Mulhall's.¹¹ Evans worries that if Mulhall is right, then *Fragments* will wind up being a work that does not "contain theological and philosophical claims and arguments" and that does not impart to the reader "serious philosophical and theological content."¹² Instead he argues that the irony at work in *Fragments* is not trying "to say something earnestly that is not meant in earnest," but "to say in a jest, jestingly, something that *is* meant in earnest."¹³ Thus on his view any irony that is to be found in *Fragments* "presupposes the validity of most of the distinctions and arguments it contains."¹⁴ He maintains that most of what "Climacus says in *Fragments* are logical truths or else basic claims about Christianity that hardly anyone in the implied audience would think of denying."¹⁵ For Evans, the irony emerges in the manner in which Climacus presents what he develops, specifically "the pretence that something that reason [purportedly] could not invent [namely the Christian revelation] has been invented" by the narrator himself.¹⁶

While I am sympathetic to the general thrust of Evans' argument, I think the degree to which *Fragments* is a maieutic work that employs irony together with other devices of indirection runs much deeper; that is, I think there is much more to bring out about the extent to which Climacus employs a maieutic method in this work. But these are very difficult matters to adjudicate. Judgments about whether a text seems to say one thing while meaning something else or whether a person seems to say one thing while doing something else are difficult to make, and intelligent, well-meaning people often arrive at very different assessments.¹⁷ As we continue our search for some of the respects in which Climacus may be a Socratic figure and employ a Socratic method, an example from Wayne Booth may be worth keeping in mind. While Booth is

speaking about the difficulty of detecting irony, I think what he says nicely generalizes to the variety of difficulties involved with trying to understand the indirect nature of Climacus' two books and how this bears on their being something other than straightforward philosophical treatises. Booth claims that there are "two obvious pitfalls in reading irony—not going far enough and going too far."¹⁸ While the reader who doesn't go far enough is in danger of missing the irony altogether (of reading the text in question too literally and without nuance), the reader who goes too far is in danger of finding irony where there is none (of reading the text in question with in effect too much sophistication), and so of not knowing "where to stop" when looking for irony.¹⁹ Booth claims that in such a case, "overly ingenious readers sometimes go astray in their search for ironies. Once they have learned to *suspect* a given speaker, they are tempted to suspect every statement he makes."²⁰ Since we all, no doubt, would like to avoid both of these pitfalls (for no one wants to be too coarse to detect irony or too taken up with irony to detect anything else), I think it's important that as we read Climacus' two books we try to uphold a certain principle of interpretive modesty. We should expect disputes here and it may be quite difficult to know how to settle these disputes. Booth suggests that the best way to determine "where to stop" in our search for irony is by being especially attentive to the texts we are reading:

Where then do we stop in our search for ironic pleasures? Where the work 'tells' us to, wherever it offers us other riches that might be destroyed by irony. It takes a clever reader to detect all the ironies in a Fielding or a Forster. But it takes something *beyond cleverness* to *resist* going too far: the measured tempo of the experienced reader, eager for quick reversals and exhilarating turns, but always aware of the demands both of the partner and of the disciplined forms of the dance.²¹

While encountering works that seek to engage their readers in an indirect fashion can be thrilling and exciting, we should always try to remain aware of the real possibility that our understanding of these works is incomplete. There may be ironies and other such means of indirection that we simply pass over. Perhaps more worrisome, once we develop a conception of what we think Climacus is doing (of how we think his therapeutic treatment is supposed to work), then our ability to read these texts well may have thereby become distorted. If, like Roberts, we become convinced that one of Climacus' chief tools of indirection is the intentional use of bad arguments, how will that color what we discover in the text? Will we be less inclined to be charitable in how we reconstruct his arguments (for if the point is to develop a bad argument then there is no need for the normal kind of charity)? If, like Mulhall, we become convinced that

Climacus' own performance in *Fragments* is meant to mimic and enact the reader's own confusions and philosophical predilections (as opposed, say, to reminding her of the correct way of proceeding about these matters), will we perhaps become unduly *suspicious* of what he is doing (since we assume that whatever he is doing is supposed to be illegitimate and is designed that way for the reader to discover)? And finally, if like Evans, we become convinced that irony and the other devices of indirection are in no way incompatible with there being a serious content that is expressed in *Fragments* (which Climacus may even try to secure via argument), will this perhaps lead us to domesticate Climacus' works, to make them out to be more like standard philosophical treatises than he maintains? Given all these potential pitfalls, I think it behooves us to proceed carefully and rather slowly.²² It is very easy to approach Climacus' texts with an idea of what we think is going on in them and to have this color or distort our grasp of what are admittedly some very difficult texts in their own right. Fortunately, when it comes to *Fragments* Climacus provides us with some help, both within *Fragments* and in later comments about his first book that he develops in the *Postscript*. By attending closely to what Climacus says about his own philosophical practice and about how he conceives his reader, we may be able to position ourselves so that we will be less prone to misreading his two books.

4.2 Climacus' Conception of Philosophy

In the *Postscript* Climacus makes clear that his principal worry about how *Fragments* might be misread does not concern readers who "go too far" in their detection of his use of indirection (though it may be that he should have better anticipated this difficulty as well).²³ He seems instead to be most worried about the prospect of its being assimilated to contemporary philosophical practice, to its being conceived of as a further contribution to the systematic, Hegelian endeavor that he claims is under way and concerning which he thinks the age is greatly expectant. Climacus says that in such a setting the last thing he wants is for *Fragments* to arouse a "sensation" or for someone to publish a praiseworthy review: "The only thing I fear is a sensation, especially the approving variety."²⁴ Above all, he does not want readers to be given the impression by means of a review that his work is but a further instance of the didactic, systematic philosophical treatises that remain the norm in his day. In short, Climacus is most concerned that his book not be received in such a way as to downplay or obscure its indirect,

maieutic nature. In this section we will consider further just how Climacus seems to conceive of himself and his philosophical enterprise, and how he goes about trying to differentiate himself and his writing from modern Hegelian-style speculative philosophy. In the next section we will then consider in more detail Climacus' response to a positive review that actually was published about *Fragments*.

4.2.1 The Preface to *Fragments*

It is especially in the preface of *Fragments* and "The Moral" with which it concludes that Climacus provides the reader with some insight into the nature of what Jacob Howland calls his "philosophical identity."²⁵ In part this is because these sections of the work stand outside the main body of the text and so lie outside the experiment proper that Climacus engages in over the course of *Fragments*.²⁶ As we've already discussed in the previous chapter (see section 3.1), by calling *Fragments* (and later the *Postscript*) "a pamphlet" Climacus is keen to differentiate between the type of writing that he is doing and the ongoing "scientific-scholarly endeavor."²⁷ But he also maintains, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that in "a time of ferment" for someone to "refrain from serving the [Hegelian] system" might seem dubious or even appear to be a kind of political offense.²⁸ At a time when everyone is busy trying to make things easier and easier,²⁹ Climacus remains "a loafer" and readily acknowledges that refusing to take part in what the age demands might seem to open him to the charge of "*apragmosynê*":

I do not want to be guilty of *apragmosynê* [abstention from public activity], which is a political offense in any age, but especially in a time of ferment, during which, in ancient times, it was punishable even by death.³⁰

It is important to notice what Climacus says about why he is a loafer. He denies that his situation is akin to the situation of a "noble Roman" who retired from public life "*merito magis quam ignavia* [from justifiable motives rather than from indolence]."³¹ In his own case, he claims to be a loafer "out of indolence, *ex animi sententia* [by inclination], and for good reasons."³²

Commentators frequently fixate on the first half of this quotation, that Climacus is a loafer "out of indolence," and so lose track of his claim that he is *also* a loafer "for good reasons."³³ While our discussion in the previous chapter has made us aware of some of Climacus' reasons for becoming an author (see sections 3.2.1-2), here he raises the possibility that by taking part in what the age demands he might simply contribute to greater confusion:

Suppose someone's intervention made him guilty of a greater crime [than *apragmosynê*] simply by giving rise to *confusion*—would it not be better for him to mind his own business [*passedede sig selv*]? It is not given to everyone to have his intellectual pursuits coincide happily with the interests of the public, so happily that it almost becomes difficult to decide to what extent he is concerned for his own good or for that of the public.³⁴

Climacus seems to think that if everyone is trying to make things easier (and if this activity is itself suspect—recall the image of the banquet and the “already gorged populace”), then if he were to become yet another practitioner of systematic Hegelian-style philosophy this might simply wind up making matters worse.³⁵

To illustrate his claim that not everyone's intellectual pursuits always “coincide happily” with what a given age seems to require, Climacus draws a contrast between the mathematician Archimedes and Diogenes the Cynic and how each behaved under circumstances where their respective cities were facing military occupation or the threat of war. In Archimedes' case, Syracuse was under occupation by the Romans while he continued with his mathematical investigations right up to point of being killed:

Did not Archimedes sit undisturbed, contemplating his circles while Syracuse was being occupied, and was it not to the Roman soldier who murdered him that he said those beautiful words:
Nolite perturbare circulos meos [Do not disturb my circles]?³⁶

Climacus ironically notes, however, that not everyone is as “fortunate” as Archimedes. This remark clearly indicates that Climacus thinks that Archimedes is an example of someone whose intellectual pursuits *did* coincide with the needs of his society, but it is not immediately obvious how. Commentators in fact usually take Archimedes as an example of someone who may be guilty of *apragmosynê*, since he does not allow the fact that the city is under siege to keep him from continuing to carry out his seemingly detached, purely contemplative activities.³⁷ For Archimedes to be an example of someone whose activities do coincide with the needs of his city, Climacus claims that the situation would have to make it “difficult to decide to what extent he is concerned for his own good or for that of the public.”³⁸ I want to suggest that one way for this to be the case here is if we understand the final words that Archimedes speaks to the Roman to be inherently ambiguous. They can mean quite literally “Don't disturb my circles” (“Don't interrupt me, I'm busy doing geometry”). But they can also signify political opposition to the Roman occupation (“Don't disturb Syracuse”). In the process of pursuing his intellectual activities,

Archimedes is thereby "fortunate" in that these very activities also enable him to fulfill his obligations as a citizen, allowing him to resist the Roman occupation and through his noble death to serve as a possible source of inspiration for his fellow citizens.³⁹

Since Climacus, however, depicts himself as someone who has good reasons to remain a loafer and to mind his own business (and so as someone who is not likely to be as "fortunate" as Archimedes), he suggests that we may have to turn to "another prototype" if we want to understand him.⁴⁰ But the example he cites of Diogenes the Cynic is also somewhat puzzling:

When Corinth was threatened with a siege by Philip and all the inhabitants were busily active—one polishing his weapons, another collecting stones, a third repairing the wall—and Diogenes saw all this, he hurriedly belted up his cloak and eagerly trundled his tub up and down the streets. When asked why he was doing that, he answered: I, too, am at work and roll my tub so that I will not be the one and only loafer among so many busy people.⁴¹

Climacus waggishly notes that Diogenes' behavior "is at least not sophistical, if Aristotle's definition of sophistry as the art of making money is generally correct" (implying that it otherwise is sophistical?).⁴² Perhaps more importantly, he also maintains that Diogenes' "conduct at least cannot occasion any misunderstanding, for it surely would be inconceivable for anyone to dream of regarding Diogenes as the savior and benefactor of the city."⁴³ What are we to conclude from this example about Climacus? What is attractive to Climacus about Diogenes' activity of trundling his tub up and down the street is that, however pointless it may seem, it is not likely to be mistaken for the sort of activity that the situation seems to call for. It is Climacus' hope that by writing pamphlets instead of systematic treatises, he too will avoid being mistaken for what the age expectantly awaits:

It is impossible for anyone to dream of attributing world-historical importance to a pamphlet or to assume that its author is the systematic Salomon Goldkalb so long awaited in our dear capital city, Copenhagen (which I, at least, regard as the greatest danger that could threaten my undertaking).⁴⁴

Above all Climacus hopes to avoid this sort of misunderstanding and the praise that goes along with being designated as an author who has delivered something of world-historical importance, since he thinks such unwarranted praise may "tear [him] from [his] carefree self-contentment as the author of a pamphlet" and also perhaps "prevent a kind and well-disposed reader from unabashedly looking to see if there is anything in the pamphlet he can use."⁴⁵ But this is not to say that we should expect there to be a strict parallel with the case of Diogenes. While it is

Climacus' hope that his activity as a writer and thinker will also allow him to limit the confusion that he otherwise might cause (as might have come about in Diogenes' case, say, if he had actually but incompetently sought to do something genuinely productive for the people of Corinth), it doesn't follow from this that what he ends up doing is as apparently pointless as what Diogenes does, or that what he has produced is itself sophistical even though it too may technically escape such a label because it fails to make any money.⁴⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, it is Climacus' view that the speculative busyness that surrounds him is not necessarily a good thing (whereas you might suppose that when faced with occupation or the threat of war, it is actually a pretty good idea to get busy).⁴⁷ While it is his hope that his loafing behavior will not be confused with all that is busily being produced, it may also be his belief that what the age truly needs (versus what it repeatedly demands and expects) is just what he provides. In such a case, Climacus' actions might not be immediately recognized by his fellow citizens as what was required (as they were with Archimedes), but his loafing still might be an activity that both allows him to mind his own business (to attend to himself) and to help his fellow citizens to overcome their condition of ethical and religious forgetfulness. This would allow him to play a role analogous to that of Archimedes, where it may be difficult to distinguish between his focus on himself and his focus on what the age *truly* requires (rather than what it thinks it needs), while also, like Diogenes, avoiding being mistaken for what the age openly demands.⁴⁸ It's worth noting that one more thing that Climacus has in common with Diogenes is that they each are *responsive* to the change in their surroundings. In order not to appear to be a mere loafer among so many busy people Diogenes also becomes busy. Similarly, while Climacus insists that he remains a loafer and so should not be confused with those who seek to make things easier and easier, he also arguably becomes a writer of pamphlets in response to the busyness of his age. For if he were merely a loafer, why would he even bother to write pamphlets?

Let's step back for a moment and consider further what seems to be at stake. Climacus makes clear that it is his overriding desire to avoid being confused with the systematic philosophers that are presently in vogue and to avoid having his writings confused with their systematic treatises. He calls this sort of confusion "the greatest danger that could threaten [his] undertaking."⁴⁹ If, as I maintain, Climacus is a Socratic figure, then one way to make sense of his worries (which can admittedly at times seem to be rather excessive) is to recall the corresponding difficulties that were faced by Socrates, someone who was frequently confused with the sophists

and who was arguably put to death in part because he was thought by his fellow citizens to be a sophist.⁵⁰ Jacob Howland nicely puts it this way:

In alluding more than once in the Preface to the problem of the distinction between sophists and philosophers—a matter that was of special concern to Plato—Climacus presents himself as a kind of latter-day Socrates amid a crowd of sham-philosophers. That he does so with self-deprecating irony only strengthens his identification with Socrates.⁵¹

We might say that it is Climacus' desire to avoid Socrates' fate; or at least, at any rate, to make every effort he can think of to avoid being identified with what he takes to be the sophists of his day. But Climacus also knows that this will be difficult due to the predilections of his reader, for if she is already in the habit of doing philosophy a certain way (a manner of doing philosophy that underwrites her present condition of self-forgetfulness) then she will also be prone to *misunderstand* what he is doing and to assimilate what he is doing to the speculative philosophical practices she is already familiar with. As readers of Climacus' books, we too, then, should try to remain aware of this "danger." By trying to set himself apart from modern speculative philosophy and its practitioners, Climacus is also thereby alerting us to the real possibility that we may fall prey to the same error to which the citizens of Athens were prone. Just as Socrates' jurors thought they knew who he was and understood the significance of his philosophical practice, so we, too, in Climacus' view, may end up thinking we know who he is and wherein lies the significance of his philosophical activity—and yet be wide of the mark.

So, for example, when someone like James Conant claims that Climacus seeks to "exemplify" the philosophical confusions that he thinks his reader suffers from (e.g., "converting a practical difficulty into an intellectual one")—where "Climacus is to serve," as Conant puts it, "as a mirror for the philosopher who [falsely or confusedly] imagines that he is making progress on the problem of how one becomes a Christian" and where Climacus represents "an idealized character in whose features [the reader] might *recognize* himself (and *thereby* recognize his life as he fantasizes it to be at variance with his life as he leads it)"—then we should proceed with caution.⁵² For if, as I've argued here, Climacus' chief concern is to *avoid* being identified with the philosophical practices that his reader is familiar with and to go out of his way to *distinguish* what he is doing from these speculative philosophical practices, then it would be quite surprising (if not outright impossible) if it turned out that Climacus' chief strategy for engaging his reader involved trying to get her to *identify* with what he is doing—not in order to reacquaint her with

an ethically-and-religiously minded way of doing philosophy that she has forgotten (or perhaps never properly encountered in the first place), but in order to mirror back to her the very type of philosophy that she is already in the habit of doing so that she can, as Conant puts it, come to "recognize [her] own confusions."⁵³ If Climacus thinks that "the greatest danger that could threaten [his] undertaking" is for his reader to confuse him with a speculative philosopher or to treat his pamphlet as akin to a speculative treatise (and he knows that his reader is already prone to such confusions), wouldn't it be odd if it turned out that his chief means of engaging his reader was to encourage and invite just such a confusion?⁵⁴ This is not to say that Conant's view cannot be defended or that we should never expect Climacus to engage in activity that may (at least initially) appear to his reader to be a kind of speculative philosophical undertaking.⁵⁵ While I myself have serious doubts about Conant's approach to Climacus' texts (and think it tends to foster a kind of hermeneutic of suspicion when it comes to Climacus' own performance), I also think that this is a good example of what I discussed above: a case where people's judgments about irony and other means of indirection may simply differ, often quite radically. For our present purposes, it is simply worth noting that this phenomenon of radical-disagreement-in-judgments exists and is not at all uncommon when it comes to trying to make sense of Climacus' books. But that is simply to underline how vulnerable we as readers may be to misunderstanding Climacus and his philosophical project. Above all, we should be alert to the danger that, perhaps unwittingly, we will in effect end up placing Climacus on trial and finding him guilty of being a kind of sophist, instead of seeing that he is better conceived of, like Socrates, as a gift of the god, someone who has been sent to *awaken* the city of Copenhagen from its ethical and religious slumbers.⁵⁶

In addition to trying to make clear to his reader that he should not be confused with the (sophistical) philosophers to which she is accustomed, Climacus also says a bit more in his preface to *Fragments* about how he understands his own task. To begin with, he notes that there is an important sense in which he is not in the business of holding opinions:

But what is my opinion? Do not ask me about that. Next to the question of whether or not I have an opinion, nothing can be of less interest to someone else than what my opinion is. To have an opinion is to me both too much and too little; it presupposes a security and well-being in existence akin to having a wife and children in this mortal life.⁵⁷

This claim can at first perhaps seem a bit strange. How can Climacus fail to have opinions? We've already canvassed several of his opinions about the forgetfulness of the age and the need for indirect communication, so whatever he means here probably should not be equated with an outright denial of having any opinions whatsoever. Rather, Climacus' point seems to concern the nature of his philosophical enterprise.⁵⁸ He seems to conceive of his activity as a thinker and writer as one that is done "in the service of thought" and "to the honor of the god," where doing this activity well involves a willingness on his part to "renounce" having opinions:

In the world of spirit, this is my case, for I have trained myself and am training myself always to be able to dance lightly in the service of thought, as far as possible to the honor of the god and for my own enjoyment, renouncing domestic bliss and civic esteem, the *communio bonorum* [community of goods] and the concordance of joys that go with having an opinion.⁵⁹

This suggests that whatever is involved in doing philosophy as Climacus conceives it, the holding of opinions and the determination of what opinions another holds are not to the point.⁶⁰ Compare Socrates' stance of ignorance and his perpetual role as midwife: all he can do is to help others give birth to what lies within them. To look to Socrates for the answers is to misconceive what kind of relationship it is possible to develop with him. Similarly, Climacus suggests that those who seek to determine what his opinions may be or who perhaps try to base their own opinions on what they think they have learned from him are not the type of readers that he seeks:

If... anyone were to be so courteous as to assume that I have an opinion, if he were to carry his gallantry to the extreme of embracing my opinion because it is mine, I regret his courtesy, that it is extended to one unworthy, and his opinion, if he does not otherwise have one apart from mine.⁶¹

At a minimum, then, Climacus alerts his reader up front that whatever she may gain from interacting with him is not something that is best characterized in terms of the acquisition of opinions.

If not new opinions, then what exactly might the reader gain from interacting with Climacus? From our earlier investigations it seems reasonable to suppose that she may be helped to remember some of the things that Climacus thinks she has forgotten. Given his worries about being confused with modern day philosophers and his conviction that he is doing something different, we might also suppose that the reader may become better acquainted with a manner of doing philosophy that does not lead to her present condition of ethical and religious

forgetfulness. By comparing how he practices philosophy to a kind of dancing, Climacus suggests that, for him, to philosophize is an art that requires a certain poise and balance, together with great flexibility and a sense of rhythm—and lots and lots of practice! This is an image he will later apply in the *Postscript* to Socrates:

Even in his seventieth year, [Socrates] was not finished with his striving to practice ever more inwardly what every sixteen-year-old girl knows. For he was not like the one who knows Hebrew and consequently can say to the young girl: You do not know that, and it takes a long time to learn. He was not like the one who can carve in stone something the young girl would readily understand she could not do and would understand how to admire. No, he knew no more than she. No wonder, then, that he was so indifferent about dying, because presumably the poor fellow had himself perceived that his life had been wasted and that it was now too late to start afresh in order to learn what only the experts know....What a jester this Socrates was, to jest this way with Hebrew, the art of sculpture, ballet, and world-historical bliss-making, and then in turn to care so much about the god that, although practicing lifelong without interruption (indeed, as a solo dancer to the honor of the god), he looked ahead with doubt about whether he would be able to pass the god's examination.⁶²

By characterizing Socrates as a "solo" dancer, Climacus draws attention to an important sense in which he conceives of philosophy and the ethical and religious matters that occupy both him and Socrates as inherently solitary concerns. In the *Postscript* Climacus identifies Lessing as another kindred spirit who seems to appreciate the need for a certain solitariness and the value of maieutically employing the first person to help remain personally isolated:

This nimbleness [of Lessing's] in teasingly employing his own *I*, almost like Socrates, in declining partnership or, more accurately, in guarding himself against it in relation to that truth in which the cardinal point is precisely to be left alone with it.⁶³

Hence the desire that Climacus expresses at the close of his preface to *Fragments* that other people not ask him to dance with them: "Every human being is too heavy for me, and therefore I plead, *per deos obsecro* [I swear by the gods]: Let no one invite me, for I do not dance."⁶⁴ I would argue that this is a classic case of combining earnestness with jest. If the sort of dance at issue is an inherently solitary activity, then Climacus can truly mean it when he pleads for others not to invite him to dance *with* them (since he really must dance *alone*, as must any other person if she is to engage in the same activity).⁶⁵ At the same time, he can also be joking with his reader a bit, since the reason he cannot dance with another person is not exactly a question of her

weight (as though going on a diet might help!), but rather an essential feature of the kind of dance at issue.⁶⁶

If philosophy amounts to a kind of solitary dance, then one thing that the reader may gain from interacting with Climacus is the opportunity both to observe a master dancer at work as well as to practice a few moves herself. What emerges from this ongoing philosophical process is not so much a set of opinions but a particular kind of life, what we might call an ethically-and-religiously mindful philosophical life.⁶⁷ Climacus claims that in doing philosophy the only thing he possesses and attends to is his own individual life. This he can put on the line and place at risk; his life and no one else's:

I can stake my own life, I can in all earnestness trifle with my own life—not with another's. I am capable of this, the only thing I am able to do for thought, I who have no learning to offer it, 'scarcely enough for the one-drachma course, to say nothing of the big fifty-drachma course' (*Cratylus*). All I have is my life, which I promptly stake every time a difficulty appears.⁶⁸

Developing himself and putting himself at risk as he does philosophy is all that Climacus claims to be "able" to do in the service of thought. For him to say that he "scarcely" has enough learning to offer "the one-drachma course" is both to invoke Socrates (who attended Prodicus' one-drachma course and ironically noted that this was why he remained ignorant, since he had never heard the "big fifty-drachma course"), and to stress again that what is at issue between Climacus and his reader is not a matter of there being something *new* for her to learn. The idea that the practice of philosophy includes a willingness to place one's life at risk recalls Socrates' words in the *Apology*:

Wherever a man has taken a position that he believes to be best, or has been placed by his commander, there he must I think remain and face danger, without a thought for death or anything else, rather than disgrace. It would have been a dreadful way to behave, men of Athens, if, at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, I had, at the risk of death, like anyone else, remained at my post where those you had elected to command had ordered me, and then, when the god ordered me, as I thought and believed, to live the life of a philosopher, to examine myself and others, I had abandoned my post for fear of death or anything else.⁶⁹

Climacus thus holds out to the reader the prospect of a conception of philosophy that has genuine existential stakes. Truly to do philosophy in his view requires that a person be willing to put

herself and the character of her life at risk. "Then," Climacus adds, "it is easy to dance, for the thought of death is a good dancing partner, my dancing partner."⁷⁰

4.2.2 "The Moral" of *Fragments*

Climacus concludes his first book with a "Moral," which may be in keeping with his tendency on occasion to write in a manner that is reminiscent of "a fairy tale" and that by his own account is "not at all systematic."⁷¹ He claims that what he has developed over the course of *Fragments* "indisputably goes beyond the Socratic."⁷² The term "Socratic" as Climacus typically uses it, however, is ambiguous. In the present case he has in mind the Socratic outlook that he has sketched in *Fragments* as a point of contrast to the Christian outlook. But it can also pick out a conception of the philosophical enterprise and so refer to Socratic method (which, as we've already seen, is something Climacus himself may employ). In claiming that his "project" has gone beyond the Socratic, Climacus does not conclude from this that the Christian outlook he has developed has therefore been shown to be "more true than the Socratic" outlook (he calls this an "altogether different question"), only that he has presented a view of life that is in effect existentially and conceptually more developed: "a new organ has been assumed here: faith; and a new presupposition: the consciousness of sin; and a new decision: the moment; and a new teacher: the god in time."⁷³ It is only because Climacus thinks that what he has developed is conceptually richer in these respects that he is willing to declare that his project truly goes beyond the Socratic.⁷⁴ In doing so, he seems to imagine that he thereby invites a kind of philosophical inspection from Socrates himself concerning whether this claim is justified:

Without these [additions], I really would not have dared to present myself for inspection before that ironist who has been admired for millennia, whom I approach with as much heart-pounding enthusiasm [*Begeistringens Hjertebanken*] as anyone.⁷⁵

For Climacus, then, Socrates is the standard according to which he wants his own philosophical activity assessed; regardless of whether the content of what he has developed can rightly be said to go beyond the Socratic outlook, when it comes to philosophical *method* it seems that for Climacus there simply is no going beyond Socrates. And really, as Jacob Howland notes, it is not just his work that Climacus presents to Socrates for inspection but *himself* and the philosophical life he has developed thus far.⁷⁶ Even the thought of approaching him makes his heart pound; he is a Socrates enthusiast! He's also aware, however, that such an enthusiasm can be misplaced:

If I were a Plato in my infatuation, and if while hearing Socrates my heart pounded as violently as Alcibiades', more violently than the Corybantes', and if the passion of my admiration could not be appeased without embracing that glorious man, then Socrates would no doubt smile at me and say, "My dear fellow, you certainly are a deceitful lover, for you want to idolize me because of my wisdom, and then you yourself want to be the one person who understands me best and the one from whose admiring embrace I would be unable to tear away—are you not really a seducer?" And if I refused to understand him, his cold irony would presumably bring me to despair as he explained that he owed me just as much as I owed him.⁷⁷

Since Climacus conceives of philosophy as a solitary activity and also appreciates that the proper maieutic relationship between two people is one that does not culminate in "embracing" the other person but in being left to oneself in isolation, whatever enthusiasm he holds for Socrates, if it is to be appropriate, presumably should not be incompatible with his own self-development and his own proper employment of a Socratic method.

But this is not the moral of *Fragments*. Climacus seems to think that in the present day, modern philosophers have lost their enthusiasm for Socrates and the manner in which he does philosophy; they think that they have developed new and better philosophical methods. He also thinks that they imagine that they have superseded Socrates in terms of philosophical content, and that because Socratic method is thought to be old-fashioned and outmoded they may also no longer even feel a need to have themselves and their philosophical achievements inspected by Socrates: "But to go beyond Socrates when one nevertheless says essentially the same as he, only not nearly so well—that, at least, is not Socratic."⁷⁸ In the *Postscript* Climacus' paraphrase of this final sentence of the moral is even more pointed: "'But to go beyond Socrates when one has not even comprehended the Socratic—that, at least, is not Socratic.' Compare 'The Moral' of *Fragments*."⁷⁹ There is nothing wrong per se with a person's declaring that she has gone beyond the Socratic. But, in Climacus' view, anyone who does this should then be prepared to be inspected by Socrates to see if she measures up to her claim. And if what she has produced goes no further than he, even as she declares that it does go further, then she will in effect have fallen short of Socrates, since his actions and his words are in agreement while she imagines that she has done more than she actually has.⁸⁰ The moral, then, seems to be (to put it in the form of a moral): Before you proclaim that you have gone beyond the Socratic, make sure first that you haven't fallen short of Socrates and his philosophical method.⁸¹

The specter of there being people who imagine that they have gone beyond Socrates while they remain philosophically and existentially less developed than he casts a different light on the structure of Climacus' first book. It is almost a commonplace among Kierkegaard scholars that Climacus' chief aim in *Fragments* is to *contrast* the Socratic and Christian outlooks. Since commentators also believe that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms are engaged in a polemic against Hegel and (especially) Danish Hegelianism, they frequently assume that the alternative to the Christian outlook that is developed in *Fragments* is therefore somehow meant to encompass not just a Platonic Socrates but also the speculative philosophers with whom Climacus does not want to be confused.⁸² For example, under a heading entitled "What Views Should Be Understood as 'Socratic'?" C. Stephen Evans writes:

Since the Socratic view is defined in terms of the views of a somewhat Platonic Socrates, the most obvious candidate for a representative of the Socratic view is philosophical idealism. Climacus wishes to define an alternative to idealism which resembles Christianity in order to clearly remind people of the logical differences between the two. The point of course is not to show the difference between Christianity and Platonism per se, but to emphasize the difference between Christianity and nineteenth century idealism, represented by Schelling and Hegel.⁸³

This is not necessarily objectionably put. The question becomes what the relationship is between a modern speculative philosopher who imagines that she has gone further than the Socratic (so, perhaps, imagines that she has a philosophical account of truth that adequately captures the Christian outlook) and the Socratic outlook as it is sketched in *Fragments*.⁸⁴ Even if such a person's philosophical outlook is ultimately equivalent to the Socratic outlook (if, say, it doesn't properly grasp the conceptual differences that in Climacus' view truly set the Christian outlook apart from the Socratic), because she imagines that it is something else (something superior) she is clearly confused and remains unclear about her own philosophical practice—and it is a properly employed Socratic method that may help her to discover this.⁸⁵ If we recall that Kierkegaard claims that Climacus' task is to trace a path back from the speculative life-view towards the Christian (see Chapter 2, section 2.3), then it may be natural to expect that there will be intermediate steps along the way, just as the path from the aesthetic to the Christian goes through the ethical and the religious. In my view, the Socratic, both as it is sketched in *Fragments* and further articulated in the *Postscript*, is best conceived of as occupying some sort of middle ground in terms of existential inwardness between where Climacus locates his reader

and where he seeks to lead her.⁸⁶ If this is right, then this means that we should not expect the speculative philosopher's shortcomings to be reflected in how the Socratic is portrayed. Existentially, she is far worse off than the Socratic philosopher (not to mention the proper Christian thinker):

If in our day thinking had not become something strange, something secondhand, thinkers would indeed make a totally different impression on people, as was the case in Greece, where a thinker was also an ardent existing person impassioned by his thinking, as was the case at one time in Christendom, where a thinker was a believer who ardently sought to understand himself in the existence of faith....Now, however, a thinker is a creature worth seeing, who at certain times of the day is singularly ingenious but otherwise has nothing in common with a human being.

That it is possible to exist with inwardness also outside Christianity, the Greeks among others have adequately shown, but in our day things seem actually to have gone so far that although we are all [supposedly] Christians and knowledgeable about Christianity, it is already a rarity to encounter a person who has even as much existing inwardness as a pagan philosopher.

To go further than Christianity and then to grope in categories familiar to the pagans, to go further and then to be a long way from being able to compare favorably with pagans in existential competency—this at least is not Christian.⁸⁷

If Climacus' reader is someone who does not "compare favorably" to Socrates in terms of "existential competency," then part of the treatment that Climacus prescribes may be for her to be reminded of Socrates and how he in fact does philosophy, to expose her to an individual who has "as much existing inwardness as a pagan philosopher." This will take her part of the way back towards a more thoughtful and more meaningful engagement with Christianity.⁸⁸

We will return to this topic when we discuss more precisely what in Climacus' view the nature of his reader's ailment is. For the present I think it will suffice if I point out what I take to be the chief contrast in Climacus' two books. I do not think Climacus' chief concern is to distinguish between the content of the Socratic and the Christian outlooks (though this is clearly important), but to distinguish between two conceptions of philosophical *method*: the speculative manner of doing philosophy (which leads to the reader's present condition of ethical and religious forgetfulness) and the Greek or Socratic approach (whether this manner of doing

philosophy is employed in relation to a Socratic or a Christian outlook).⁸⁹ In *Fragments* Climacus approvingly draws attention to Socrates' use of maieutic method:

Socrates remained true to himself and artistically exemplified what he had understood. He was and continued to be a midwife...because he perceived that this relation is the highest relation a human being can have to another. And in that he is indeed forever right; for even if a divine point of departure is ever given, this remains the true relation between one human being and another.

Between one human being and another the Socratic relationship is indeed the highest, the truest.⁹⁰

This commitment to the maieutic relationship between persons treats the individual herself as the fundamental ethical and religious unit.⁹¹ Each person, on this view, is humanly speaking sufficient unto herself and at best an "occasion" for another person to exercise her ethical and religious capacities:

Socrates had the courage and self-collectedness to be sufficient unto himself, but in his relations to others he also had the courage and self-collectedness to be merely an occasion even for the most obtuse person.

Between one human being and another, this is the highest: the pupil is the occasion for the teacher to understand himself; the teacher is the occasion for the pupil to understand himself.⁹²

To go "further" than Socrates in this respect is to imagine that one *qua* teacher can have a greater importance than this or to imagine that one's teacher can play such a role with respect to oneself. Climacus seems to think that this is just what has become characteristic of the age: "Everyone goes further than Socrates, both in assessing one's own value and in benefiting the pupil, as well as in socializing soulfully and in finding voluptuous pleasure in the hot compress of admiration!"⁹³ On Climacus' view, however, "the point is to acquire the same understanding" that Socrates upholds "within the formation as assumed" by him in his project.⁹⁴ That is, Climacus holds that within the Christian outlook, the relationship between persons "is again structured Socratically":

Everything is structured Socratically, for the relation between one contemporary and another contemporary, insofar as they both are believers, is altogether Socratic: the one is not indebted to the other for anything, but both are indebted to the god for everything.⁹⁵

If Climacus is, as I maintain, a Socratic figure, then we should expect that he too will uphold the maieutic relationship with his reader and that he, along with Socrates, will emerge as someone who is existentially more competent than his reader, even as he may (at least initially) appear to her to be much less competent (for it is in the nature of the maieutic relationship that the philosophical midwife lowers herself in relation to her interlocutor).⁹⁶ If his reader is in the habit of engaging in a type of abstract philosophical reflection that leads to a condition of forgetfulness, then we should expect Climacus to try to remind her of another way of doing philosophy, one that he ties to Socrates and that he expects his own philosophical practice to exemplify to such an extent that he “dares” to be inspected by the master himself.

4.3 Climacus' Critique of Beck's Review of *Fragments*

In the preface to the *Postscript*, Climacus returns to his concern that he and his pamphlet will be confused with the systematic undertakings of modern philosophers. Initially it seems that his fears with respect to *Fragments* may have been unwarranted, for he proclaims that “rarely, perhaps, has a literary undertaking been so favored by fate in accord with the author's wishes as...concerning the fate of [his] little pamphlet: it has aroused no sensation, none whatsoever.”⁹⁷ Climacus again rehearses why he is worried about this happening and how above all what he wants to avoid most are praiseworthy reviews of his writings:

Relying on the nature of the pamphlet, I was hoping this would happen, but in view of the bustling ferment of the age, in view of the incessant forebodings of prophecy and vision and speculative thought, I feared to see my wish frustrated by some mistake. Even if one is a very insignificant traveler, it is always hazardous to arrive in a town at a time when everyone is most excitedly and yet most variously expectant—some with cannons mounted and fuses lit, with fireworks and illuminated banners in readiness; some with the town hall festively decorated, the reception committee all dressed up, speeches ready; some with the dipped pen of systematic urgency and the dictation notebook wide open in anticipation of the arrival of the promised one incognito—a mistake is always possible. Literary mistakes of that kind belong to the order of the day.

Fate be praised, therefore, that it did not happen. Without any commotion whatever, without the shedding of blood and ink, the pamphlet has remained unnoticed—it has not been reviewed, not

mentioned, anywhere; no literary clangor about it has increased the ferment; no scholarly outcry has led the expectant host astray; no shouting about it from the outpost has brought the citizenry of the reading world to their feet.⁹⁸

Alas, it soon becomes clear that Climacus has spoken too soon. In the long appendix in the middle of the *Postscript*, where he discusses how his resolution to get to the bottom of the misunderstanding between speculative philosophy and Christianity was comically being fulfilled by the other pseudonyms (see Chapter 3, section 3.4), Climacus reports in a footnote that he has “just learned in the last few days that [*Fragments*] was reviewed.”⁹⁹ This review was published anonymously by a Danish contemporary of Kierkegaard's, Frederik Beck, in a German academic journal (in German).¹⁰⁰ Climacus' response to Beck's review has rightly been taken by commentators to provide an especially valuable discussion of his conception of what he is doing in *Fragments*, and it may also shed light, as James Conant has argued, on what Climacus is doing in the *Postscript*.¹⁰¹ For our present purposes, there are three things worth stressing in Climacus' discussion of Beck's review: (1) Climacus' critique of Beck's didacticism; (2) his discussion of the reader for whom *Fragments* and the *Postscript* is written, together with his description of the imagined interlocutor who appears in *Fragments*; (3) his explication of the method he employs in *Fragments*, what he calls the art of “taking away.”¹⁰² Let's discuss each of these in turn.

4.3.1 Beck's Didacticism

Beck's review of *Fragments* is neither very long nor very critical in nature. Instead it briefly walks the reader through the work's main topics (as they unfold in the book's five chapters and the “Interlude” between Chapters 4 and 5) and reads more like a *précis*. While Beck does not discuss the preface of *Fragments* or “The Moral,” he does single out for praise what he calls “the peculiarity [or distinctiveness] of its procedure [*der Eigentümlichkeit ihres Verfahrens*].”¹⁰³ In doing so, Beck has clearly put his finger on one of the most unusual aspects of *Fragments*. He notes that while the overall strategy of *Fragments* “consists in setting forth the basic Christian presupposition as a general hypothesis” and then proceeds to develop individual “positive-Christian presuppositions in the form of general problems,” it does so “without reference to their historical appearance” (that is, without mentioning Christianity by name).¹⁰⁴ In an attempt to praise the author of *Fragments* while criticizing the contemporary age, he further writes: “These presuppositions are presented with a clarity and analyzed with an acuity and fineness such that our age, which levels, neutralizes and mediates everything, will hardly

recognize them.”¹⁰⁵ While it seems clear from the context that Beck means to exclude from this criticism those for whom the review is written (the readers of the academic journal in which it appears), Climacus conveniently ignores this and suggests that there is “a touch of irony” in the fact that Beck seems to appreciate that the presentation of Christianity in *Fragments* may not be immediately recognizable by its readers and yet, by means of a review, he himself nevertheless seemingly seeks to provide these very same readers with a straightforward account of the book's contents.¹⁰⁶

In this way Climacus introduces his main objection to Beck's review. For, despite Beck's having drawn attention to the peculiar procedure of *Fragments*, the review itself makes next to no mention of just how stylistically odd a book it is. For all that readers of the review may know, *Fragments* is simply one more systematic philosophical treatise on the nature of Christianity and how its conception of truth differs from a pagan/Socratic conception. In other words, as Climacus sees things, Beck's review does precisely what he has so anxiously sought to avoid: assimilates his philosophical practice to the modern speculative philosophy that he thinks contributes to his reader's condition of forgetfulness. It's worth considering closely what exactly Climacus' criticism is. He does not appear to object to Beck's review with respect to its conceptual or dialectical clarity, but principally because he thinks readers will get the wrong impression about what kind of a book *Fragments* is:

His account is *accurate* [*nøiagtigt*] and on the whole *dialectically reliable* [*paalideligt*], but now comes the hitch: although the account is *correct* [*rigtigt*], anyone who reads only that will receive an *utterly incorrect* [*forkeert*] impression of the book. This mishap, of course, is not too serious, but on the other hand this is always less desirable if a book is to be discussed expressly for the sake of its peculiarity [*Eiendommelighed*].¹⁰⁷

With respect, then, to having accurately represented the contents of *Fragments*, Climacus not only does not fault Beck but genuinely seems to praise him. To call Beck's account of *Fragments* “*nøiagtigt*” is to stress that it is not only accurate but “precise” and “scrupulous.” To say that it is dialectically or conceptually “*paalideligt*” is to underline that it is not only reliable but “dependable,” “trustworthy,” and “faithful.”¹⁰⁸ So what is his chief complaint? It's that Beck's review is “didactic” (*docerende*) and so smacks of the manner of writing philosophy that Climacus thinks is characteristic of the age:

The account is *didactic*, purely and simply didactic; consequently the reader will receive the impression that the pamphlet

[*Fragments*] is also didactic. As I see it, this is *the most incorrect impression* one can receive of it.¹⁰⁹

Since Climacus has already drawn attention to the need for a non-didactic, indirect manner of writing philosophy, it's understandable why he might not appreciate there being a review, however dialectically accurate, that gives its readers the impression that the book it is reviewing is the very kind of philosophy they are used to consuming.¹¹⁰ For one thing, this may lose him some readers since they may assume that there is nothing particular about his book that sets it apart from a whole host of philosophical treatments of Christianity. And for those who do decide to pick up his book after having read the review, Climacus may believe that it is now all the more likely that they will simply misunderstand what he is doing.

While it is not difficult to see that Climacus thinks that Beck's review misrepresents the character of *Fragments*, it's worth examining just what he thinks Beck has overlooked. Immediately after noting the tension between the reason Beck gives for reviewing *Fragments* ("for the sake of its peculiarity") and the didactic impression his review actually creates, Climacus proceeds to outline what he thinks Beck has neglected (thereby providing us in the process with valuable insight into what he, Climacus, thinks constitutes the work's "peculiar procedure").¹¹¹ In most general terms, Climacus accuses Beck of neglecting what he calls his book's "contrast of form" (*Formens Modsætning*).¹¹² Upon hearing this, one's first thought might be to wonder in what respect Climacus is speaking of a "contrast" of form. Does he mean that the form of the work stands in contrast to its content? And if so, how exactly? If we follow C. Stephen Evans, we might expect that the contrast would be between a jesting form and a serious or earnest content (see section 4.1 above). Alternatively, if we follow James Conant, then we might conclude that the contrast Climacus has in mind does not exist between the form of the work and a genuine content but between the form of the work and something that only has the *appearance* of being such a content (what Conant terms "the ostensible teaching of the work").¹¹³ According to Conant, in such a case the speculatively-inclined reader thinks she is being given something further to know (this is the bait), while the aim of the work is to get her to recognize that she has an overdeveloped appetite for knowledge:

The aim of a pseudonymous work is not to impart a doctrine to the reader but to deliver him from an illusion. The method is to offer the reader something that has the *form* of knowledge in order to show him that what he is attracted to is only an *appearance* of knowledge.

The tendency of the age is to think that if something is not difficult to understand, then it is not difficult at all. The pseudonymous work [in this case, the *Postscript*] therefore presents the difficulty [of Christianity] in a form in which it *appears* as if it were one of the understanding....The aim of the work therefore is to present something that has the *form* of an intellectual difficulty, inviting the [speculative] philosopher to grapple with it, and leading him to the point where the terms in which he was tempted to pose the difficulty come apart on him.¹¹⁴

If this is what Climacus has in mind, then we might say that the contrast is between the form of the work and an *apparent* content, something the reader will have to recognize as such if she is to understand the point of his book.¹¹⁵ While not the diametrical opposite, Conant's approach is effectively the reverse of Evans', since by his lights Climacus presents something whose form makes it appear philosophically serious and legitimate while the point is for the reader to realize that her philosophical desire to reflect in a disinterested, aesthetic way about matters that require her to be personally interested (the ethical and the religious) is misplaced: "That is, [with respect to the Christianly religious in particular,] it involves an attempt to enter into the religious life in a disinterested manner; which is to say, it fails to engage the object it aims at altogether."¹¹⁶ On Conant's view, Climacus' own performance exhibits a corresponding "performative contradiction"; Climacus warns his reader of the dangers of approaching these matters in a disinterested fashion while he himself then proceeds to do that very thing, creating a contrast between the intellectual, aesthetic form that he gives to his writing and the lack of genuine content.¹¹⁷

These are hard matters to settle. The notion of "form" is vague and there is little agreement among commentators about what counts as a work's form as opposed to its content, or whether in the end of the day we can even meaningfully separate the two. Furthermore, Climacus does not even uniformly speak of a "contrast of form." More frequently he employs the compound noun "Modsætningens-Form," which might better be translated "contrast(ive)-form," and sometimes speaks of a "form of contrast" (*Modsætningens Form*).¹¹⁸ The main point seems to be simply that the work has a contrastive character of some sort that somehow involves the form in which it has been written, though the nature of this contrast remains somewhat vague. Climacus also does not restrict the value of a contrast of form to his own writings. He seems to think that this is a characteristic that the other pseudonymous works also possess: "the contrast of form is altogether necessary for every production in these spheres."¹¹⁹ He especially ties the

effective use of a contrastive manner of writing to the proper expression of a person's inwardness: "The more complete the form of contrast, the greater the inwardness; and the less it is present, to the point of being direct communication, the less the inwardness."¹²⁰ This recalls the distinction we discussed in the previous chapter between a mere outpouring of feeling and the proper integration of what a person finds moving into that person's life in such a way that this is expressed in her future actions (see section 3.2.2). Climacus seems to think that when a person genuinely has an inner life that is characterized by the appropriate ethical and religious passions, then she will not give direct expression to this in her manner of speaking and writing, but will instead do so via a contrast-form: "The direct outpouring of feeling is no proof at all that one has it, but the tension of the contrast-form is the dynamometer of inwardness."¹²¹ Similarly, the recipient of such a communication does not acquire something directly for him to appropriate, but instead is given an occasion whereby he too, through self-activity, can respond in kind: "Pathos in the form of contrast is inwardness; it remains with the communicator even when expressed, and it cannot be directly appropriated but only through another's *self*-activity....[T]here is inwardness when what is said belongs to the recipient as if it were his own—and now it is indeed his own."¹²² The contrast-form, in short, is supposed to serve as a kind of artistic vehicle whereby the maieutic relationship can be upheld, allowing both the speaker/author and the listener/reader to each remain personally isolated and to keep intact their inner lives.

As impressive as that may sound, it also remains somewhat obscure. Fortunately, Climacus does not limit his criticism of Beck to the general claim that he has neglected the contrast-form of *Fragments*. He also specifies five more distinct features that he claims "the reader finds no hint" of in Beck's review:

- (1) The teasing resistance of the experiment to the content;
- (2) The inventive audacity (which even invents Christianity)—the only attempt made to go further (that is, further than so-called speculative constructing);
- (3) The indefatigable activity of the irony;
- (4) The design's complete parody of speculative thought;
- (5) The satire in making efforts as if *was ganz Außerordentliches und zwar Neues* [something altogether extraordinary, that is, new] were to come of them, while what constantly emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity.¹²³

If we take Climacus' initial criticism simply to specify that Beck has neglected the contrastive character of *Fragments*, then we might treat these five features as specific instances of how he thinks that *Fragments* exhibits a contrast of form. If so, then this should help us to obtain a clearer picture of some of the respects in which Climacus thinks *Fragments* is unlike the philosophical treatises to which his readers are accustomed, and may also help to adjudicate between Evans and Conant. The claim that *Fragments* has an experimental character supports the view that Climacus conceives of it as a non-didactic work. Later in the *Postscript* he will assert as much: "The reader of the fragment of philosophy in *Fragments* will recollect that the pamphlet was not didactic but was experimental."¹²⁴ In a draft of the paragraph that immediately precedes Climacus' critique of Beck's review, he expands on this contrast between casting his writing in the form of an experiment and its being given a didactic form. Speaking to himself he observes:

By means of the form of an experiment, your achievement [in *Fragments*] must be that it is an existing person who asks about it and the matter is placed as close to existence as possible, so that it does not become a little more knowledge that a knower can add to his [already extensive] knowledge but a primitive impression for his existence, which, to repeat again, can never be done directly, since in that case the receiver receives it by way of his knowledge, and the matter remains the same old thing.¹²⁵

Clearly it is Climacus' hope that *Fragments* ultimately does not come across to his reader as a work that is presenting her with something more to know; yet, at the same time, he does speak of "the teasing resistance of the experiment to the content," which seemingly goes against Conant's view.¹²⁶ Of central importance is the idea that "it is an existing person who asks about" the matters being raised, suggesting that one of Climacus' aims is to take part in Kierkegaard's larger project of reminding his readers of what it is like to encounter a concrete existing individual, someone who properly employs the first person.¹²⁷ Speaking in his own voice about Beck's review, Kierkegaard also addresses the distinction between the didactic and the experimental:

The review of my *Fragments* in the German journal has an essential error: making the content appear didactic, instead of that the pamphlet in virtue of its contrast of form is experimenting, which is the very basis of irony.¹²⁸

This reads as though Kierkegaard is committed to the idea that there is a content being expressed in *Fragments*. The "essential error" of the review is that it makes this content "appear didactic."

That is, it makes it appear as if there were genuinely something *new* for the reader to learn from *Fragments* as opposed, say, to there being something that she has forgotten (and so needs to be reminded of).

Features (2), (4) and (5) arguably go together. If Climacus is engaged in *Fragments* in both parodying and satirizing speculative philosophy, (2) provides a clear example of how he may go about doing this.¹²⁹ Climacus calls his "invention" of Christianity "audacious" and suggests that this is the only respect in which his experiment seeks to "go further" than the speculative enterprise he aims to ridicule (for while speculative philosophy may imagine that it can explain Christianity, he has done it one better by first inventing or discovering it). Kierkegaard makes clear that he ties Climacus' "inventive audacity" to what he takes to be speculative philosophy's inappropriate attitude to Christianity: "To make Christianity seem to be an invention of Johannes Climacus is a biting satire on philosophy's insolent attitude toward it."¹³⁰ Perhaps most important with respect to our discussion of Evans and Conant, (5) clearly seems to create difficulties for Conant.¹³¹ For it is much harder to uphold Conant's claim that the chief sense in which Climacus' works employ a contrast-form is that which is expressed "through 'the contrast of the form' with the ostensible teaching of the work," when Climacus takes it that what "constantly emerges" from his undertaking is "old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity."¹³² Here the contrast is clearly between the reader's expectation that Climacus' hypothetical investigation will not only discover something "new" but "something altogether extraordinary" and what his investigation actually turns up. The reader seeks something new to learn and may (at least initially) be encouraged to have this thought by Climacus himself. It is also easy to predict how she might respond if what Climacus repeatedly keeps discovering is simply the traditional Christian teaching. That will not appear to be anything that is at all new to her, and if the reader is under the illusion that she is already leading an exemplary Christian life, then she may no doubt even wind up being frustrated and angry with Climacus for apparently wasting her time (we will discuss further the anticipated response of the reader and what this signifies in section 4.4.2).

In the draft passage from the *Postscript* that I quoted from earlier, Climacus claims that prior to and at the time when he made the decision to publish *Fragments* the figure of the old man at the grave remained with him and continued to structure his thinking: "Without ever having forgotten that scene at the grave, I was very vividly reminded just then of that venerable

old man.”¹³³ He seems to conceive of his task in *Fragments* to be one that both addresses the presumptuousness of speculative thought (that “Christianity becomes truth only by way of speculative thought’s conception”) and, at the same time, honors the old man and the traditional conception of Christianity that he represents:

Speculative thought has taken a questionable interest in Christianity; it has said that it understood the truth of Christianity. But I have shown above [i.e., earlier in the *Postscript*] that, when this is understood more closely, this means that Christianity becomes truth only by way of speculative thought’s conception. In order to make this really clear, I thought: You must venture the utmost; you must make that attempted presumption become really clear by pretending as if Christianity were a thought-experiment that arose in your head. Every direct attack on speculation leads to nothing—because in the system there is, after all, plenty of room, and so the attack is absorbed into it. No, you must go further than speculation. But in this audacious ironic form against speculation you must take care so that, instead of having something that is very modern, perhaps a new religion, you have what that grieving old man praised as the highest, have the most stringent orthodox form, and have it in such a way that it becomes clear that it is inaccessible to speculation.¹³⁴

Even as he hopes to battle against speculation (and avoid simply having his attacks “absorbed” into “the system”), Climacus also notes that he “must take care” so that what he presents is not something “new,” but “what that grieving old man praised as the highest...the most stringent orthodox form” of Christianity; this is what Climacus claims is on display in *Fragments*.

Kierkegaard also sees this as a twofold task:

To bring out the orthodox forms in the experiment “so that our age, which only mediates etc., is scarcely able to recognize them” [Note in the margin: these are the reviewer’s words] and believes it is something new—that is irony. But right there is the earnestness, to want Christianity to be given its due in this way—before one mediates.¹³⁵

Thus the chief contrast that seems to be at work in *Fragments*, at least by both Climacus’ and Kierkegaard’s lights, concerns the expectation on the part of the reader that she will acquire something new to learn (and may even, at least for a time, think that what she encounters really “is something new”), while what she actually encounters are “the orthodox forms” of Christianity (something she may have been neglecting and so need to be reminded of). For

Kierkegaard this allows the work both to turn its irony against speculative philosophy while also allowing Christianity "to be given its due."

The one feature that Beck does briefly address in his review is (3), the use of irony in *Fragments*. But this is limited to his closing sentence: "We leave it to each person to consider whether he wants to look for earnestness or possibly for irony in this apologetical dialectic."¹³⁶ Beck may even be trying to live up to what he takes to be some sort of Kierkegaardian ideal of leaving certain things to the judgment of the individual reader. Climacus, however, objects to this closing gesture, calling it "misleading."¹³⁷ He seems to object to this for two reasons. First, he thinks that this remark casts doubt upon whether irony and the other devices of indirectness that he has accused Beck of neglecting are really there to be discovered in the text. Climacus thinks that if one were reviewing something that truly was entirely lacking in irony (a book that, e.g., was "unmixed, pure didactic ultra-earnestness"), then such a remark might have a point, since the reviewer could thereby invite the reader to discover just how lacking in irony the work actually is: "leaving it up to the reader *to look* or whether he *wants to look*—for something that is not directly in the book."¹³⁸ But for a reviewer to say in earnest, "God knows whether it is irony or earnestness," when what she is faced with is clearly a non-didactic work (where it is "only a matter of *finding* what is there" to realize this) is, by Climacus' lights, to mislead one's reader and perhaps, in the process, to satirize one's own undue earnestness (for there clearly is no irony present in such a comment!). Climacus compares this to the case of someone who was present at one of "Socrates' ironic conversations" and who then later "gives an account of it to someone else but leaves out the irony and says: God knows whether talk like that is irony or earnestness."¹³⁹ In such a case, according to Climacus, the one giving such an account clearly misrepresents the character of Socrates' conversation, while also unwittingly "satirizing himself" in the process (since he unwittingly invites the reader to be struck by the complete lack of irony in his own overly earnest report). Note the explicit parallel drawn here between *Fragments* (reported on by Beck) and a Socratic conversation (reported on by someone who appears *blind* to Socrates' irony). Climacus also objects to Beck's closing sentence due to its apparent invitation to look *either* for earnestness *or* for irony, suggesting that Beck may think that they are mutually exclusive: "But because irony is present, it doesn't follow that earnestness is excluded. Only assistant professors assume that."¹⁴⁰

When Climacus says therefore that Beck's review is likely to give readers an incorrect impression of *Fragments*, he primarily means that they will receive the impression that none of these devices of indirection is present in his book, or that they are not essential to understanding his method of proceeding. But this is expressly what he denies:

My peculiar [or distinctive] procedure [*eiendommelige Fremgangsmaade*], if there is to be any mention of it..., consists in the *contrast-form* of the communication and *not at all* in the perhaps new dialectical combinations by which the issues become clearer.¹⁴¹

Beck seems to focus exactly on what Climacus seems to consider secondary. By drawing our attention to the "clarity" and the "acuity and fineness" with which he claims *Fragments* presents a certain content, Beck emphasizes what Climacus here is calling "the perhaps new dialectical combinations."¹⁴² Climacus, on the other hand, contends that what is peculiarly distinctive about his book is the presence of the different devices that serve to make his work a non-didactic, indirect work: "[My procedure] consists primarily and decisively in the contrast-form, and if and when this is pointed out there can be, if necessary, brief mention of a fragment of didactic distinctiveness."¹⁴³ This is not therefore to deny that *Fragments* can be praised for its dialectical competence. It is only to maintain that this is not where Climacus locates its special character or what he thinks makes it an unusual work of philosophy. Beck's review simply ignores what he takes to be central. By explicitly comparing *Fragments* to a Socratic conversation, Climacus seems to invite us not to make the same mistake, but instead to conceive of his first book as a Socratic work in its own right.

4.3.2 Climacus' Reader and the Condition of Knowing Too Much

One reason that Climacus objects to Beck's having given the impression in his review that *Fragments* is a didactic work is that he thereby seems to convey the further impression that Climacus has written his book "for those who are unknowledgeable [*Ikke-Vidende*], who would like something to know."¹⁴⁴ That is, he makes *Fragments* appear to be a work of direct communication, which was written to teach his reader something she doesn't already know. On Climacus' view, the main difference between direct and indirect communication concerns the aim of the communication and the condition of the one for whom the communication is made.¹⁴⁵ Direct communication can serve one of two generic aims: (1) to present something to a knowledgeable person for her to judge and assess; or (2) to present something to an

unknowledgeable person for her to learn.¹⁴⁶ Whether the one for whom the communication is made is knowledgeable or unknowledgeable, direct communication presupposes, as Kierkegaard puts it, that her "ability to receive [what is to be communicated] is entirely in order."¹⁴⁷ Climacus denies, however, that *Fragments* is written for either of these two kinds of readers; instead, he claims that he seeks to address someone who is knowledgeable but whose knowledge has become a *liability*:

The book is so far from being written for those who are unknowledgeable, who would like something to know, that the one with whom I enter into conversation in the book is always a knowledgeable person, which seems to indicate that the book is written for those who are knowledgeable—whose *trouble* is that they know too much [*veed for meget*].¹⁴⁸

There are several things worth noting about this passage. First, notice that it is Climacus' contention that *Fragments* "is written for those...whose trouble is that they know too much."¹⁴⁹ Here a person's knowledge somehow seems to be interfering with her ability to live well (recall that Climacus' diagnosis of what ails the age more generally is that "because of much knowledge [*den megen Viden*] people have entirely forgotten what it means to *exist* and what *inwardness* is").¹⁵⁰ Another way that Climacus tries to characterize this condition is to say that despite a person's being "very knowledgeable [*meget vidende*]," her knowledge has "little or no significance for [her]."¹⁵¹ We might say that in such a case she only knows what she knows "by rote."¹⁵² We could call her an *unhealthy* knower in order to distinguish her from the knowledgeable person who is expected, in the case of direct communication, to make a proper use of what she knows in order to judge what has been communicated. Climacus' aim is to treat this unhealthy condition through the use of an indirect manner of writing in his two books. But, in the case of *Fragments*, he thinks its therapeutic character has been utterly obscured by Beck's review, since by giving the impression that *Fragments* is didactic, Beck invites readers to approach this work as though it had something new to teach them or as though it were a suitable object for the knowledgeable person to assess.¹⁵³

A second thing to notice in this passage is how Climacus draws attention to "the one with whom [he] enter[s] into conversation in the book." That is, *Fragments* has a dialogical structure that may represent Climacus' own attempt to remind his readers of the philosophical value of the ancient Greek notion of dialogue:

If only dialogue in the Greek style were introduced again in order to test what one knows and what one does not know—then all the artificiality and unnaturalness, all the exaggerated ingenuity, would be blown away....Have a Hegelian philosopher or Hegel himself converse with a mature person who is dialectically experienced by having existed, and right away at the beginning all that is affected and chimerical will be prevented.¹⁵⁴

I think we should conceive of Climacus as just such a “mature person who is dialectically experienced by having existed” (so quite unlike the young Johannes of *De Omnibus*—see Chapter 3, section 3.1). If the reader is someone who stands in need of Socratic treatment of her condition of knowing too much and Climacus is to play the role of Socratic doctor, so to speak, then the book's interlocutor may represent, as Stephen Mulhall nicely puts it, “the text's internal representation of its intended audience.”¹⁵⁵ While commentators have certainly drawn attention to the presence of this interlocutory figure in *Fragments*, I do not think that the significance of Climacus' exchanges with the interlocutor has been adequately appreciated.¹⁵⁶ We will discuss the interlocutor further in section 4.4. For now, let's consider more closely the nature of Climacus' reader and her condition of knowing too much.

If we follow Kierkegaard's lead and assume that Climacus' particular task is to trace the path from the speculative life-view back towards what it is to exist as a Christian, then we should expect that the particular type of reader he aims to address in his two books is someone who is taken up with the modern, Hegelian-style of doing philosophy.¹⁵⁷ Whether such a person is a bona fide Hegelian or not remains an open question. Especially in the *Postscript*, the speculative philosopher is the frequent butt of numerous jokes and is often openly ridiculed, and one might wonder why such a person would even bother to read such works, or if she did why she would read very far.¹⁵⁸ If we recall the story of the old man (see the previous chapter, section 3.2.2), it is his grandson who he is most worried about. He is the one who may require something above and beyond the traditional faith of his grandfather if he is to keep from becoming corrupted by what undid his father. Thus we might distinguish between the fully committed speculative philosopher (who may not have much patience for Climacus' comical remarks) and the younger person who is attracted to speculative philosophy (such that she may already have begun to forget herself ethically and religiously speaking) but who also might find it entertaining to “listen in” while Climacus points out some of the contradictions that he thinks modern philosophers sometimes exhibit in their tendency to forget themselves and to scorn the significance of being an individual

human being (compare Socrates' claim that some people enjoy listening to his conversations because they "enjoy hearing those being questioned who think they are wise, but are not").¹⁵⁹ It may turn out that Climacus' books can only reach the younger, less committed type of reader.

Climacus employs a parallel distinction when discussing those who are drawn to an aesthetic life-view. In his discussion of the first part of *Stages on Life's Way* (concerning a party of aesthetes), he maintains that "it is too late to exhort against a decidedly aesthetic existence." It is only "a young person whose life is not yet decided in the deepest sense" (such as the Young Man who appears in the first part of *Stages*) for whom there is still "hope."¹⁶⁰ This is akin to the dynamic between Socrates and, on the one hand, someone like Thrasymachus and, on the other, the more impressionable youth who sometimes listen in on Socrates' discussions. Thrasymachus and the committed speculative philosophers may ultimately be lost causes who cannot be persuaded to change their lives. If that is the case, then Socrates' primary goal may be to crush and intellectually humiliate such a figure so that he loses his appeal in the eyes (and ears) of those in attendance.¹⁶¹ One possibility, then, for who the principal reader might be that Climacus seeks to address is that it is a younger person, someone who is perhaps drawn to speculative philosophy without fully appreciating the dangers it may represent; someone who is interested in the topic but open to being persuaded that it may not, in fact, be the activity most suited for her; and so someone who is not yet fully committed to such an extent that her condition of self-forgetfulness seems incurable. It is for a reader such as this that Climacus' constant ridicule of modern speculative philosophy together with his frequent praise of ancient Greek philosophy and Socrates in particular may be most effective.

Recall that when Climacus presents his more general diagnosis of what he thinks has led people to forget how to exist and what it is to have an inner life, he ties this condition of knowing too much to what he calls "the dubious relation between modern Christian speculative thought and Christianity."¹⁶² He claims that "because everyone knows the Christian truth, it has gradually become such a triviality that a primitive impression of it is acquired only with difficulty."¹⁶³ What Climacus seems specifically to have in mind with respect to the speculatively-inclined reader is a situation where the intellectual activities involved in doing systematic, speculative philosophy have effectively undermined the abilities of people to retain a proper impression of Christianity and the demands it makes on a person's life. The condition of knowing too much in effect seems to interfere with the ability to be personally struck by Christianity. Instead, under

the sway of speculative philosophy and an overdeveloped habit of engaging in abstract, disinterested reflection, people have become prone to the experience of feeling that they are "finished" comprehending Christianity:

When an age in systematic, *rote* fashion has finished with the understanding of Christianity and all the attendant difficulties and jubilantly proclaims how easy it is to understand the difficulty, then, of course, one must harbor a suspicion...since a difficulty is indeed recognizable by its being difficult to understand.

No wonder that people are so quickly finished with Christianity when they begin by putting themselves in a state in which receiving an ever-so-little impression of Christianity is entirely out of the question.¹⁶⁴

If it is Climacus' desire to target the sort of reader who has in effect forgotten what it means to exist as a Christian and who, at the same time, thinks she has finished with understanding Christianity and all its "attendant difficulties," then it becomes clearer why he might think that indirect communication is necessary. If he is to engage the reader so that she can become aware of her condition of forgetfulness, so that ideally she may even set about trying to remember what she has forgotten, Climacus will have to communicate with her in such a way that her conviction that she has understood Christianity can be undercut: for she thinks she knows all about the difficulties of Christianity, and so lacks a correct self-understanding; that is, she suffers from a species of the disgraceful ignorance that Socrates targets and, accordingly, stands in need of someone who can address her in proper Socratic fashion.

How we conceive Climacus' reader can potentially have far-reaching interpretive consequences. For example, because James Conant believes that the primary target of the *Postscript* is a reader who tends to convert practical ethical and religious questions into questions of the intellect (thereby indulging her "compulsion to always reflect upon the task of living (a certain sort of life) rather than to attend to the task itself"), this has consequences for how he understands Climacus' own behavior.¹⁶⁵ Since Conant thinks that Climacus' principal means of making his reader aware of her condition is to enact the very same confusions to which she is prone (thereby mirroring back her own evasive behavior—see above, section 4.2.1), he is much more readily inclined to be *suspicious* about Climacus' own purportedly philosophical activity. Thus the fact that Climacus does not seem to be in a hurry to finish his project and never seems to tire of reflecting about ethical and religious matters looks suspicious.¹⁶⁶ Doesn't this behavior dramatically exemplify precisely what is wrong with the reader? Doesn't it (at least initially)

hold out to her what she most desires, namely a way to delay and postpone having to make genuine ethical and religious commitments while fostering the illusion that by indulging her desire to reflect rather than to act she is actually making real ethical or religious progress?¹⁶⁷

While Climacus' tendency to linger, to slow things down, to be a "loafer" as he puts it, certainly may look suspicious by Conant's lights, I think this is due, at least in part, to Conant's having misconceived who Climacus' main target is.¹⁶⁸ It's not someone who confusedly thinks that philosophy can help her to decide *whether* she should become a Christian (while it actually provides her with a way to *delay* making such a decision), but rather someone who imagines herself *already* to be a Christian and who thinks that ethically and religiously attending to herself is a relatively straightforward matter. Basically, such a reader thinks that being a Christian is *easy* and certainly not something that requires much effort on her part.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, being someone with certain intellectual inclinations, she finds herself drawn to speculative philosophy, and the more she becomes enamored with the abstract reflection this activity involves the more she develops a habit of neglecting herself. She simply has no patience for attending to herself or rather supposes that she has already finished with such a task.¹⁷⁰ And the more she neglects herself, the busier and more preoccupied she becomes with speculating. If I am right in suggesting that this is the principal type of reader that Climacus seeks to engage (where the more youthful the reader is, the better chance he has of treating her condition), then behavior that looks to Conant as though it exemplified a confusion (with the aim of mirroring the reader's own confusion) in fact serves as a *corrective* to the hasty, impatient reader who is unwilling to spend any time attending to herself and whose chosen manner of doing philosophy leads her to forget herself. If such a reader is in a hurry, then Climacus will take his time and take on the appearance of a loafer. If such a reader has the urge to "go further" than Christianity, then Climacus will try to show her that she has not yet come far enough in the task of attending to herself.¹⁷¹ If such a reader imagines that she already is a Christian and that being a Christian is easy, then Climacus will try to reacquaint her with just how "difficult" and strenuous such a task can be.¹⁷²

At a minimum, then, I think we should expect Climacus' reader to be someone who is under an *illusion* about her own personal standing with respect to Christianity. She is someone who presumably knows too much about Christianity while having forgotten herself ethically and religiously speaking. In particular she is someone who imagines that she *already* is a Christian (and so someone who thinks not only that she has truly made the decision to become a Christian

but that she is "finished" with this activity). As a result, she has put herself "in a state in which receiving an ever-so-little impression of Christianity is entirely out of the question."¹⁷³ It is Climacus' aim to address both this inner "deadness" or apathy and the habit of knowing too much that he thinks underwrites this state. I have also suggested that we conceive of the reader as a more youthful person who is drawn to speculative philosophy but who may not yet have fully committed herself to such a life (where "youthful" does not so much pick out a person's chronological age as her degree of existential development; the more youthful one is, the greater the extent to which one's "life is not yet decided in the deepest sense").¹⁷⁴ Because the reader is under the illusion that she already is a Christian (and that she has in effect already completed what she takes to be a relatively easy task), she no longer feels challenged by the difficulty of becoming (and continuing to be) a Christian. For her to rediscover (or discover for the first time) just how strenuous and life-long such a task truly is, she will first have to overcome her present condition. This condition represents a very different kind of obstacle than what is normally faced by those who have not yet decided to become Christian but who also do not (falsely) imagine themselves already to be Christian:

The most difficult decision is not that in which the individual is far removed from the decision (as when a non-Christian is going to decide whether he wants to be a Christian), but when it is *as if the matter were already decided*....When I am not a Christian, and the decision is to become a Christian, then Christianity helps me to become aware of the decision....But when it is as if the matter were already decided...there is something that hinders me in becoming aware [of the decision] (and this is the factor that increases the difficulty)—namely, the *semblance* of a decision.

My thinking goes something like this: if [Christianity] is the highest good, then it is better that I definitely know that I do not possess it, so that I can aspire to it with all my might, than to be entranced in illusion and imagine that I possess it and so consequently do not even consider aspiring.¹⁷⁵

Climacus' reader does not "aspire" after Christianity because she imagines that she already possesses it. It appears to her "as if the matter were already decided" and this stands in the way of attending to herself in the requisite way. Christianity seems easy and relatively unimportant; her knowledge of Christianity has "little or no significance for [her]."¹⁷⁶ Climacus' goal will be to engage his reader's condition of knowing too much in order to help her to overcome the peculiar kind of apathy that she seems to suffer from. Because she is someone who has certain

intellectual inclinations, this apathy also expresses itself in how she *thinks* about the ethical and the religious. Climacus' goal will be to try to reawaken his reader to what proper thinking about these matters looks like. He will, in short, try to reawaken her to the difficulties involved with thinking and living as an ethical and religious (and Christianly religious) individual.

4.3.3 Climacus' Art of "Taking Away"

Earlier in the *Postscript*, before he has begun his critique of Beck's review, Climacus very vividly raises the issue of how to respond to the abundance of knowledge that he claims is the source of people's ethical and religious forgetfulness. If people know too much, where what they know they frequently only know by rote, then one drastic solution to the problem might simply be to do away with their knowledge. Climacus compares this to the burning down of the Alexandrian library:

If one can at times recall with some relief that Caesar had the Alexandrian library burned to the ground, one could, well intentioned, actually wish for humankind that this overabundance of knowledge be taken away again so that one could again come to know what it means to live as a human being.¹⁷⁷

Note that by taking away knowledge it becomes possible to possess a certain type of knowledge, here tied to knowing "what it means to live as a human being." Climacus returns to the image of "taking away" people's knowledge in his discussion of Beck's review. He maintains that when one is faced with a person who knows too much, to the extent that what she knows ethically and religiously (e.g. about Christianity) has become "a triviality" and no longer makes a "primitive impression" on her (what I called an "action-guiding impression" in Chapter 3, section 3.3), then being able to communicate with such a person requires special abilities: "When this is the case, being able to *communicate* eventually becomes the art of being able to *take away* or to trick something away."¹⁷⁸ Climacus admits that this "seems strange and very ironic," but maintains that he nevertheless has "succeeded in expressing exactly what [he] mean[s]."¹⁷⁹ Reminiscent of the Socratic image of the banquet that we discussed in the previous chapter (where those who are dining, though "already gorged," continue to "demand" that more courses of food be served), Climacus compares the person who knows too much to someone whose mouth is so full of food that he is unable to eat.¹⁸⁰ He maintains that in both of these cases, to provide such a person with something that is genuinely nourishing (whether physically or intellectually/spiritually) does not consist in giving him more of what he already has:

When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat, and it will end with his dying of hunger, does giving food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead, in taking a little away so that he can eat? Similarly, when a man is very knowledgeable [*er meget vidende*], though his knowledge has little or no significance for him, does sensible communication consist in giving him more to know, even if he loudly proclaims that this is what he needs, or does it consist, instead, in taking something away from him?¹⁸¹

This situation seems to require something above and beyond a normal diet, since one must not only refuse to provide more food or more knowledge (even if that is what the other person insists that he "needs"), but also take away some of what is already filling the mouth or the mind of the incapacitated individual.¹⁸² For food to be truly nourishing, its presence can't interfere with the means whereby a person consumes it. To help a person to eat whose mouth is "so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat," one needs to remove some of the food; to unclog things so that he can then begin to chew again and thereby derive some nourishment. How does the image apply in the case of someone who knows too much? It's clear that in such a case one certainly should not give a person "more to know"; hence Climacus' desire to write non-didactic, indirect works. The abundant presence of knowledge somehow seems to interfere with a person's ability to consume or properly use what he knows ethically and religiously speaking; the latter seems to have been drained of any significance it may have once had for him. He is no longer nourished by such things. If they are again (or perhaps for the first time) to become nourishing, then whatever is interfering with the proper use of this knowledge must be taken away.

But what exactly must be taken away from the person who knows too much? One candidate might be the reader's current conviction that she is finished with understanding Christianity; the illusion that she already is a Christian and that her life is basically in order ethically and religiously speaking. This illusion may stand in the way of attending to herself in the appropriate manner.¹⁸³ There's good reason to think that removing such an illusion is at least part of the process of engaging such a person.¹⁸⁴ This nicely lines up with both Kierkegaard's and Socrates' use of the term "take away" in the context of indirect communication and maieutic method. Recall that Kierkegaard claims that indirect communication is appropriate in those circumstances where a person is under an illusion or "a delusion which first must be taken away."¹⁸⁵ Since the "delusion is an obstacle" then "the first step of the communication is to take away [*at tage bort*] the delusion." Recall also that Socrates claims that part of his activity as a

philosophical midwife includes the occasional need to take away from his interlocutors some confusion or falsehood they have given birth to, together with an ability on his part to put up with the anger that this sometimes evokes: "People have often...got into such a state with me as to be literally ready to bite when I take away some nonsense or other from them."¹⁸⁶

On the other hand, if an illusion were the only thing that Climacus sought to take away from his reader, then the comparison with the person whose mouth is full of food would not be that apt.¹⁸⁷ For in the one case, one takes away food so that she can eat food. Whereas in the case of the person who knows too much, we're not talking about taking away knowledge so that she can properly use knowledge, but about taking away an illusion. While I think that Climacus clearly does want to remove the reader's illusion that she already is a Christian and so has "finished with the understanding of Christianity," he also seems to think that the best way to remove this illusion is by really and truly taking away a part of what his reader knows.¹⁸⁸ It is this activity of taking away what she knows that ultimately should facilitate removing her illusion. Climacus claims that the way to take away someone's knowledge is by giving what she knows a new form so that it is no longer recognizable by her as something she knows:

When a communicator takes a part of what the very knowledgeable man knows and communicates this to him in a *form* that makes it *strange* to him, the communicator is, as it were, *taking away* from him *his knowledge*, at least until the knowledgeable man manages to assimilate it by overcoming the resistance of the form.¹⁸⁹

This suggests that among what the reader knows, whatever is taken away from her is only taken away *temporarily*.¹⁹⁰ As long as the form in which she encounters something makes it appear strange, then her knowledge will have in effect been taken away from her. Climacus clearly also seems to imagine, however, that "by overcoming the resistance of the form" the reader will "assimilate" and so regain the knowledge that had temporarily been taken from her. Of course, it might seem questionable that a person "knows" something if it can be taken away from her in this manner. This is a topic we discussed in the previous chapter (see section 3.3). I argued there that Climacus was relying on a distinction between what might be called "mere" or "rote" knowledge and action-generating knowledge. His chief concern is trying to address a reader who is in some sense acquainted with the Christian teaching but who has fallen into an apathetic condition in relation to what she knows (it no longer makes an existential impression on her); it isn't properly integrated into her life, even as she remains under the illusion that it is. Through the use of the various devices of indirection that he employs in *Fragments*, it is Climacus' aim to

provide his reader with a situation where she will find herself repeatedly wrestling with the *unusual forms* she encounters in the text. In the process she will, in effect, find herself being brought back again and again to topics (and parts of herself) that she may have been *neglecting* simply because she thought she had already achieved a thorough understanding of them and the role they should play in a person's life. Climacus claims that the use of such an indirect, experimental manner of writing is perfectly suited for his reader's condition: "If a person knows everything but knows it by rote, the form of the experiment is a good exploratory means; in this form, one even tells him what he knows, but he does not recognize it."¹⁹¹

To clarify what he means by making the form of his reader's knowledge "strange," Climacus offers a mathematical analogy:

Suppose, now, that the trouble with the very knowledgeable person is that he is accustomed to one particular form, "that he can demonstrate the mathematical theorem if the letters read ABC but not if they read ACB"; then the changed form would indeed take his knowledge away from him.¹⁹²

The person who only knows the mathematical theorem "by rote" may have this revealed to her when she encounters a new form and finds herself unable to apply the theorem correctly. Previously she may have been "satisfied with a fleeting acquaintance that goes by the letters," but by struggling with the new form and eventually "overcoming" its resistance she may develop the capacity to keep her "eye mathematically on the demonstration" regardless of which letters are used.¹⁹³ Similarly, Climacus thinks that since his reader thinks she "has finished with the understanding of Christianity and all the attendant difficulties" and has even come to think of Christianity as something that is "easy," then what she requires is not more knowledge but a non-didactic, indirect work whose contrast-form truly makes things difficult for her to understand:

The difficulty [of Christianity] is clothed in a new form in which it really is difficult. This is communication to the person who already has found the difficulty so very easy to explain. If it so happens, as the reviewer [Beck] suggests, that a reader can scarcely *recognize* in the presented material that with which he was *finished* long ago, then the communication will *bring him to a halt*.¹⁹⁴

Climacus, then, argues here that *Fragments* is a book that is especially designed to bring his reader to a halt and to occasion her subsequent struggles to overcome the strange forms she encounters in the book, with his ultimate aim being that she become *aware* of the fact that she

has forgotten what it is to exist as a Christian together with the difficulties associated with such an existence.

4.4 Climacus' Experiment: A Socratic Framework for Reading *Fragments*

I began this chapter by raising the issue of why reading *Fragments* might be a difficult philosophical exercise. Climacus repeatedly denies that what he is doing in his two books should be assimilated to modern, Hegelian-style philosophy. At the same time, he remains worried that his enterprise will nevertheless be misunderstood by his readers. In the light of how his two books have been received by scholars, I think his worries have proved to be justified. We saw in our discussion of his critique of Beck that one way that a person can misread *Fragments* is to fail to attend to its use of irony and other devices of indirection. I noted that this is what Wayne Booth calls "not going far enough" in one's engagement of such a work.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, I also drew attention to a second way that a person can misread *Fragments*, to what Booth calls "going too far" in one's detection of irony and other means of indirection. In the latter kind of case, it's as though one has acquired an overdeveloped sensitivity for irony and Climacus' use more generally of a contrastive form of writing. This way of misreading *Fragments* can be equally damaging, but much more difficult to combat. When one is faced with someone's having missed the presence of irony, then it may be possible to draw her attention to what she's missed, especially since this may deepen her experience of the text in question. When it is a matter of someone's going too far in her detection of irony, this can be a much more entrenched difficulty; for, as Booth puts it, once a person has "learned to *suspect* a given speaker, [she is] tempted to suspect every statement he makes."¹⁹⁶ Here one is faced with a much more sophisticated reader (perhaps too sophisticated) and the task is to convince her that the text has "other riches that might be destroyed by irony."¹⁹⁷ Over the course of this chapter I have occasionally drawn attention to approaches to Climacus' works that might be held to fit this pattern (Roberts and Mulhall with respect to *Fragments*; Conant with respect to the *Postscript*). It has not been my aim to demonstrate that this is so, only that this remains a real danger when reading Climacus' books and that in my view we should approach with caution how these commentators conceive of Climacus' philosophical method and his philosophical activity more generally. That these

differences in judgment frequently arise may be less a sign that Climacus has failed in his enterprise and more an indication of just how demanding these matters are.

In the final section of this chapter I want to close by laying out what might be called a Socratic framework for reading *Fragments*. This is not meant to be a detailed discussion of how Climacus' discussion unfolds over the course of the book. I don't have the space for that here. Nor is it meant to be a detailed discussion of the content of what Climacus develops (there are plenty of good book-length studies that already meet this need).¹⁹⁸ If, as Climacus puts it, "what constantly emerges [in *Fragments*] is old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity," then I think that this licenses me to proceed on C. Stephen Evans' assumption that most of what "Climacus says in *Fragments* are logical truths or else basic claims about Christianity that hardly anyone in the implied audience would think of denying."¹⁹⁹ My focus will continue to be on what Climacus calls his "distinctive procedure"; that is, his use of a contrastive form of writing, which he claims enables him to take away from the reader some of what she knows (together with some of what she thinks she knows) about Christianity and her personal relationship to it.²⁰⁰ If the reader has been neglecting "the orthodox forms" that are brought out in *Fragments* and doesn't immediately recognize them as such in the strange form in which they appear in the book, then this will "bring [her] to a halt" and potentially help to make Christianity more "difficult" for her.²⁰¹ As she wrestles with the difficulty of these unusual forms, she may come to rethink and reconsider matters that at present make little or no "impression" on her.²⁰² While Climacus' chief aim might be said to remove the reader's illusion that she already is a Christian, it is also to engage her in such a way that a passionate, non-apathetic response to the Christian teaching becomes possible again. The reader is therefore marked neither as a Socratic thinker, whose passionate response to Christianity is to find it to be "foolishness" (a species of "offense"), nor as a Christian thinker, whose passionate response is "faith."²⁰³ Both these responses presuppose a degree of existential development that Climacus thinks his speculatively-inclined reader lacks. For, given the ethical and religious forgetfulness that is characteristic of the age, "it is...a rarity to encounter a person who has even as much existing inwardness as a pagan philosopher."²⁰⁴

4.4.1 Climacus' Maieutic Incognito in *Fragments*

Immediately following the preface of *Fragments* there is a single sentence, labeled "Propositio" (proposition or hypothesis), that appears above the heading of the first chapter:

The question is asked by an ignorant person [*den Uvidende*] who does not even know what the occasion was for his asking in this way.²⁰⁵

Commentators typically ignore this opening moment.²⁰⁶ Or, when they do discuss it, they are not at all in agreement about what it signifies. For example, H. A. Nielsen maintains that “the *propositio*...helps to identify the author’s intended *reader* as one who can put to himself questions of this kind without endless preliminaries.”²⁰⁷ In this case, Nielsen reasonably assumes that the question at issue is the one with which the first chapter opens:

Can the truth be learned? With this question we shall begin. It was a Socratic question or became that by way of the Socratic question whether virtue can be taught.²⁰⁸

Stephen Mulhall agrees with Nielsen that “the question referred to can only be that which immediately follows this *propositio*,” but treats the *propositio* itself as principally concerning the *author* not the reader.²⁰⁹ Given that Climacus is the (pseudonymous) author of *Fragments* and that, in general, he is the one speaking in the book, I think Mulhall is right to tie this to Climacus (Mulhall is the only commentator I’ve discovered who has been appropriately struck by this opening moment), but I don’t agree with his claim that the *propositio* serves as a kind of preview of Climacus’ faults. Mulhall claims that because Climacus begins *Fragments* with a Socratic question, “he structures his elaboration of the Socratic and non-Socratic hypotheses from the outset as alternative solutions to a Socratic paradox.”²¹⁰ Mulhall thinks that the *propositio* is meant to signal to the reader “the profoundly questionable nature of this starting-point” and to suggest that “Climacus never questions the importance and correctness of his procedure, but in fact lacks the fully transparent self-knowledge whose reality the very asking of the Socratic question presupposes.”²¹¹ One difficulty with this reading is that it requires Mulhall to ascribe an awareness of Climacus’ alleged faults to whoever wrote the *propositio* that he claims Climacus himself lacks. Yet within the fiction of Climacus’ being the author of *Fragments*, there is no one who could have composed and positioned the *propositio* in the text except Climacus.²¹² Thus while I agree with Mulhall that we should treat the *propositio* as a description of Climacus, I think we need an approach to *Fragments* that explains how Climacus could be the one who advances such a description about himself.

The *propositio* highlights at least two things for the reader. First, the one who asks the question that initiates the philosophical investigation that lies before her is represented to be ignorant. This implies that he doesn’t know the answer to his question and holds out to the reader

the possibility that if and when he discovers the answer, this will be a new discovery for him and possibly for her (recall Climacus' claim that *Fragments* satirically proceeds "as if something altogether extraordinary, that is, new" were going to emerge).²¹³ He also is described as someone who lacks an awareness of the occasion that gets the book's investigation under way. This could mean that he is ignorant of the condition of the age (that people suffer from an ethical and religious forgetfulness), or it could point to a historical ignorance about Christianity (an ignorance that it is the occasion of this historical phenomenon's having taken place that makes it possible for the non-Socratic hypothesis that is developed in *Fragments* to be developed). If the former, I don't think this is supposed to apply to Climacus full stop since, as we've seen in Chapter 3 and in our discussion of the preface to *Fragments*, he elsewhere presents himself as someone who has a very worked out diagnostic account of why he has chosen to write pamphlets at this particular time. The latter reading is supported by draft material from *Fragments*. Originally, instead of being labeled "Propositio," this opening sentence was labeled "1st Position" and stood in contrast to an envisaged second position (labeled "Position II"), which is described as follows:

An ignorant person [*Den Uvidende*] who presumably knows historically what he is asking about but seeks the answer.²¹⁴

Here the contrast is between two positions, both of which are occupied by someone who is ignorant about the matter under investigation, where the ignorance of the first position might also be said to include a historical ignorance that the second position lacks.

What's going on here? If there are grounds for thinking that Climacus is the author of the *propositio* and that it is meant as a description of himself, doesn't this itself pose a kind of paradox for the reader? Climacus appears to be someone who both is and is not aware of the nature of his undertaking and what might have occasioned it. The solution to this paradox lies in appreciating that the *propositio* is put forward by Climacus not as a description of himself *qua* author but of himself *qua* Socratic figure, the one who will engage in a conversation with an interlocutor and thereby enter into a maieutic relationship with the reader.²¹⁵ That is, for the bulk of *Fragments* Climacus assumes a role or incognito of an ignorant person as part of the literary-philosophical experiment that he himself has composed.²¹⁶ David Gouwens draws attention to a similar dual role that is played by the pseudonym Constanin Constantius in *Repetition*, noting that it is important to distinguish between "Constantin-as-author and Constantin-as-character in his own book."²¹⁷ Climacus also seems to be aware of this dynamic in *Repetition*. He contrasts its

experimental structure, where the pseudonym "Constantin himself must be involved and play *partes* [roles]," with the experimental structure of the third part of *Stages on Life's Way*, where the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus does not assume a role within his own experiment but instead "stands entirely outside as a 'street inspector'."²¹⁸

If Climacus is the Socratic figure I maintain him to be, then we should perhaps not be surprised that the stance he adopts is characterized as one that involves *ignorance*. If he is to engage his reader and he thinks that she is suffering from an ethical and religious forgetfulness brought about by knowing too much, then one way to do so is to present himself to her as someone who is ignorant about the very matters that she thinks she knows all too well. Whether or not he is genuinely ignorant about these matters, what is critical is that he adopts a maieutic stance in which he presents himself as lower than the reader; he takes at face value her illusion that she already is a Christian and that Christianity makes a genuine impression on her. His strategy is then to proceed to take away some of what she knows, to disguise it so that she doesn't recognize it, in order to test whether what she knows is something she knows only by rote.

4.4.2 Climacus' Exchanges with the Interlocutor

Let's turn now and consider in a little more detail the nature of the exchanges between Climacus and his interlocutor, and how often they occur. *Fragments* has five chapters and two other major sections, an appendix to Chapter 3 and the Interlude between Chapters 4 and 5. Accordingly, Climacus and the interlocutor engage in seven exchanges, which together comprise almost a quarter of the entire text.²¹⁹ Given how much of the book is devoted to these exchanges, it is striking how little attention they have received from commentators.²²⁰ One unusual feature is that Climacus' interlocutor is never given a name. He is someone that Climacus simply conjures forth, typically at the end of a chapter and usually by appealing to the possibility of "someone" speaking in reply to what he has developed. For example, the first three times he interacts with his interlocutor, he begins as follows: "perhaps someone will say"; "if someone were to say"; "perhaps someone now says."²²¹ This device is also used in *Practice in Christianity*.²²² But, perhaps more notably, it is also reminiscent of the device that Socrates employs in the *Apology* to personify the jury and so give his defense speech a more dialogical character.²²³

If we keep in mind that one of the key contrasts in *Fragments* is between the reader's expectation of something new to learn and the constant emergence of the orthodox forms of

Christianity (what she has forgotten but thinks she knows all too well), it may not be surprising that the interlocutor repeatedly charges Climacus with plagiarism. Each time Climacus develops something over the course of a chapter, whether this be cast in the logical/metaphysical register found in Chapters 1, 3 (including its appendix) and the Interlude (between Chapters 4 and 5) or the more poetic register of Chapters 2, 4 and 5, Climacus' interlocutor frequently makes clear that he feels as if he's been misled by the author of *Fragments*.²²⁴ Initially, however, his only response is to give expression to his anger and disappointment; he otherwise refuses to engage in much discussion with Climacus (but he does apparently continue to listen/read). In fact, in each of the first three exchanges (held, respectively, at the ends of Chapters 1, 2 and 3), the interlocutor only speaks once. The first two times he speaks, he is quite dismissive, charging Climacus with plagiarism and thereby objecting to the ludicrousness of a project whose result is what "everyone can see" and "what any child knows":

This is the most ludicrous of all projects, or, rather, you are the most ludicrous of all project-crankers, for even if someone comes up with a foolish scheme, there is always at least the truth that he is the one who came up with the scheme. But you, on the other hand, are behaving like a vagabond who charges a fee for showing an area that everyone can see. You are like the man who in the afternoon exhibited for a fee a ram that in the forenoon anyone could see free of charge, grazing in the open pasture.

What you are composing is the shabbiest plagiarism ever to appear, since it is nothing more or less than what any child knows.²²⁵

In both cases, Climacus notes that there is "anger" in the interlocutor's tone. Not only does Climacus not seem to be delivering on the interlocutor's expectation of something new, but he seems to be passing off as his own "invention" something that the interlocutor is unwilling to attribute to any human being (since it involves the traditional Christian teaching). Climacus does not mind that the interlocutor is angry at him and even seems delighted that he has provoked a response from him, since any kind of passionate response is an improvement on the condition where Christianity makes no impression on him whatsoever. At the same time, Climacus also encourages his interlocutor not to let his anger carry over to what has been (illicitly) presented as his invention: "Go ahead and be angry with me and with any other human being who pretends to have invented it, but you do not for that reason need to be angry with the idea."²²⁶ Instead he invites his interlocutor to be struck by how "strange [*besynderligt*]" it is "that something like this

exists, about which everyone who knows it also knows that he has not invented it."²²⁷ Climacus is more than ready to grant that the charge of plagiarism holds and that in this respect his interlocutor's "anger is justified."²²⁸ But he also invites him to see that a more appropriate response to what he has developed (that which he "did not steal from any single person"; for he admits that he "did not rob the human race, but robbed the deity") is not anger but a kind of "wonder":

Since we both are now standing before this wonder, whose solemn silence cannot be disturbed by human wrangling about what is mine and what is yours, whose awe-inspiring words infinitely drown out human quarreling about mine and thine, forgive me my strangely mistaken notion of having composed it myself.²²⁹

Climacus' interlocutor, however, is resistant to allowing himself to become involved in this way. If he is under the illusion that he is a Christian and yet not in the habit of having a more passionate response to the Christian teaching, then he may not even get the point of Climacus' philosophical activity. Why does this strange narrator keep changing registers and switching his approach to a topic that he, the interlocutor, thinks he knows all about?

Beginning with the third exchange, there are signs that the interlocutor's engagement with Climacus' project may be increasing. The third time he speaks he again expresses his disappointment with what's been developed, but he also displays some resistance to Climacus' earlier suggestion that what he is developing warrants a passionate response other than anger:

I know full well that you are a capricemonger, but you certainly do not believe that it would occur to me to be concerned about a caprice so strange or so ludicrous that it probably has never occurred to anyone and, above all, so unreasonable that I would have to lock everything out of my consciousness in order to think of it.²³⁰

In his denial that "it would occur to [him] to be concerned" about what Climacus has developed, the interlocutor nevertheless expresses a kind of engagement that he earlier has not displayed. He finds what Climacus has developed to be utterly "unreasonable" and possibly incoherent. In short he expresses a species of what Climacus will call the passion of "offense."²³¹ To find what Climacus calls "the absolute paradox" of Christianity to be "foolishness" or "absurd" is nevertheless to be passionately engaged by the Christian teaching in a way that he thinks the speculative philosophers of his day fail to be engaged.²³² Thus the interlocutor has made a bit of progress and is now closer to doing philosophy in the passionate manner of a Socrates or a

genuine Christian thinker. This is partly revealed by a change in his future exchanges with Climacus. Beginning with the fourth exchange, at the end of the appendix to Chapter 3, the interlocutor actually speaks more than once and so begins to enter more truly into a dialogue with Climacus. This indicates, I take it, that he has become a bit more personally involved in Climacus' project, though his responses are still primarily of the same character since he again charges Climacus with using phrases that do not "belong" to him: "You really are boring, for now we have the same story all over again....Those phrases do not belong to you but are very familiar, and everyone knows to whom they belong."²³³ Climacus, who again is not disturbed by this accusation, challenges the interlocutor to identify the proper sources of the phrases in question and promptly is given a detailed bibliography by the interlocutor together with the following admonishment: "As you see, I do know my business and know how to catch you with the stolen goods."²³⁴ Climacus, by contrast, is more interested in the phenomenon of offense and how it seems to possess the "advantage" of "pointing up the difference more clearly" between an individual's powers of understanding and that which cannot be understood (where one is not "supposed to understand the paradox" but "the maximum of any eventual understanding is to understand that it cannot be understood").²³⁵

In the fifth exchange, at the end of Chapter 4, a further change takes place, in that the interlocutor's initial response is not a charge of plagiarism and a simple rejection of Climacus' project, but rather consists of an expression of surprise at what he takes to follow from Climacus' discussion (thereby revealing that he has perhaps been listening more closely to what has been developed). Though he follows this up with yet another charge of plagiarism, his tone has importantly become more moderate and less accusatory:

You talk like a book and, what is unfortunate for you, like a very specific book. Once again, wittingly or unwittingly, you have introduced words that do not belong to you...but they are familiar to everyone....for the words are from the Bible.²³⁶

From this point on, the interlocutor becomes more and more engaged by Climacus' project and, by the end, has arguably made a certain amount of progress. I'll say a bit more about the nature of this progress after we discuss some of the specific means by which Climacus carries out his experiment.

4.4.3 Hypothesis, Intentional Forgetfulness, and the Poetic

Let's consider further Climacus' method of engaging his interlocutor in *Fragments*. Recall that Climacus claims in the *Postscript* that his distinctive procedure or method consists in his use of what he calls a contrastive form of writing. He claims that this contrastive form of writing involves a strategy of "taking away" from the interlocutor certain things that he claims to know, but that no longer appear to play a significant role in his own life. Climacus hopes to make overly familiar things strange, even if in the process this means that his own activity may sometimes take on an appearance of ludicrousness.

Probably the chief way that Climacus achieves this effect in *Fragments* is through the hypothetical form that he gives to the whole endeavor.²³⁷ The interlocutor repeatedly charges Climacus with addressing what "everyone knows," and Climacus notes that his activity of "assuming" such things can give his project a ridiculous appearance:

Perhaps it seems ludicrous to want to give this thesis the form of doubt by "assuming" it, for, after all, in our theocentric age everyone knows such things.²³⁸

At the same time, because he proceeds hypothetically Climacus is able to sustain to a point his interlocutor's desire to learn something new (even if this desire is repeatedly frustrated), while also remaining personally elusive with respect to his own opinions (recall that his conception of philosophy does not aim at trafficking in opinions—see section 4.2.1). At the end of *Fragments*, Climacus steps out of the incognito he has maintained since the opening *propositio* and more directly ties his hypothetical approach in the book to what he calls an intentional act of forgetting:

As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that...precisely by means of the historical—has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness....This, however, I have wanted to *forget* to a certain extent, and, availing myself of the unlimited discretion of a *hypothesis*, I have supposed that the whole thing was a whimsical notion of mine, which I did not want to give up before I had thought it through.²³⁹

This act of intentional forgetting can thus be tied to Climacus' assumed stance as someone who is ignorant, and supports the idea that the role he has been playing is supposed to include a historical ignorance about the phenomenon of Christianity.²⁴⁰ In *Fragments* Climacus calls Socrates' ignorance both "an expression of love for the learner" and, at the same time, "a kind of

deceit.”²⁴¹ I think something analogous is going on in Climacus' own case. While it can still remain true that in a fundamental sense Climacus is ignorant of Christianity (or at least of what it means to be a Christian, if, e.g., he is not a believer), there remains a sense in which he, like Socrates, may possess a kind of self-knowledge that his interlocutor appears to lack. If the interlocutor really has forgotten something about existence and inwardness and remains unaware of this condition, Climacus can achieve a certain degree of equality with him by openly assuming the guise of someone who has forgotten the very thing that the interlocutor thinks he knows all too well. Part of the martyrdom of this kind of stance is that you have to put up with appearing ludicrous and with being misunderstood in some of the ways exhibited by Climacus' interlocutor.

Along with his use of this hypothetical method, Climacus also seeks to engage his reader and the interlocutor through the use of a whole medley of different stories, jokes, parables, etc., all of which are interlaced throughout with allusions and implicit references to the Christian story. In his final response to the interlocutor's frequent charge of plagiarism, Climacus readily owns up to the charge and says that this too has been intentional on his part:

I shall make just one more comment with respect to your many allusions, all of which were aimed at my mixing of *borrowed* phrases in what was said. I do not deny this, nor shall I conceal the fact that I did it *deliberately*.²⁴²

One effect of such a strategy is that the reader too may be struck by a certain experience of strangeness (*besynderlighed*) when she encounters a familiar, perhaps overly familiar, phrase or thought that has been cast in an unusual form. Climacus repeatedly comments on the oddness and strangeness of what his experiment unearths, and one sign that the interlocutor has made progress is his acknowledgment in his final exchange with Climacus of the strange recollective effect that his writing has had on him:

How very strange! I have read your discussion to the end, and really not without some interest, and I have been pleased to find no slogans, no invisible writing. But how you do twist and turn. Just as Saft always ends up in the pantry, you always mix in some little phrase that is not your own, and that disturbs because of the recollection it prompts.²⁴³

Here again, however, the interlocutor is more cautious in what he accuses Climacus of. He notes that one of Climacus' final points "is in the New Testament, in the Gospel of John," but he also allows that perhaps Climacus has expressed things in the way he has because he "wanted to give

that comment a particular effect by casting it in this form."²⁴⁴ He's also now willing to admit that his earlier view concerning the relative advantage that a contemporary to Christ might have over someone of later generations may be less compelling than he had first thought.²⁴⁵

One further effect of the kind of writing Climacus uses is its tendency to undercut a certain decorum that a reader may be in the habit of imposing. Early on, for example, Climacus compares his use of the genre of a fairy tale to Socrates' penchant for drawing examples from everyday life:

Suppose there was a king who loved a maiden of lowly station in life—but the reader may already have lost patience when he hears that our analogy begins like a fairy tale and is not at all systematic. Well, presumably the erudite Polus [*sc.* Callicles] found it boring that Socrates continually talked about food and drink and physicians and all such silly things Polus never talked about (see *Gorgias*).²⁴⁶

While the fairy tale stresses the fantastic and Socrates' examples stress the mundane, in both cases they diverge in tone and apparent seriousness from what the interlocutor holds to be a quite serious matter and that, as a result, he may be in the habit of thinking calls for serious examples and a more dignified way of proceeding. It is common that one's first reaction to the use of such non-standard ways of writing can be anger, for one may suspect that one is not being taken seriously. But such devices can also help a person to break out of fixed habits of thinking and speaking, achieving in the process something like a fresh impression of what otherwise may have become stale. In the *Postscript* Climacus ties this aspect of his writing to his strategy of intentional forgetting, noting that this can lead to the appearance of a certain kind of ignorance:

My *Fragments* approached Christianity in a decisive way, without, however, mentioning its name or Christ's name. In an age of knowledge, in which all are Christians and know what Christianity is, it is only all too easy to use the holy names without meaning anything thereby, to rattle off the Christian truth without having the least *impression* of it. If anyone wishes to suppose that the reason the names were not mentioned was my ignorance, that I did not know that the founder of Christianity was named Christ and his teaching Christianity, he may very well suppose that. It is always good to be known for something; I on my part can ask for nothing better than to be the only one in the midst of Christianity who does not know that the founder of Christianity was Christ—to be *ignorant* is still always better than to be as knowledgeable about it as about a hundred other trivialities.²⁴⁷

With these brief remarks now in view about Climacus' incognito, his exchanges with the interlocutor and the method he uses to engage him, I want to conclude this chapter by saying a bit more about Climacus' diagnosis of what ails his interlocutor and, correspondingly, what he aims to achieve by engaging him in the way that he does.

4.4.4 Absentmindedness and Awareness

Just as Climacus makes use of the phrase "going further" to mark a category of people who, unlike Socrates, do not respect the midwife relation when it comes to those solitary activities we discussed above (see sections 4.2.1-2), so too does he appeal to this notion in his characterization of his interlocutor. One of the first places he introduces this notion with respect to the Christian outlook that he is hypothetically developing comes at the end of Chapter 1. Here Climacus notes that unlike the Socratic outlook, in which the truth is supposed to lie within a person, in the Christian case the only thing that a person can discover within herself is that she is "untruth" (that is, Christianity defines her as "outside the truth" through her own doing and thus conceives of her as a sinner).²⁴⁸ Any further progress that she makes will be dependent on her becoming a believer and, therefore, will be dependent on the god, not on her. But, Climacus notes further, it is possible that someone may not be entirely clear about this, and thereby come to have the opinion that he has "gone much further" than this merely on his own:

Whether or not [a person] is to go any further [than thinking he is in untruth], the moment must decide (although it already was active in making him perceive that he is untruth). If he does not understand this, then he is to be referred to Socrates, even though his opinion that he has gone much further will cause that wise man a great deal of trouble, as did those who became so exasperated with him when he took away some foolish notion from them...that they positively wanted to bite him (see *Theaetetus*, 151).²⁴⁹

Here, I want to suggest, we have in miniature the basic dynamic of *Fragments*. Climacus' interlocutor is someone who does not understand what he can and cannot achieve on his own with respect to his Christian faith. Tied to this is the opinion that he can achieve much more than is humanly possible, so much more in fact that he comes to believe that he has finished with his understanding of Christianity; and it is Climacus' Socratic task to disabuse him of this opinion.

Given that Climacus' interlocutor suffers from some of the things I've outlined, we might still wonder just what exactly Climacus hopes to achieve by writing *Fragments*. We've seen how some of his methods are meant to engage his interlocutor and, hopefully, to undercut his

conviction that he has understood Christianity and its attendant difficulties. In a nice passage at the beginning of the Interlude (the section between Chapters 4 and 5), Climacus addresses the reader directly, and offers a kind of diagnosis of what he takes to be a problem that is characteristic of modern speculative thought and from which he implies that the interlocutor himself is suffering:

If you find me rather prolix, repeating the same thing "about the same thing,"²⁵⁰ you must, please note, consider that it is for the sake of the illusion, and then you presumably will...account for [my prolixity] in a far different and more satisfying way than to presume that I let myself think that this matter definitely required consideration, yours as well, inasmuch as I suspected you of not fully understanding yourself in this regard, although I by no means doubt that you have fully understood and accepted the most recent philosophy, which, like the most recent period, seems to suffer from a strange absentmindedness [*besynderlig Distraction*], confusing the performance with the caption, for who was ever so marvelous or so marvelously great as are the most recent philosophy and the most recent period—in captions.²⁵¹

This passage actually means to suggest, I think, that Climacus *does* suspect his interlocutor of not fully understanding himself and so to be suffering from this "strange absentmindedness" or distracted frame of mind.²⁵² And while he never suggests that a human being could play the role of the god when it comes to helping a person to discover that she is a sinner, he does seem to think that one human being, in her activity as a midwife, can assist another person to overcome this condition of absentmindedness whereby the interlocutor remains unaware of or indifferent to Christianity. That is, Climacus seems to think that his maieutic activity does have the ability to help another person to overcome her condition of forgetfulness and regain an awareness of Christianity, though he is quick to point out that this regained *responsiveness* in no way guarantees that one will respond with the passion of faith:

Whether one is offended or whether one believes, the advantage [gained] is to become aware. In other words, awareness is by no means partial to faith, as if faith proceeded as a simple consequence of awareness. The advantage is that one enters into a state in which the decision manifests itself ever more clearly.²⁵³

It is only by overcoming this absentmindedness with respect to oneself that one can return to the true difficulties of understanding Christianity, a task that Climacus' interlocutor (and reader) thinks he has already completed. Thus while one achievement of *Fragments* may be to help remove the reader's illusion that she is already a Christian and so done with the difficulties

associated with this task, I think that in a more restricted sense what Climacus hopes above all to achieve with his reader is to lead her from a condition where "there is neither a suggestion of offense nor a place for faith" to one where these responses become possible again.²⁵⁴ Thus I think C. Stephen Evans and others are mistaken when they make claims like "Climacus takes it for granted that Christianity... will be regarded as absurd by many, perhaps most, people" or that Climacus is committed to the idea that "offense and faith... are the only possible responses to the paradox."²⁵⁵ For on Climacus' view, the precise problem with modern speculative philosophy is that it deprives one of the condition in which these different passionate responses are possible. By engaging in abstract philosophical reflection and forgetting herself, the speculative philosopher is "not on the way to the terror of the paradox." Or as Climacus puts it in the *Postscript*: "If the terror in the old days was that one could be offended [by Christianity], the terror these days is that there is no terror, that one, two, three, before looking around, one becomes a speculative thinker who speculates about faith."²⁵⁶

In the next chapter we will turn and consider a second character-role or incognito that Climacus assumes in his relationship to the reader. While he presents himself as someone who has forgotten Christianity in *Fragments*, in the *Postscript* he presents himself as someone who is historically aware of Christianity (so as approximating the second position described in section 4.4.1) and who experimentally raises the question, cast appropriately in the first person, "How do I, Johannes Climacus, become a Christian?"

Chapter 5: Climacus' Second Socratic Stance

(*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*)

In the previous two chapters we've already had occasion to draw repeatedly on Climacus' second book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, both in our discussion of his diagnosis of what ails his reader (and the age more generally) and in our consideration of the method of treatment that he employs in his first book, *Philosophical Fragments*. Yet it is to Climacus' philosophical performance in the *Postscript* itself that Kierkegaard points us when he provides us with what I was earlier calling a clue about where to look if we are seeking further illumination about the role of the Socratic within his authorship (see the end of section 2.6 in Chapter 2). This "performance," however, also takes place over the course of a 630 page book.¹ The *Postscript* is Kierkegaard's Mount Everest and many a scholarly life has been lost in trying to make the ascent; some stray from a sound path, while others don't bring the proper equipment or make sure that they are fit for the climb. We will not even attempt the ascent here; this chapter is best viewed as a preliminary survey of some potential ways to lose one's footing and a discussion of what type of fitness is required if one is to reach the summit. We will discuss the nature of Climacus' second experimental stance and what he hopes to achieve by means of this experiment. I will argue that one of Climacus' chief therapeutic aims is to remind his speculatively-inclined reader of a way of doing philosophy that does not lead to her present condition of forgetfulness. In the process an analogy will emerge between reading well and living well; in both cases what Climacus' reader requires above all is a greater attention to the proper employment of the first personal "I" together with a greater exercise of self-restraint. We will also examine Climacus' own existential standing in relation to what he experimentally develops and consider what light this sheds on the rather unusual way that the *Postscript* ends, with Climacus first calling his book "superfluous" and then proceeding to revoke everything he has written.²

5.1 Climacus Concludes His Authorship

The title of Climacus' second (and final) book is *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.³ Two questions naturally arise. Why has Climacus written a second book (a second instance of the “pamphlet” genre)? What is the significance of its being a concluding postscript to his first book?⁴ Let's start with the second question. When considering why the title has the word “concluding” in it, commentators typically and reasonably point to Kierkegaard's original plan to bring his authorship to an end with the publication of the *Postscript*.⁵ While this turned out not to be the case for Kierkegaard (just as the “First and Last Explanation” that he appended to the *Postscript* also turned out not to be his last word on his authorship), it is true that this is Climacus' last book. With this work something is concluded that began with his discovery of a task (making things difficult) and the making of a resolution (to get to the bottom of how speculative philosophy had apparently corrupted the old man's son), and that seems not to have been completed in his first book. Furthermore, that this is called a “postscript” to *Fragments* seems to suggest that the two works are intimately connected and might even be conceived of as a single book.⁶

We've already seen in Chapter 3 that one of the reasons that Climacus has for writing a second book is to explain to his reader how he became an author and to situate his writing in relation to Kierkegaard's larger authorship. This also provides him with an opportunity to develop his diagnosis of what he thinks ails Christendom. We saw in Chapter 4 that another reason Climacus has for writing the *Postscript* is to address more specifically how *Fragments* has been received and, as he thinks, misrepresented (notably in Beck's review), together with his own conception of the philosophical method that he employs in his first book. Thus while *Fragments* is principally therapeutic in nature (with Climacus remaining in character for most of the book—as someone whose ignorance includes having forgotten about the historical phenomenon of Christianity—in order to employ his art of taking away), the *Postscript* has diagnostic aspirations and also seeks to increase the reader's understanding of the (pseudonymous) author of *Fragments* and the nature of his philosophical undertaking.

At the same time, Climacus also makes clear that he conceives of the *Postscript* as a kind of “sequel” to *Fragments*, in which he arguably seeks to engage his reader in a new manner.⁷ He maintains in particular that the second, principal part of the *Postscript* (which focuses not on the

truth of Christianity but on “the individual’s relation to Christianity”) is “a renewed attempt in the same vein as the pamphlet,” but he also calls this “a new approach to the issue of *Fragments*.”⁸ This is to pick up a theme he raised at the end of *Fragments*. At the close of his first book, Climacus suggests that what he has written thus far is incomplete; in order to finish his pamphlet he may need to write a further section: “In the next section of this pamphlet, if I ever do write it, I intend to call the matter by its proper name and clothe the issue in its historical costume.”⁹ He does not, however, leave his reader in the dark about what he means by this claim, but instead gives her a preview of what a second section would address:

It is not difficult to perceive what the historical costume of the next section will be. As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that...has wanted to be the single individual’s point of departure for his eternal consciousness.¹⁰

Thus while in *Fragments* Climacus proceeded in a manner in which he refrained from even mentioning Christianity by name (until the very end of the book), he suggests that what the sequel to *Fragments* will do is to investigate these same matters without using this particular form of deception. And this is certainly one of the principal differences between *Fragments* and the *Postscript*. In his first book, excepting the very end, Climacus develops the Christian outlook without mentioning Christianity by name or identifying it as the (supposedly) unique historical phenomenon it represents itself to be, while in the *Postscript* he explicitly raises Christianity as a topic from the get-go; in Kierkegaard’s words, the *Postscript* serves as a “turning point” in his authorship and “deals with and poses” for the first time “the issue of [his] entire work as an author: becoming a Christian.”¹¹ A further reason, then, for writing a second book is simply that Climacus hasn’t completed his examination of the differences between the Socratic and the Christian outlooks and isn’t done reminding his reader of what he thinks she has forgotten. He has approached these matters using an incognito in which the historical phenomenon of Christianity was (at least temporarily) kept hidden from the reader, but he also seems to think that it may be worthwhile covering the same territory without keeping this hidden. Recall that the incognito assumed by Climacus in *Fragments* was originally labeled “1st Position” (instead of “Propositio”) and was contrasted with a second character role (labeled “Position II”).¹² The chief difference between the two positions was that the ignorance of the first position included an unawareness of Christianity *qua* historical phenomenon, whereas the second position does possess this historical awareness:

An ignorant person [*Den Uvidende*] who presumably knows *historically* what he is asking about but seeks the answer.¹³

Having already assumed the incognito of one who has forgotten about Christianity, it remains for Climacus to approach Christianity from the stance of one who “knows historically” what he is examining but who still represents himself to be ignorant in some fundamental sense about what it is to be a Christian; that is, he presents himself as someone who openly declares that he is not a Christian. This is precisely the Socratic stance that Kierkegaard draws attention to (and that he will later, in “My Task,” claim is the stance that he himself has adopted in relation to his contemporaries). In both *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard maintains that if one is to engage those who are under the illusion that they already are Christians (even as their lives are governed by “aesthetic or, at most, aesthetic-ethical categories”), then “it must be done indirectly, not by someone who loudly declares himself to be an extraordinary Christian, but by someone who, better informed, even declares himself not to be a Christian.”¹⁴ Kierkegaard singles out Climacus as his principal example of someone who adopts this stance: “The one who introduced the issue [of becoming a Christian] did not *directly* characterize himself as a Christian and the others as not being that; no, *just the reverse*—he denies being a Christian and grants this to the others. This Johannes Climacus does” (we will discuss Climacus’ second stance in more detail in section 5.2).¹⁵

On the face of it, it makes sense that Climacus might try a different tack in his second book. Whether or not his strategy of taking away some of his reader’s (rote) knowledge of Christianity was effective, the reader has now been made aware of this strategy through the explanation that appears at the end of *Fragments* (and she will gain an even deeper grasp of what exactly Climacus claims to have been doing in his first book and why when she reads his critique of Beck’s review). The reader is also now better acquainted with Climacus himself and knows that he is not someone who is especially interested in seeking new speculative philosophical discoveries; if he were to present himself again as such a person, it is doubtful that the reader would be taken in a second time by such a ruse. She has been alerted to (and perhaps has become interested in) the fact that Climacus’ interests lie elsewhere, in getting conceptually clear about the differences between the Socratic and Christian outlooks and in trying to do philosophy in a way that lives up to the Socratic ideal to which he seems to be devoted.¹⁶ If the reader’s progress in *Fragments* was anything like the progress made by the interlocutor, then she may now be a bit

less vulnerable to the temptations of speculative philosophy. But she still remains the type of person whose intellectual inclinations led her to seek out such an activity in the first place. Even if she has discovered that there may be more to being a Christian than she had imagined, she may also wonder if there is a way of attending to this task (and so to herself) that is compatible with the philosophical exercise of her intellect. Even if she becomes convinced that speculative philosophy can lead her to forget herself ethically and religiously, she still might wonder whether there is a way of doing philosophy that is compatible with keeping herself fully in view. Climacus arguably began reminding her of such a way of doing philosophy in *Fragments*, inviting her to move from the apathetic condition of the speculative philosopher to a condition in which her thinking becomes passionately tied to Christianity (whether this passion be one of offense or faith).¹⁷ I think one of his aims in the *Postscript* is to provide his reader with a more general account of this alternative conception of philosophy together with further examples of how this manner of doing philosophy can both satisfy her intellectual inclinations while also keeping her from forgetting herself.¹⁸

Finally, another reason Climacus may have for writing a second book is to test himself and his ability to carry out a Socratic endeavor on a larger scale and against the backdrop of his already having covered the same ground in his first book, while also perhaps providing his reader with a greater challenge in the process. Kierkegaard maintains, for example, that “the experimenter and maieutic practitioner ranks according to how long he can hold out and to the scale on which he is able to lay out the experiment.”¹⁹ While Climacus clearly conceives of the *Postscript* as a second experimental work, it is also clear that it has been executed on a much larger scale than *Fragments*. The ideal seems to be Socrates and the supposition that he may have lived his entire life in an experimental/maieutic mode.²⁰ While there is clearly a difference between living in such a manner and remaining in character over the course of a text, Climacus regularly invites a comparison between the existential development of a person and her artistic ability to reflect this in words.²¹ If one is to have the capacity to communicate about such things, then one must have “enough art to vary inexhaustibly, just as inwardness is inexhaustible, the doubly reflected form of the communication.”²² While not everyone who has achieved a certain existential inwardness will thereby have the artistic skills to do this, Climacus seems to think that having such an inner life is a necessary condition for being able to do so (which also seems to

imply that to discover such artistic competence in a work is to obtain grounds for making a corresponding judgment about the author's own existential competence).²³

With respect to the challenge of returning to address the same material that he addressed in *Fragments*, Climacus draws attention to a similar parallel between the contents of *Either/Or* and what is later attempted in *Stages on Life's Way*: "That *Stages* has a relation to *Either/Or* is clear enough and is definitely indicated by the use in the first two sections of familiar names from that work."²⁴ Climacus remarks that if the author of *Stages* had approached him, he would "have advised him on aesthetic grounds against calling attention to an earlier work by using familiar names....[I]t is always precarious to prompt a recollection. To avoid this is easy; to do it is to risk oneself and one's luck in a daring venture."²⁵ Since Climacus himself, however, will repeatedly call attention in the *Postscript* to "an earlier work" (namely *Fragments*), this suggests that there may be non-aesthetic grounds for doing so despite the aesthetic risks. Climacus' thinking appears to be governed here by an ideal that he claims "Socrates staked his honor and pride on," namely the ability "continually to say the same thing and about the same thing."²⁶ What others may find aesthetically boring, Climacus takes to be a mark of Socrates' existential depth. By way of explanation, he develops the following parallel:

If a pastor could keep on preaching all year on the same text, continually rejuvenating himself in new fertility of expression, he would in my opinion be matchless, but a sensate listener would find him boring.²⁷

That is, the aesthetically-inclined listener is bored due to what she takes to be a lack of variety, whereas the more spiritually developed listener seeks to deepen her understanding of one and the same thing. Climacus thinks that when it comes to writing, the task of saying "the same thing and about the same thing" will test both the author and the genuine reader. In trying to write about the same thing, the author will have tested whether she has the inwardness that makes such a continual "fertility of expression" possible:

Because of the ensuing comparison [with the previous work], an absolute requirement of richness of expression is made, since it is not difficult to repeat one's own words or to repeat a felicitously chosen phrase word for word. Consequently, to repeat the same also means to change under conditions made difficult by the precedent.²⁸

With respect to the reader, Climacus distinguishes between what he calls the “inquisitive reader” and the “attentive reader,” claiming that what will be of no interest to the former will create new challenges for the latter:

Whereas the inquisitive reader is put off by its being the same, since the inquisitive reader demands external change in names, scenery, clothes, hair, etc., the attentive reader is made more rigorous in his demands because there is nothing enticing at all, nothing diverting, no embellishments, no particulars pertaining to the externalities of the unknown characters and the climactic conditions of far-off territories etc.

In other words, ...it holds true for potboiler writers, and...for those who are captivated by them, that change is the supreme law; but with regard to truth as inwardness in existence...the opposite holds true, and the law is: the same, and yet changed, and yet the same....[S]oberness of spirit is recognizable by its knowing that change in the external is diversion, but change in the same is inwardness.²⁹

In Climacus' own case, then, we should be alert to the possibility that this is one of his authorial aims. Not only does Climacus repeatedly return in the *Postscript* to topics and themes that were originally raised in *Fragments*, but even the different parts of the *Postscript* are themselves arguably yet further attempts to say the same about the same, each time with a slight variation or change in form but always, as he says of Lessing's writings, “something that continually remain[s] the same while it continually change[s] form,...something that a gymnastic dialectician produces and alters and produces, the same and yet not the same.”³⁰

5.2 Climacus' Experiment in the *Postscript*

In my view commentators have not been adequately struck by the fact that the *Postscript* has an experimental form and that Climacus engages in a second experiment over the course of his second book.³¹ In the introduction to the *Postscript*, Climacus draws a distinction between two topics that a work on Christianity might investigate: (1) the truth of Christianity; (2) the individual's relation to Christianity.³² He calls the former an “objective issue” (suggesting that a disinterested, aesthetic manner of proceeding would be appropriate for trying to address it) and the latter a “subjective issue” (suggesting that an interested, ethical and/or religious manner of proceeding that focuses on the subject herself would be appropriate).³³ He claims that previously

in *Fragments* and now in the *Postscript* his chief concern has been and remains the subjective issue. As a result, Climacus maintains that what he seeks to address in his books does not directly bear on “the *indifferent* individual’s systematic eagerness to arrange the truths of Christianity in paragraphs” but instead is “about the concern of the *infinitely interested* individual with regard to his own relation to such a doctrine.”³⁴ Given, however, that Climacus’ reader is someone who at present may actually be “indifferent” to her own relation to Christianity (since she is under the illusion that she already is a Christian and that she has finished with such a task), Climacus again decides to approach this topic via an experiment:

Putting things as simply as possible (I will *experimentally* use myself): “I, Johannes Climacus, born and bred in this city and thirty years old, an ordinary human being like most folk, assume that a highest good, called an eternal happiness, awaits me just as it awaits a housemaid and a professor. I have heard that Christianity is one’s prerequisite for this good. I now ask how I may enter into relation to this doctrine [*Lære*].”

The objective issue, then, would be about the truth of Christianity. The subjective issue is about the individual’s relation to Christianity. Simply stated: How can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness that Christianity promises?³⁵

The first thing to notice about these passages is that we cannot conclude from them that Climacus genuinely does want to become a Christian. By experimentally raising this matter, Climacus has once again cast things in a hypothetical form.³⁶ At the same time, it’s also worth noticing that he has in the process assumed another character role, that of someone who *is* personally interested in clarifying his own standing to Christianity and determining what all is involved in becoming a Christian. Even if Climacus’ own convictions remain personally elusive throughout the book, he has assumed the incognito of someone who is seeking the answer to the question, “How do I become a Christian?”³⁷

While the hypothetical nature of Climacus’ experiment arguably limits the reader’s ability to arrive at a definite judgment about Climacus’ own personal commitments, there is still plenty of room for disagreement about what significance we should attach to Climacus’ endeavor itself.³⁸ We’ve already had occasion to consider in the previous chapter an approach to Climacus’ texts that invites us to be suspicious of his purported philosophical activity. When Climacus presents himself as someone who wants to investigate how to become a Christian and then proceeds to do this over the course of the *Postscript*, is he perhaps simply providing his

speculatively-inclined reader with more grist for her philosophical mill? Is Climacus' aim not to exhibit what a proper philosophical investigation of these matters would be (thereby exhibiting a manner of doing philosophy that is consistent with a person's keeping herself in view), but rather to get the reader to discover that even the sort of philosophical activity that he himself engages in must be abandoned? Stephen Mulhall puts it this way:

Philosophers must give up the impulse to think that philosophical knowledge is an essential preliminary to faith, even in the essentially self-abnegating form in which Climacus himself develops it...The true teaching of the *Postscript* is that one must stop doing philosophy altogether—not just restrict one's philosophizing to attacks on the impulse to philosophize about faith, but stop philosophizing. It means realizing that even the *Postscript*, with its unremitting attack on philosophical pretensions, still retains philosophical pretensions which must be abandoned or revoked.³⁹

This approach was first initiated in contemporary Kierkegaard scholarship by Henry Allison in a paper on the *Postscript* that was published in 1967.⁴⁰ Allison argues that far from constituting a “contribution to religious or existential philosophy,” the “doctrinal content of [the *Postscript*] must be regarded as an ironical jest, which essentially takes the form of a carefully constructed parody of the *Phenomenology of Mind*.”⁴¹ It is Allison's view, therefore, that “the real purpose of this jest is not to convince the reader of a philosophical or religious truth, but to *prevent* him from *theorizing*, even in an ‘existential’ sense about Christianity.”⁴² On this view, the chief philosophical point of the *Postscript* is not to make “a contribution, good, bad or indifferent, to a philosophy of existence,” but to serve as a “*reductio ad absurdum* of any such enterprise.” More recently, versions of this view have been defended by James Conant, Stephen Mulhall, and Michael Weston.⁴³

The principal thrust of this approach to Climacus' texts is to hold that Climacus tries to make his reader aware of her own tendency to theorize about and intellectualize the difficulties of being a Christian (rather than allowing these difficulties to make a personal, existential claim on her) by himself enacting this very tendency. If the reader is prone to approach ethical and religious matters in a *disinterested* manner (when the appropriate attitude is one of infinite personal interest), then one way for Climacus to help her to discover this about herself is to exhibit this very behavior. While he may *say* that these matters are “about the concern of the infinitely interested individual,” if he himself nevertheless proceeds in a disinterested manner

then his own activity will be but a further instance of what he wants to criticize. So, for example, Michael Weston argues that “the formulation of the ‘issue’ in [*Fragments*] and [*the Postscript*] is an evasive intellectualizing of a question which is existential, requiring a personal situation of crisis and decision.”⁴⁴ On his view, Climacus illicitly makes it appear “as if a theory of subjectivity, of the ‘personal,’ is needed for understanding the ‘issue’ of ‘How to become a Christian,’ ” when in fact the whole point of creating such an appearance is to help the reader to discover that “to ask ‘How do I become a Christian?’ is not to ask a question to which the appropriate response is the reflection we have been drawn into (in accordance with our own desires)” in the *Postscript*.⁴⁵ The reader moves from a condition of thinking that philosophical reflection can help her to become a Christian to a condition of greater self-awareness, where she realizes that philosophical reflection has no bearing whatsoever on the difficulties involved with leading a Christian life.

One thing that can make this approach appear attractive is that it turns Kierkegaard scholarship on its head, tweaking the nose of any scholar who has become too earnest and devoted to what she thinks she’s discovered in Climacus’ writings, while also making the understanding of these works to be a much more subtle, sophisticated exercise. If Allison et al. are right, then generations of people have simply and utterly misread these books. What they took to be serious was a joke and now the joke’s on them! This is certainly well within the limits of a healthy scholarship. If people become too dogmatic about how they approach and read Climacus’ two books (which themselves surely are far from being dogmatic in approach), then scholarship that seeks to pull the rug out from under the dogmatists should be welcomed. As a final judgment, however, about what’s going on in Climacus’ books, I think this approach is in danger of missing many of the philosophical “riches” that are to be found in *Fragments* and the *Postscript*.⁴⁶ While I welcome how this approach tries to get people to pay more attention to the unusual manner in which Climacus’ two books are written, I still think ultimately that it itself tends to foster a hermeneutic of suspicion with respect to Climacus’ philosophical activity that, once it gets going, is very difficult to stop. For, as Wayne Booth notes, “Once [overly ingenious readers] have learned to *suspect* a given speaker, they are tempted to suspect every statement he makes.”⁴⁷ This may have led James Conant, for example, to misrepresent the precise manner in which Climacus carries out his project in the *Postscript*. On Conant’s view, “the guiding question of the work” that Climacus sets out to investigate is “How does one become a

Christian?"⁴⁸ Because Climacus argues that ethical and religious questions can only be properly investigated by those who approach these questions in an infinitely interested manner, Conant thinks we should be suspicious of the fact that Climacus is pursuing this matter, since he is a self-described humorist who repeatedly denies that he is a religious individual (let alone a Christian) and so does not appear to be personally interested in the requisite way:⁴⁹

Johannes Climacus...will—in case we fail to notice it—insist upon his own detachment and disinterestedness....[He] tells us he is not a Christian. Indeed, he is not even interested in becoming a Christian. But he is interested in asking and answering the question: how does one become a Christian? He asks this question from the perspective of someone who is and intends to remain an 'outsider' to Christianity and he wishes to pursue the answer in a 'disinterested' fashion. His own interest in the matter, as he himself explains it, is of a purely objective and impersonal nature.⁵⁰

Conant thus accuses Climacus of falling into a kind of "performative contradiction" since he allegedly approaches in a disinterested manner a topic (how one becomes a Christian) that by its very nature appears to require that it be approached in a personally-interested manner.⁵¹ That is, on Conant's view Climacus illicitly employs an "aesthetic mode of treatment" in his attempts to shed light on "the categories of the ethical and the religious."⁵² But this picture of Climacus rests on a mischaracterization by Conant of the question actually being investigated in the *Postscript*. Climacus does not in fact set out to investigate the question "How does one become a Christian?," but instead seeks to answer the question, "How do *I*, Johannes Climacus, become a Christian?" In his writings on the *Postscript* Conant consistently substitutes the impersonal "one" for the first personal "I," but I take it that Climacus' use of the first person here is critical and indicates that he does not wish to pursue this question in a strictly disinterested fashion.⁵³ While it is true that he may be "an outsider" to Christianity and that he regularly denies that he is a Christian, his goal is not in my view to approach this topic in a manner that mirrors the disinterested approach of the speculative philosopher, but instead to remind her of how to approach this question in the proper way.⁵⁴

In a sense, Climacus' target is much less subtle than Allison et al. would have it. It's not a creeping, disinterested philosophical reflection that has even managed to contaminate Climacus' own philosophical practice, but much more straightforwardly the tendency of the age and

speculative philosophy in particular not to take being an individual human being seriously enough. Climacus calls this the “specific immorality” of the age:

What is an existing human being? Our age knows all too well how little it is, but therein lies the specific immorality of the age. Every age has its own; the immorality of our age is perhaps not lust and pleasure and sensuality, but rather a pantheistic, debauched contempt for individual human beings. In the midst of all the jubilation over our age and the nineteenth century there sounds a secret contempt for being a human being....[P]eople want to delude themselves world-historically in the totality; no one wants to be an individual existing human being.⁵⁵

That this is Climacus' target is made clear by his expectation that (at least initially) his reader may be resistant to such an approach and dismissive of the idea that she should attach any special importance to attending to herself. Immediately following the first time that Climacus raises his topic of investigation in the *Postscript*, having (experimentally) put things properly in the first person, he imagines how a speculative philosopher might reply:

“What exceptional effrontery,” I hear a thinker say, “what horrendous vanity in this world-historically concerned, theocentric, speculatively significant nineteenth century to dare to attach such importance to one's own little self.”⁵⁶

In response to this dismissive rejection of his experiment, Climacus somewhat waggishly retorts: “I shudder; if I had not hardened myself against various terrors, I would probably stick my tail between my legs.”⁵⁷ Yet he makes clear in the final appendix to the *Postscript* that he considers the posing and exploring of this question in the first person to be the “content of the book”:

In the isolation of the experiment, the whole book is about myself, simply and solely about myself. “I, Johannes Climacus, now thirty years old, born in Copenhagen, a plain, ordinary human being like most people, have heard it said that there is a highest good in store that is called an eternal happiness, and that Christianity conditions this upon a person's relation to it. I now ask: How do I become a Christian?”...I ask solely for my own sake. Indeed, that is certainly what I am doing or, rather, I have asked this question [*Jeg har spurgt derom*], for that indeed is the content of the book.⁵⁸

Part of the Socratic nature of Climacus' assumed character-role in the *Postscript* lies in the fact that he raises this question (“How do I become a Christian?”) in a context in which “all the others [imagine that they] do have faith *already* as something given, as a trifle they do not consider very valuable.”⁵⁹ In a setting where everyone already thinks she is a Christian, there is

plenty of opportunity for speculating about it while no one seems to spend any time investigating the matter in a way that bears on the individual's own existential relation to Christianity:

While everyone is busy with learnedly defining and speculatively understanding Christianity, one never sees the question "What is Christianity?" presented in such a way that one discovers that the person asking about it is asking in terms of existing and in the interest of existing. And why does no one do that? Ah, naturally because we are all Christians as a matter of course....The learned Christians argue about what Christianity actually is, but it never occurs to them to think otherwise than that they themselves are Christians, as if it were possible to know for sure that one was something without knowing definitely what it is.⁶⁰

Climacus acknowledges that if everyone already assumes that she is a Christian, then his raising of the question—How do I become what everyone already assumes she is—will acquire the appearance of "a kind of lunacy."⁶¹ At the same time, he maintains that by posing things in the first person, though "the issue pertains to [him] alone...if properly presented, it will pertain to everyone in the same way."⁶²

It is Climacus' goal, then, to help remind his reader of the self she's forgotten (or perhaps never properly encountered) and in doing so he plays a part in helping to reacquaint the age with what it is to be a genuine ethical or religious individual.⁶³ By asking and investigating the question in the first person, he will provide his reader with something she may not be in the habit of encountering: "In our day,...one seldom or never *hears* a person speak as if he were *conscious* of his being an individual existing human being."⁶⁴ It is critical, therefore, that we do not lose sight of the significance that Climacus attaches to engaging in a type of philosophical reflection that properly employs the first personal "I," and that we also keep in mind his view that the modern Hegelian-style of doing philosophy tends to undercut this practice and to cultivate habits of self-forgetfulness.⁶⁵ It's also worth keeping in mind that the two philosophers who are most celebrated in the *Postscript*, Socrates and Gotthold Lessing (who Climacus notes "reminds us vividly of the [ancient] Greeks") are both singled out for their ability to teasingly employ the first person, enabling them to remain alone in the solitary activities that Climacus associates with ethical and religious development, while also maieutically throwing their interlocutors back on their own individual selves.⁶⁶

5.3 Existence-Issues, Subjective Thinking, and the Simple Wise Person

By the time she has worked her way through *Fragments*, Climacus' reader may find that her awareness of the difficulties of Christianity has increased. While she may initially have thought that she already was a Christian and that this was not an especially difficult thing to be, she may now be less prone to neglect herself and more aware of the need to attend to such a task. At the same time, she still remains someone with certain intellectual inclinations and unless she is presented with an alternative way of giving expression to this part of her nature, she may continue to be drawn to speculative philosophy. That is, while the reader that Climacus addresses in *Fragments* and the *Postscript* may exhibit the forgetfulness that he thinks is characteristic more generally of the age, she requires a treatment that is especially tailored to her intellectual/philosophical nature.⁶⁷ Is there a way for her both to keep herself in view, ethically and religiously speaking, and to be a thinker? I think Climacus' answer to this question is yes.⁶⁸ While part of what he is doing in the *Postscript* is simply reminding his reader of some of the difficulties involved in becoming and being a Christian, he also addresses the topic of what it is to be someone who *thinks* about these matters in a manner that does not lead to the condition of forgetfulness that supposedly results from doing speculative philosophy. If speculative philosophy in his view leads to "absentmindedness," so that the individual "forgets that he is existing," Climacus holds out to his reader the idea of a "simpler philosophy, which is delivered by an existing individual for existing individuals"; that is, a way of doing philosophy that avoids this condition of self-forgetfulness and keeps the individual *qua* individual in view.⁶⁹ Since he knows that his reader may admire the speculative philosopher (and possibly aspire to be one herself), Climacus continues to criticize speculative philosophical practice and to lampoon its practitioners. But he doesn't stop with these negative attacks; he also sets before his reader an alternative philosophical ideal, inviting her to aspire instead to become what he calls either a "subjective thinker" or a "simple wise person" (the latter being a term that he and Kierkegaard both use to describe Socrates).⁷⁰

Since the term "subjective thinker" might sound self-contradictory, it may be worth briefly discussing what Climacus here means by "subjective." While he joins Kierkegaard in distinguishing between aesthetic categories and ethical and religious categories, he also introduces another pair of terms to distinguish what the speculative philosopher excels at from

what she neglects. Climacus typically calls the type of thinking involved with the exercise of aesthetic capacities “objective” and, perhaps somewhat less helpfully (at least in our day), calls the type of thinking involved with the exercise of ethical and religious capacities “subjective.”⁷¹ It’s important to keep in mind, however, that this contrast between objective and subjective thinking or reflection is not meant to distinguish between a normatively appropriate manner of thinking and a personally arbitrary or subjectivistic manner of thinking, but to distinguish between thought that aims at objects and thought that is principally concerned with subjects (ethically and religiously speaking):

To objective reflection, truth becomes something objective, an object, and the point is to disregard the subject. To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.⁷²

Climacus thus draws a distinction between the sense in which “the subject’s task is to strip away more and more of his subjectivity and become more and more objective” (where the subjectivity in question would be closer to the epistemologically problematic sense that we usually attach to the word) and a different ethical and religious task, in which “to become subjective is a very praiseworthy task, a *quantum satis* [sufficient amount] for a human life.”⁷³ In the latter case, the operative distinction is between “being a so-called subject of sorts” (where most people start) and “being a [genuine] subject or becoming one and being what one is by having become that.”⁷⁴

If on Climacus’ view it is the task of every human being to become a subject, the subjective thinker is someone whose philosophical activities are supposedly compatible with this undertaking. Some of Climacus’ descriptions of the subjective thinker line up nicely with our earlier discussions of the philosophical midwife.⁷⁵ Climacus maintains that the subjective thinker is someone who through his manner of communication not only “has set himself free” but who also “set[s] the other free.”⁷⁶ He claims that for the subjective thinker “communication is a work of art” that recognizes that “subjective individuals must be held devoutly apart from one another.”⁷⁷ Both his thinking itself and the form that his communication takes are characterized by what Climacus calls “double-reflection.”⁷⁸ By this he means that above and beyond the reflection exhibited by objective thinking (which is “indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence”), the subjective thinker “has another kind of reflection, specifically, that of inwardness, of possession, whereby [what is thought] belongs to the subject and to no one else.”⁷⁹ With respect to thinking, the subjective thinker “thinks the universal, but, as existing in

this thinking, as acquiring this in his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated.”⁸⁰ With respect to communication, Climacus again draws a distinction between two moments of reflection:

When a thought has gained its proper expression in the word, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator's own relation to the idea.⁸¹

Since subjective reflection is supposed to leave the individual “subjectively isolated,” this second moment of reflection is best conceived of, according to Kierkegaard, as a moment “in which [what is communicated] is recaptured” by the communicator.⁸² The recipient will only make this her own thought if she becomes self-active and appropriates what was given expression in the first reflection. One other feature worth noting about the subjective thinker is Climacus' claim that he “has just as much of the comic as he essentially has of pathos”:

According to the way people exist ordinarily, pathos and the comic are apportioned in such a way that one has the one, another the other, one a little more of the one, another a little less. But for the person existing in double-reflection, the proportion is this: Just as much of pathos, just as much of the comic. The proportion provides an interdependent safeguard. The pathos that is not safeguarded by the comic is an illusion; the comic that is not safeguarded by pathos is immaturity.⁸³

Since “his communication must in form essentially conform to his own existence,” we should therefore also expect the subjective thinker to be someone who has a tendency to combine earnestness with jest in the way that he writes.⁸⁴

The figure of the subjective thinker is thus meant to provide the reader with an alternative to the reigning ideal of the speculative philosopher. Instead of becoming unduly fascinated with Hegelian-style world-history (to the neglect of the self), the subjective thinker is represented by Climacus as someone who “is not a scientist-scholar [*Videnskabsmand*]; he is an artist. To exist is an art.”⁸⁵ Returning to the topic of attending to the self, which he originally raised via his own experimental stance (see section 5.2), Climacus maintains that the subjective thinker keeps himself *qua* ethical and religious subject fully in view:

The subjective thinker's task is to *understand himself in existence*....In all his thinking, then, he has to include the thought that he himself is an existing person. But then in turn he also will always have enough to think about. One is soon finished with

humanity in general and also with world history....One is soon finished with faith viewed abstractly, but the subjective thinker, who as he thinks is also present to himself in existence, will find it inexhaustible when his faith is to be declined in the manifold *casibus* [cases] of life. It is not waggery either, because existence is the most difficult for a thinker when he must remain in it.

The subjective thinker's task is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses in existence the essentially human.⁸⁶

As part of his aim of leading the reader back from the speculative towards the Christian, Climacus claims that what he's here calling the subjective thinker's task ("to understand oneself in existence") was also "the Greek principle."⁸⁷ At the same time, he acknowledges how oddly someone might come across if, in the present day, he were to try to live as a Greek philosopher:

I am well aware that if anyone nowadays were to live as a Greek philosopher, that is, would existentially express what he would have to call his life-view, be existentially absorbed in it, he would be regarded as lunatic. Be that as it may. But to be ingenious and more ingenious and extremely ingenious, and so ingenious that it never occurs to the most honored [speculative] philosopher, who is nevertheless speculating on existence-issues (for example, Christianity), to whom in all the world this could pertain, least of all that it pertains to himself—this I find to be ludicrous.⁸⁸

Furthermore, Climacus maintains that "to understand oneself in existence is also the Christian principle," though he adds that, on his view, the task is even more difficult than for the Greek philosopher since "this self [that is, the Christian self] has received much richer and much more profound determinations that are even more difficult to understand together with existing."⁸⁹ The main difference, then, between the speculative philosopher and the subjective thinker (whether Greek philosopher or Christian thinker) is that while the former engages in a form of thinking that remains unaware that what is being (or attempted to be) thought "pertains to himself," the latter "as he thinks is also present to himself in existence" and "include[s] the thought that he himself is an existing person."

While the main issue that Climacus addresses in the *Postscript* is how to become a Christian, he treats this as but a species of a larger genus of "existence-issues."⁹⁰ His strategy seems to be one of trying to impress upon his reader that if she cultivates the subjective thinker's habit of always including in her thinking the thought *that* she is an existing person, then what can

otherwise appear to be the simplest of issues will turn out to be more than adequate for satisfying her intellectual inclinations:

One forgets that existing makes the understanding of the simplest truth exceedingly difficult and strenuous.

If the individual comprehends that to become subjective is his highest task, then, in carrying out that task, issues should become manifest to him that in turn could suffice for the subjective thinker fully as well as the objective issues that the objective thinker has...suffice for him.⁹¹

Climacus maintains that the only reason these “simple” issues don’t seem to grip the speculative philosopher is because she does not try to think about them while also keeping herself in view. What can seem to be a relatively straightforward matter, such as, for example, “what it means to die” or “what it means to be immortal,” takes on an entirely different character once these questions are tied to the individual herself.⁹² Then such matters go from being something that can be speculatively thought about “in general” (and perhaps finished with rather quickly) to something that pertains to the individual herself *qua* individual, the thinking of which is an existential “act” on the part of the individual and something that will take her an entire lifetime to think through.⁹³

In his own case, Climacus claims that what may be “to blame for [his regularly] catching sight of tasks that are sufficient for a whole human life, whereas others may be able to be done with them before this sentence is finished,” is that he is “a corrupt and corruptible man”:

It is all too true. Whereas all the good people are promptly all set to attend to the future of world history, I am obliged many a time to sit at home and mourn over myself. Although my father is dead and I no longer attend school, although I have not been turned over to the public authorities for correction, I have nevertheless seen the necessity of attending a little to myself...The only one who consoles me is Socrates. He is supposed to have discovered within himself, so it is said, a disposition to all evil; it may even have been this discovery that prompted him to give up the study of astronomy, which the times now demand.⁹⁴

Here Climacus’ need to attend to himself recalls his experimental stance in the *Postscript* and his prediction that the speculative thinker would find such an activity beneath her and lacking in importance.⁹⁵ One of Climacus’ goals is to convince his reader that the task of attending to herself is actually of greater significance (and difficulty) than she imagines. Given her intellectual inclinations, it is his aim to convince her both that such a task by its very nature

should last a lifetime and that in the process the existence-issues that surround becoming a subject are something that most certainly can satisfy her intellectually speaking—without, however, leading to the condition of self-forgetfulness that results from engaging in speculative philosophy.

While Climacus allows that there is a difference between the subjective thinker or simple wise person and an ordinary person (who he calls “the simple person”), this difference is not one that expresses itself as a difference in what is known, such that by doing philosophy one becomes more knowledgeable about these existence-issues than the ordinary person. Since these issues are of an ethical or religious nature, they will be inherently practical and action-guiding, consisting of “not only a knowing” but “also a doing that is related to a knowing, and a doing of such a nature that the repetition of it can at times and in more ways than one become more difficult than the first doing.”⁹⁶ As with Socrates, the main difference lies not in what is known but in an awareness of what one does or does not know. For the simple existence-issues that Climacus discusses, the difference is not a matter of knowing something that the simple person does not know, but rather the reflective manner with which the simple wise person engages what is the very same subject matter as that which concerns the simple person. For this reason, according to Climacus, there remains an underlying “equality” between the simple wise person and the simple person that simply is not recognized by the speculative philosopher:

The difference between the simple person's knowledge and the simple wise person's knowledge of the simple...is a meaningless trifle...the [simple] wise person knows that he knows or knows that he does not know what the simple person knows—speculative thought does not respect this formula at all. Nor does it respect the equality implicit in the difference between the [simple] wise person and the simple person—that they know the same thing.⁹⁷

With respect, for example, to the paradox of Christianity, “the speculator and the simple person in no way know the same thing when the simple person believes the paradox and the speculator [purportedly] knows that it is annulled.” The simple wise person, on the other hand, “also knows that it must be a paradox, the paradox he himself believes” (or, if he's not a believer, the paradox he passionately rejects). The only difference between him and the simple person is that, by “immers[ing] himself in comprehending the paradox as paradox,” he comes to know “that he knows this about the paradox.”⁹⁸ But he is forever arriving in his philosophical reflections at the very thing that also concerns the simple person (though it concerns the latter in a less reflective

way). The main difference between them, according to Climacus, is that “the simple...sense the pressure of life in another way” and feel “no great need for any other kind of understanding,” whereas those who do possess this intellectual need are therefore “not altogether simple, inasmuch as [they] feel a need to understand”; at the same time, however, they differ from the speculative philosopher since they “still are so limited that [they] feel particularly the need to understand the simple.”⁹⁹ Climacus characterizes himself as such a person, saying that “this is the way [he has] tried to understand [himself],” while also acknowledging that the end result of such subjective reflection is “that foolish little difference...that the simple person knows it, and the [simple] wise person knows that he knows it or knows that he does not know it.”¹⁰⁰

Climacus thus holds out to his reader an alternative to becoming a speculative philosopher. As he examines a number of different existence-issues and tries to motivate the alternative conception of philosophy that he claims is exhibited by the subjective thinker/simple wise person, he also specifies further just what he thinks the speculative philosopher lacks (and so, by implication, what he thinks his reader especially needs to cultivate). Returning to the image of the speculative philosopher as one who too readily and too quickly imagines that she has finished with the task of being a Christian (whereas Climacus, recall, is a loafer who has plenty of time), he maintains that in learning to think subjectively (where one properly employs the first person) what is needed above all is *self-restraint*. Climacus claims that “since the temptation is to finish too quickly,” the individual’s “task is to exercise restraint” over herself.¹⁰¹ By way of illustration, he compares the hastiness of the speculative philosopher to someone who does not make proper use of his time:

Generally, speed is lauded and in some instances is regarded as neutral, but in this instance it is even reprehensible. When in a written examination young people are given four hours to write the paper, it makes no difference whether the individual finishes ahead of time or uses the whole time. Here, then, the task is one thing and time something else. But when time itself is the task, it is a defect to finish ahead of time. Suppose a person is given the task of entertaining himself for one day and by noon is already finished with the entertainment—then his speed would indeed be of no merit. So it is also when life is the task. To be finished with life before life is finished with one is not to finish the task at all.¹⁰²

Climacus notes that in his own case while he would describe himself as “one of those who have power,” he admits that his power “is not that of a ruler or a conqueror” but is limited to an ability

“to exercise restraint.”¹⁰³ Moreover, he also admits that the scope of this power is “not extensive” since he has “power only over [himself]” and “not even that if [he does] not exercise restraint [over himself] every moment.”¹⁰⁴ In this way Climacus' loafing behavior takes on a new significance. If the speculative philosopher is one who has no patience for attending to herself and imagines that she has finished this lifelong task “by noon,” then Climacus' ability to slow things down, to rethink topics and approach them from new angles (always saying the same about the same) and basically to “keep on as long as need be” is, above all, a mark of his power of self-restraint.¹⁰⁵ This is something that the reader can learn to observe in Climacus' own behavior while also learning to detect the lack of self-restraint that is exhibited in some of the examples he sketches for her of how the speculative philosopher falls into self-forgetfulness. But if the reader is truly to acquire the ability to observe the presence or absence of self-restraint in others she must learn to restrain herself. Climacus notes, for example, that if one wants to determine whether a person is lying when he claims that he personally has thought about death with respect to himself, one need only “let him talk”:

Just pay attention to the reduplicated presence of the stated thought in every word, in every parenthetical clause, in the digression, in the unguarded moment of simile and comparison, if one wants to take the trouble of checking whether a person is lying—provided that one [also] scrupulously keeps watch over oneself. For the ability to keep watch in this way [over others] is gained by restraining oneself; then one gains it purely gratis and ordinarily does not care to make particular use of it.¹⁰⁶

Here reading well and living well are both tied to cultivating the power of self-restraint. By taking his time and exhibiting his ability to restrain himself (to “keep on as long as need be”), Climacus does not indulge the speculative philosopher's desire to finish quickly.¹⁰⁷ Repeatedly, just when the reader may start to imagine that Climacus has finished with his rather strange investigation of how to become a Christian (something the reader already imagines herself to be), thus allowing her perhaps to get back to speculating, Climacus introduces something further that needs to be thought through, thereby providing the reader with yet another opportunity to engage in a form of philosophical reflection that requires her to employ the first personal “I” and so keep herself in view. As the reader learns to attend to herself and to restrain these impulses to “finish too quickly,” she will become a better reader of Climacus' two books and come to appreciate “how the simplest issue is changed by restraint into the most difficult.”¹⁰⁸ She will

thereby also gain a greater capacity for doing philosophy in a manner that doesn't lead to self-forgetfulness, becoming ever more ready and willing to join the likes of Climacus and Socrates in philosophically attending to herself.

5.4 Humor, Revocation, and Climacus' "Understanding with the Reader"

One of the more bizarre features of Climacus' second book is the gesture of revocation with which he brings both it and his authorship as a whole to a close.¹⁰⁹ What does it mean for an author to take back what he has written? And what is the philosophical significance of such an act? In recent Kierkegaard literature, James Conant's writings have helped to impress upon scholars the necessity of trying to answer these questions.¹¹⁰ In his own case, Conant argues that there exists a parallel between how the *Postscript* ends and how Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* concludes:

I should say briefly where I see the most interesting (as well as the most neglected) parallel between [the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus*]: namely, in their respective closing moments. Each culminates in a gesture of *revocation*. I am inclined to think that one will not be in a position to understand either of these books until one has a satisfying account of the spirit in which, in each case, this revocation is intended.¹¹¹

Conant himself seems to conceive of revocation as a way for the author to indicate to the reader that what has been developed over the course of his book is not what it may first appear to be. In the case of the *Postscript* in particular, Conant argues that "the dialectical ladder of the *Postscript* culminates in the declaration that the doctrine of the work is a pseudo-doctrine—one which the author himself revokes."¹¹² The reader may have thought that what was being developed had legitimate philosophical content, but the author's real aim on Conant's view is rather "to make (apparent) assertions and then revoke them in the end, to offer something that has the appearance of doctrine and then undermine it from within."¹¹³ With respect to the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus*, Conant thinks that "both works culminate in patent nonsense and hence both are—as each declares at its conclusion—written in order to be revoked."¹¹⁴ Thus by Conant's lights revocation follows from the author's having written a particular kind of work of philosophy. To revoke a work amounts to a moment in the text in which the author speaks more straightforwardly to the reader. If the author earlier has sought to enact some of the confusions to

which he thinks his reader may be prone, he now steps forward and makes clear to her that this is what he has been doing.¹¹⁵ In doing so, he also indicates thereby that what has been developed is the sort of thing that *ought* to be revoked, since to fail to revoke it would be to continue to proceed as if what was developed had genuine philosophical content—and that would be bound to have no therapeutic value whatsoever, since this would leave the reader in a condition in which she would still be held captive by the illusions that the book had originally sought to help her to dispel.

While I don't agree with Conant's account, I do think that he has helpfully drawn attention to a matter that any interpretation of what Climacus is doing needs to address.¹¹⁶ In my view, the most straightforward way to understand the significance of Climacus' revocation is to keep in mind that he is engaged in a hypothetical experiment over the bulk of the *Postscript*. If he has proceeded under the assumed character of one who desires to answer the question "How do I become a Christian?," it still doesn't follow that he himself wants to become a Christian. He makes clear that it is only "in the isolation of the experiment" that he has raised this question and that his doing so "is indeed the content of the book."¹¹⁷ While what he has experimentally developed in the first person may serve the Socratic purpose of helping his reader to remember what she has forgotten, for Climacus then to revoke what he has developed is simply to step out of character and deny that this is his own existential position; it is to make explicit for the reader what was implicit in his having given things an experimental form in the first place.¹¹⁸ In the final appendix to the *Postscript*, which follows the book's formal conclusion, Climacus reiterates that with respect to himself he is and remains a humorist:

The undersigned, Johannes Climacus, who has written this book, does not make out that he is a Christian; for he is, to be sure, completely preoccupied with how difficult it must be to become one; but even less is he one who, after having been a Christian, ceases to be that by going further. He is a humorist; satisfied with his circumstances at the moment, hoping that something better will befall his lot, he feels especially happy, if worst comes to worst, to be born in this speculative, theocentric century. Yes, our age is an age for speculative thinkers and great men with matchless discoveries, and yet I think that none of those honorable gentlemen can be as well off as a private humorist is in secret, whether, isolated, he beats his breast or laughs quite heartily.¹¹⁹

Note that in claiming to be a humorist, Climacus not only denies that he is a Christian but also claims that "even less" is he the type of person who may have thought that she was a Christian

but who then, presumably finding this not to be all that challenging or difficult, sets out—by “going further”—in search of something else with which to occupy her time. This is clearly a portrait of the reader that Climacus has Socratically sought to engage. But why doesn't announcing that he is a humorist suffice? Why does Climacus need to go so far as to revoke all that he has written? A number of commentators have argued that it precisely because Climacus is a humorist that he revokes what he has written. As David Cain puts it, “Revocation characterizes the humorist; Climacus is a humorist; therefore his concluding revocation should come as no surprise.”¹²⁰ Thus if we want to get clearer about the significance of Climacus' revocation, it may be worth considering in further detail just what it is to be a humorist.

While there are a number of early reflections on humor in Kierkegaard's journals and papers, together with scattered remarks in some of the earlier pseudonymous works, our principal sources for thinking about humor are Climacus' own reflections plus the reflections of the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus, who Climacus maintains is “essentially a humorist.”¹²¹ The first thing worth noting is that Climacus conceives of humor as a life-view that can inform and structure a person's life in the way that the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious and the Christianly-religious life-views all can.¹²² So a person can be (and become) a humorist. It's also worth noting that existentially speaking, the humorist ranks quite highly. According to Climacus, the humorist occupies the “confinium” between the ethical and religious spheres:

There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. To these correspond two *confinia* [border territories]: irony is the *confinium* between the aesthetic and the ethical; humor is the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious.¹²³

While he does not discuss in any detail the humorist's relation to the ethical, Climacus does say that the humorist “honors the moral” and seems to rank the humorist higher than the ethical person but lower than the religious person in the hierarchy of degrees of existential competence.¹²⁴ Thus while the aesthete, the ironist, and the ethical person rank lower than the humorist, the religious person and the Christianly religious person rank higher. Climacus therefore conceives of the standpoint of the humorist as a highly developed existential stage:

Humor is the last stage in existence-inwardness before faith. Therefore, in my judgment, it had to be advanced so that no stage behind it would be left unnoticed, which later could give rise to confusion.

That faith and the Christian-religious have humor preceding them...shows what an enormous existence-range is possible outside Christianity, and on the other hand what life-development is the condition for properly embracing Christianity.¹²⁵

To complicate matters, however, Climacus also claims that humor can serve as an “incognito” for a religious person, allowing him “to place a veil between people and himself in order to guard and protect the inwardness of his suffering and his relationship to God.”¹²⁶ In this case, “the religious person is not a humorist” (that is, “in his innermost being, the religious person is anything but a humorist”), “but in his outer appearance he is a humorist.”¹²⁷ This means, according to Climacus, that a competent “observer” (*en Iagttager*) who sought out a religious person would “follow the principle that everyone in whom he discovered the humorous would be made the object of his attention.”¹²⁸

Recall that one of the ways that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms distinguish between lives that are governed by a religious life-view and those that are governed by an ethical life-view is that insofar as a person's life has a religious character, then it will appear to her that she “is not capable of fulfilling” the “infinite requirement” of the ethical and so stands in need of “divine assistance.”¹²⁹ The humorist, by occupying the confinium between the ethical and the religious, becomes the first example of someone who has become conscious of “this powerlessness” of the individual and the pain and sadness that are associated with a person's feeling that this condition is not accidental but due to the individual herself.¹³⁰ At the same time, in addition to humor's having a “tragic side,” it also exhibits a deep familiarity with the comical.¹³¹ Climacus maintains about himself, for example, that “if there is anything [he has] studied thoroughly, from top to bottom, it is the comic.”¹³² On his view, “by essentially existing *qua* human being, one also gains a responsiveness to the comic” and “the more competently a person exists, the more he will discover the comic.”¹³³ A familiarity with the comic allows one to detect what might be called life-contradictions, especially those situations where a person *says* one thing and *does* something else (frequently the opposite): “The comic is present in every stage of life...because where there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comic is present.”¹³⁴ Since Climacus' principal topics of investigation are the ethical and the religious (and the specifically Christian), he frequently provides his reader with examples where comic contradictions arise with respect to these life-views, both concerning how an individual

may have organized her life and how she may attempt to communicate with others about this life-view.

While we should thus expect the humorist, given his posited degree of existential competence, to be someone who is extremely well-versed in the comic, it is “the religious person,” according to Climacus, “who has discovered the comic on the greatest scale, and yet he does not consider the comic as the highest, because the religious is the purest pathos.”¹³⁵ This marks a fundamental difference in outlook between the humorist and the religious person. Whereas humor consists, on Climacus' view, of an “equilibrium between the comic and the tragic,” religiousness ultimately assigns priority to the tragic.¹³⁶ For example, with respect to religious suffering, Climacus maintains that this is “tragically assimilated with pathos into the religious person's consciousness, and thereby the comic is excluded.”¹³⁷ The pseudonym Frater Taciturnus puts it this way: “The religious....presupposes the unity of the tragic and the comic in passion, and with a new passion or with the same one it chooses the tragic....”¹³⁸ Taciturnus describes his own position as a humorist, on the other hand, as follows: “I do not go beyond the unity of the comic and the tragic in spiritual equilibrium.”¹³⁹ While he admits that “this equilibrium is an *offense* against the holy passion of the religious,” he also maintains that this condition is nevertheless a significant existential achievement since one must possess a high degree of “mental fortitude [*Assndsstyrke*] to see the comic and the tragic simultaneously in the same thing.”¹⁴⁰ Taciturnus ties this existential outlook to Socrates and claims that while this condition of equilibrium is “not the infinite religious concern about oneself,” it is “the infinite concern about oneself *in the Greek sense*.”¹⁴¹ Thus the humorist arguably stands as the most existentially developed of Kierkegaard's non-Christian pseudonyms, someone who falls just short of religiousness and whose outlook and existential development is perfectly in keeping with Kierkegaard's claim that his pseudonymous works up through the *Postscript* were written “in the Greek mode.”¹⁴²

As a humorist, then, Climacus occupies a peculiar and yet very precise existential position within Kierkegaard's universe of discourse. The humorist is someone who has a special affinity for the religious life even though he is not himself a religious person. Because he lives as it were on the border of the religious (without actually occupying religious ground itself), the humorist, while not a religiously committed individual, nevertheless acquires a certain familiarity with religious concepts that someone like the aesthete, for example, entirely lacks.¹⁴³

That is, even though he does not become a religious person the humorist acquires a certain conceptual competence with respect to religious matters that enables him to discern cases where people's lives do not square with their avowed religious commitments: "The humorist continually (...at every time of day, wherever he is and whatever he thinks or undertakes) joins the conception of God together with something else and brings out the contradiction."¹⁴⁴ Following Wittgenstein, the humorist might say, "I am not a religious [person] but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."¹⁴⁵

As a humorist, Climacus is thus very well-positioned to be a kind of guide who explores ethical and religious topics.¹⁴⁶ If the employment of concepts in these two spheres is bound up with the ability to attend to oneself and to use the first personal "I," then Climacus' occupying the border between these two spheres suggests that he too should possess a certain competence in this respect and so be someone who is in a position to carry out his different experiments. But this is not to say that this competence perfectly coincides with that of the truly religious individual. For while the humorist and the religious individual are both set apart from the likes of the aesthete (who, according to Climacus, is hopeless when it comes to religious matters), there is still an important respect in which the humorist falls short of the religious individual.¹⁴⁷ While they both have the capacity to make correct judgments about the extent to which a person's life accords with his avowed religious commitments, the humorist refuses to allow his religious conception of things to change how he personally lives. In contrast to the religious person who "in his innermost being relates himself to God," the humorist "does not relate himself to God in religious passion."¹⁴⁸ That is, while the humorist and the religious person both in a sense have a correct conception of, for example, the religious significance of suffering, where they differ, according to Climacus, is that the humorist refuses to apply his understanding of suffering to his own life and instead "makes the deceptive turn and *revokes* the suffering in the form of jest."¹⁴⁹ But practical concepts of this sort are also meant to issue in actions as well as correct judgments. While the humorist is able to make correct judgments about the religious behavior of others (thereby exhibiting a certain conceptual competence), when it comes to his own actions and the character of his inner life the humorist seems to pull back, to revoke what he's articulated instead of allowing it to make a personal claim on him. The humorist, in short, might be said to exhibit a kind of *akratic* behavior with respect to the religious since, according to Climacus, "the effect that a person's conception of God...*should* have is that it transforms his entire existence in

relation to it.”¹⁵⁰ Instead of allowing this personal transformation to take place, the humorist “becomes impatient” and “revokes everything,” thereby revealing in my view that acts of revocation are indicative in the first instance of a kind of character flaw.¹⁵¹ In a draft to the *Postscript*, Climacus brings out the difference between the humorist and the religious individual as follows:

Humor is turned inward... is not without the inwardness of suffering, but still has so much of an undialectical self left that in the shifting it sticks its head up like a nisse and raises laughter; the inwardness of religiousness is a crushing of the self before God.¹⁵²

From a religious point of view, then, the humorist is simply unwilling to “humble” himself sufficiently before God; his act of revocation is a sign of human *pride* and thus reveals an important sense in which he falls short of the religious individual.¹⁵³

Once we appreciate that acts of revocation are in essence an expression of the humorist’s unwillingness to become a religious person and to live a religious life, it also becomes clear that Conant’s conception of revocation, however interesting a notion it may be in its own right, is simply not well-supported by the text.¹⁵⁴ Recall that for Conant, Climacus’ final act of revocation was supposed to be a moment in which he spoke more directly to the reader, finally making clear what he had previously only been “hinting at,” namely that his earlier activity was not genuinely philosophical but rather was meant to exemplify a confusion to which he thinks the reader may also be prone and that his own behavior serves to mirror back to her.¹⁵⁵ According to Conant, Climacus’ revocation is supposed to be a clear indication to the reader that he attaches no philosophical significance to what he has developed and that neither should the reader; not only does he revoke what he’s developed but, given its philosophical status, he *ought* to revoke it. But while revocation may be perfectly in keeping with the humorist’s attempts to attend to himself “in the Greek sense” and to maintain a “spiritual equilibrium” between the comic and the tragic, it is clear that from a religious point of view the humorist ought *not* to revoke what he has developed.¹⁵⁶ That is, what Climacus revokes in the *Postscript* is presumably quite sound (resting as it does on the conceptual competence he possesses with respect to the religious), and instead says more about his own existential limitations than anything it may say about the philosophical significance of what he’s developed.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, the humorist remains a highly competent existential figure, someone whose emotional and spiritual depth is far removed from the apathetic condition of the speculative philosopher. From the point of view of Christianity, it

is the humorist's unwillingness to embrace the tragic side of life to the exclusion of the comic that marks him as someone who falls short. Strangely enough, this is not due to a lack of emotion but rather to a willingness on the part of the humorist to "let sadness substitute for decision":

The humorous appears when one answers the question of *Fragments* (Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal happiness?) not with a yes or no of decision but with a sad smile (this is the lyrical in humor), which signifies that both the old man's seventy years and the almost stillborn infant's half hour of life are too little to become a decision for an eternity.¹⁵⁸

But since from the point of view of Christianity one is either saved or damned and this rests entirely on whether or not one decides to receive Christ as one's personal savior, anything that hinders that decision is regarded as suspect: "the essentially Christian consists precisely in decision and decisiveness."¹⁵⁹ Thus, according to Climacus, sadness is precisely what Christianity does not ultimately allow for as a response to the human condition: "Christianity has no room for sadness: salvation or perdition—salvation ahead of it, perdition behind for everyone who turns around, whatever he sees."¹⁶⁰ Yet the humorist does not answer with "a yes or no of decision." His "sad smile" seems to be but yet another way of finding Christianity, at bottom, to be "foolish" (since not even the "old man's seventy years" are enough, by the humorist's lights, "to become a decision for an eternity"). Thus in my view, the humorist, like his Greek philosophical counterpart before him, remains someone whose passionate relationship to Christianity has the particular character of offense.¹⁶¹

Interestingly, it is the apparent personal shortcoming of the humorist that also seems to make him perfectly suited for serving as a Socratic figure for the reader. While his outlook of humor may lead him to revoke what he is personally unwilling to embrace, this is also nicely in accord with the maieutic ideal of leaving things to the reader herself.¹⁶² So, for example, John Lippitt has convincingly argued, in reply to Conant, that Climacus' revocation serves a quite different function, allowing him to exhibit a certain modesty and enabling him to remove himself from any position of authority, thereby leaving the reader alone with what has been developed.¹⁶³ Let's consider further the significance of Climacus' revocation with respect to his reader. In the final appendix to the *Postscript*, which is entitled "The Understanding with the Reader," Climacus claims that "to be an authority is much too burdensome an existence for a humorist" and says that it is "one of life's comforts that there are such great men who are able and willing to be [such] an authority, from whom one has the benefit of accepting their opinion as a matter of

course.”¹⁶⁴ This is to return to the view of philosophy that Climacus sets forth in *Fragments*, where, as we saw in the previous chapter, he suggests that whatever the reader may gain from interacting with him, this is not something that is best characterized in terms of the acquisition of opinions (see section 4.2.1). It appears to be Climacus' view in fact that the sort of book he has written is not meant to serve as the basis for any opinion his reader may hold or later acquire. To “appeal” to his book therefore is to indicate that one “has *eo ipso* [precisely thereby] misunderstood it.”¹⁶⁵ More than anything, Climacus still fears that someone will appeal to him and his writings with approval: “Above all, may heaven spare the book and me from any approving vehemence, so that a vociferous party-liner cites it approvingly and enrolls me in the census.”¹⁶⁶ Climacus maintains that he has “no opinion except that it must be the most difficult of all to become a Christian.”¹⁶⁷ But he claims that even this opinion is of an unusual nature:

As an opinion, it is no opinion, and neither does it have any of the qualities that ordinarily characterize an “opinion.” It does not flatter me, since I do not make out that I am Christian; it does not insult the Christian, since he of course can have nothing against my regarding what he has done and is doing as the most difficult of all; it does not insult the attacker of Christianity, since his triumph becomes all the greater, since he goes further—than that which is the most difficult of all. I consistently desire no proof from actuality that I actually do have an opinion (an adherent, cheers, execution, etc.), because I have no opinion, wish to have none, and am satisfied and pleased with that.¹⁶⁸

At a minimum, then, Climacus seems to associate the holding of an opinion with what may potentially set a person apart from others (where it may “flatter” her and “insult” them). In relation to the opinion that it must be “the most difficult of all to become a Christian,” Climacus still remains quite willing to grant the superiority of whoever he engages on this matter (whether believer or critic). If a person comes to hold this opinion or dispute it, she should not do so by appealing to Climacus or his book, for that is “much too burdensome an existence for a humorist.”

It is immediately following this passage that Climacus raises for the first time in the final appendix the topic of revocation, suggesting that he thinks of this as a gesture that will help make clear to the reader that whatever else she does with his book, she should not conceive of it or its author as an authoritative source of opinion with respect to the topics under investigation.¹⁶⁹

Climacus compares the revocation of his book to a notice that sometimes appears at the back of certain religious works:

Just as in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds a note at the back of the book that notifies the reader that everything is to be understood in accordance with the teaching of the holy universal mother Church, so also what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only a conclusion but has a revocation to boot.¹⁷⁰

Thus in an appendix “at the back of the book,” Climacus “notifies his reader” that a proper understanding of what has been developed in the *Postscript* (the raising and answering of the first personal question “How do I become a Christian?”) will include grasping that “everything...is revoked.” He returns to the topic of understanding him and his book a couple of pages later in the context of a discussion of his “imagined reader.”¹⁷¹ While he may imagine a reader because he does not want to presume that he has an “actual” reader, in doing so this also allows him to provide a sketch of what, in his view, the ideal reader of the *Postscript* would be like. Climacus claims that such an imagined reader is “absolutely the most pleasant of all readers,” someone who “understands one promptly and bit by bit” and who “can stick it out just as long as the author” (so someone who himself is not in a hurry and who is thus also able to appreciate the fact that the author is a loafer).¹⁷² He also claims that such a reader will understand why he has written the kind of book that ultimately winds up being revoked:

He can understand that the understanding is the revocation—the understanding with him as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book. He can understand that to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it, that to write a book that does not demand to be important for anyone is still not the same as letting it be unwritten.¹⁷³

Climacus' description of the *Postscript* as a book that “does not demand to be important” seems to point us again to his desire to avoid any kind of direct relation of authority with his reader. But just as I argued in Chapter 4 that his decision to write pamphlets at all was responsive to what he took to be the needs of the age (as opposed to what the age demands), so too would it appear that he thinks that there is a need for the sort of book that by its very nature is revoked.¹⁷⁴ When Climacus claims that his imagined reader appreciates that “the understanding is the revocation,” this seems to suggest that one will not have understood the book unless one grasps what it is about this book that leads to its being revoked. This is, among other things, to appreciate the

maieutic aim of such a work and its author. If the reader has become aware of her own condition of forgetfulness or has come to appreciate some of the respects in which living as a Christian may be more difficult than she had imagined, these are things that concern her and her alone, and for these self-realizations to be genuine the reader must self-actively arrive at these conclusions on her own and so should not be dependent on the author's having a personal relation to these matters. The pseudonym Frater Taciturnus makes a similar point with respect to his reader, suggesting that he seeks a reader whose existential competence is not dependent on the author's own apparent endorsement of what he's developed:

If it so pleased me to declare everything I wrote to be gibberish [*Galimathias*], the person who is to be my reader must be able to let himself not be disturbed by this but see to it that he reproduces the dialectical movements himself.¹⁷⁵

Thus whatever relationship the reader may come to have to Christianity, this should not be unduly grounded in or mediated by Climacus or his book.

For the reader truly to understand this, however, also seems to require that she appreciate that Climacus is a Socratic figure. To this end, Climacus closes his appendix by addressing his reader and providing her with a final self-portrait:

My dear reader, if I may say so myself, I am anything but a devil of a fellow in [speculative] philosophy, called to create a new trend. I am a poor individual existing human being with sound natural capacities, not without a certain dialectical competence and not entirely devoid of study either.¹⁷⁶

By calling himself "a poor individual existing human being," Climacus sets himself apart from the speculative philosopher and in effect returns to the topic of his experiment: reminding his reader of the need to attend to herself *qua* individual human being. For his own part, he observes that this is still all that he is: "I remain what I myself admit is infinitely little, a vanishing, unrecognizable atom, just like every single human being."¹⁷⁷ In the light of his present level of self-development, Climacus now feels ready to become a fellow learner:

As I see myself, I have developed so much just by my independent thinking, have been educated so much by reading, internally oriented so much by existing that I am in a position to be an apprentice, a learner, which is already a task. I do not pretend to be more than capable of beginning to learn in a higher sense. If only the teacher were to be found among us!...The teacher of whom I speak...is the teacher of the ambiguous art of thinking about existence and existing.¹⁷⁸

Climacus reports that if he could find such a teacher of “the art of thinking about existence and existing,” he is sure that he would make real progress:

If [such a teacher] could be found, I dare to guarantee that something would jolly well come of it if he in print would attend to my instruction and to that end proceed slowly and piece by piece, allowing me to *ask questions*, as good instruction should, and to delay going on from anything before I have completely understood it.¹⁷⁹

Climacus reports that he has sought such a teacher, questions in hand, but alas no such teacher has come to light. As a result his “pursuit is *eo ipso* unimportant and only for his own enjoyment”; and this is to be expected, on Climacus' view, “when a learner in [the art of] existing, who then cannot want to teach others..., presents something that can be expected of a learner.”¹⁸⁰ This is to be someone “who essentially knows neither more nor less than what just about everyone knows, except that he knows something about it more definitely and, on the other hand, with regard to much that everyone knows or thinks he knows, definitely knows that he does not know it.”¹⁸¹ That is, Climacus' final portrait of himself is as a Socratic figure, which remains no easy calling; for, as Climacus notes, “when someone these days...says, ‘There is much that I do not know,’ he is suspected of a tendency to lie.”¹⁸²

Conclusion

In the first part of this dissertation we considered some of the respects in which Kierkegaard conceives of himself as a Socratic figure. In light of the illusion to which he thinks his contemporaries have fallen prey (where they imagine they are Christians while leading lives that are governed by non-Christian categories), Kierkegaard concludes that what the age needs above all is a Socrates, someone who can employ a maieutic method to help people to overcome this illusion. It is Kierkegaard's view, moreover, that to be an effective philosophical midwife requires an ability and a willingness to disguise oneself and employ different means of deception (deceiving others into the truth). I argued in Chapter 2 that one of the reasons that Kierkegaard may have used pseudonyms is that this allows him to engage his readers maieutically and to give expression to the Socratic side of his own nature without requiring him to present himself as a Socratic figure (see section 2.6). While his pseudonyms (notably Johannes Climacus) employ different masks and readily grant to the reader the existential superiority that she imagines herself to possess, Kierkegaard can remain personally outside this maieutic dynamic; he can invite the reader to identify him with the edifying speeches that he publishes under his own name. In the second part of this dissertation we explored the idea that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus is himself a Socratic figure. I argued that in response to his diagnosis that people have forgotten themselves ethically and religiously speaking, Climacus adopts two different Socratic stances. In *Fragments* he experimentally presents himself as someone who has forgotten about Christianity and invites the reader to join him in a hypothetical investigation that, much to her continual annoyance, repeatedly keeps arriving at the traditional Christian teaching ("old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity").¹ In the *Postscript*, by contrast, Climacus openly declares himself not to be a Christian and experimentally investigates the first personal question, "How do I become a Christian?" By appearing as someone who denies that he is a Christian amidst those who assume that they already are Christians (those who seem to think that

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“we are all Christians as a matter of course”), Climacus is thus perfectly suited to fill the Socratic role that, according to Kierkegaard, the condition of the age requires.² Yet, if this conception of Climacus as Kierkegaard’s Socratic pseudonym is correct, then what should our final judgment be of “My Task”? That is, when Kierkegaard proclaims at the end of his life and in his own voice that he is not a Christian and readily identifies this stance with Socrates’ stance of ignorance, he no longer seems to feel the need to distance himself personally from the use of a maieutic method. I want to conclude by considering further the significance of this development in his position.

After the publication of the *Postscript* in 1846, Kierkegaard seems to have developed some reservations about the continued use of indirect communication and maieutic method. In fact, he seems to have concluded that if he were going to continue to be an author then he would no longer be justified in using indirect communication: “Now it is clear to me that henceforth it will be indefensible to use [indirect communication].”³ He seems to think that he has reached a point in his authorship where he should no longer be a riddle to his reader, but instead should present himself more definitively as a religious figure:

The awakening effect is rooted in God’s having given me the power to live as a riddle—but no longer, lest the awakening effect end in being confusing. The thing to do now is to take over unambiguously the maieutic structure of the past, to step forth definitely and directly in character, as one who has wanted and who wants to serve the cause of Christianity.⁴

This 1848 entry recalls Kierkegaard’s earlier desire (expressed in 1846) to change the manner in which he arranged his life from the Greek mode of the pseudonymous works to a corresponding Christian mode: “The entire pseudonymous production and my life in relation to it was in the Greek mode. Now I must find the characteristic Christian life-form.”⁵ In part, the decision no longer to use a maieutic method seems to be based on Kierkegaard’s growing sense that in relation to Christianity, while such a method may certainly be warranted for a time, it isn’t possible to give full expression to the Christian teaching through the exclusive use of a maieutic manner of proceeding:

In connection with Christianity the indirect method is only *transitional*, for Christianity, after all, has grace to proclaim....The indirect method in the proclamation of Christianity is a maieutic approach. A *beginning* can be made with it in order to shake up the illusions....

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The communication of the essentially Christian must end finally in “witnessing.” The maieutic cannot be the final form, because, Christianly understood, the truth does not lie in the subject (as Socrates understood it), but in a revelation which must be proclaimed. It is very proper that the maieutic be used in Christendom, simply because the majority actually live under the delusion that they are Christians. But since Christianity still is Christianity, the one who uses the maieutic must become a witness.⁶

Thus while Kierkegaard continues to think that the use of a maieutic method may be perfectly appropriate when trying to address those who are under the kinds of illusions he claims to have targeted, he nevertheless seems to have concluded that the use of such indirection can only be “transitional.” The idea that “the maieutic cannot be the final form” also squares with Kierkegaard’s later assessment in *On My Work as an Author*: “Since the movement [of the authorship] is to arrive at the simple, the communication in turn must sooner or later end in direct communication.”⁷

One source of Kierkegaard’s growing reservations about the use of a maieutic method in relation to Christianity is his increased sense that the authentic practice of Christianity may ultimately be incompatible with being a Socratic figure. As he shifts to the “exclusively religious production” of 1847-1851 and beyond, Kierkegaard seems to call into question or at least rethink the importance that the *Postscript* assigns to conceiving of the religious in terms of “hidden inwardness.”⁸ While Climacus certainly holds that the Christianly religious (“Religiousness B”) is set apart from what he calls “Religiousness A” by its claim that the individual does not discover “the relationship with God *within* himself but relates himself to something *outside* himself” (that is, to “God in time as an individual human being”), he does not develop what might be called the practical consequences of this difference.⁹ Specifically, Kierkegaard comes to assign more and more significance to “the imitation of Christ” and the need for the believer to “confess Christ before the world.”¹⁰ This is to accept, according to the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, that “truly to be a Christian is...to be the abased one,” to live a life that will be “despised, ridiculed, spat upon, and [ultimately] regarded as a crime” in the eyes of the world.¹¹ Kierkegaard worries that a continued desire to use a maieutic method might simply be “an attempt” on the part of the maieutic practitioner “to avoid suffering for the doctrine”; he suggests that in his own case, for example, the conviction that he might be justified in avoiding the “humiliation” that is often involved with professing that one is a Christian “before [other]

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people”—since this would allow him thereby to continue to serve as a Socratic midwife—“could very well be a trick on the part of [his] heart” that illicitly seeks to limit the extent of his personal suffering.¹²

Probably the single most important text that addresses this matter is an 1852 entry from the journals entitled “To declare maieutically that one himself is not a Christian.”¹³ Kierkegaard begins this entry by rehearsing the parallel that he takes to hold between the Socratic position and the one that he thinks is called for by Christendom, and then turns to consider whether there are any limitations to the use of a maieutic method in relation to Christianity:

Take the Socratic position: error and evil are puffed-up knowledge—therefore Socrates is the ignorant one and remains that until the end. Likewise, to be a Christian has become an illusion, all these millions of Christians—therefore the situation must be reversed and Christianity must be introduced by a person who says that he himself is not a Christian. This is the way I have understood it. But to what extent ought this tactic [to] be maintained to the end, and to what extent should I stick to it?¹⁴

Kierkegaard claims that in his own case, “the entire enterprise has been a matter of being honest with [himself]: whether and to what extent [he] wanted to become a Christian in the strictest sense.”¹⁵ He maintains that he has “devoutly” assumed “the task of making clear what Christianity is” and notes that “the pseudonym [i.e., Johannes Climacus] also declared himself not to be a Christian,” but it still remains his view that “when the one who enters on this operation is himself in the situation of having to determine whether he actually wants to become a Christian in the strictest sense, this tactic cannot and ought not to be maintained to the end.”¹⁶ This is because, on Kierkegaard’s view, the one who declares that he is not a Christian thereby seemingly avoids any danger and suffering that might be involved with confessing that one is a Christian: “Christianity teaches that a danger is involved, persecution goes along with confessing that one is a true Christian—this is no doubt evaded by the person who in introducing Christianity declares himself not to be a Christian.”¹⁷ Kierkegaard even imagines the case of someone whose Christian convictions are more settled than his own. Even in this case he thinks, ultimately speaking, that the maieutic is not compatible with fully giving expression to one’s commitment to Christianity:

Let us suppose that the person who introduced Christianity maieutically (in order to get rid of the illusion, the delusion of being Christian because one is living in Christendom), declaring himself not to be a Christian, let us suppose that he not only from

the beginning made up his mind about wanting to be a Christian in the strictest sense, let us suppose that he completely ordered his life (although continually declaring himself not to be a Christian) according to the requirements of Christianity concerning renunciation and dying to the world, lived in voluntary poverty and so on,* and thereby was definitely exposed to the suffering and persecution that are inseparable and are the essentially Christian—can he continue to the end with this formula: “I am not a Christian”? The answer to this must be: Christianity nevertheless always requires the confession of Christ....¹⁸

* *In the margin*: and everything involved in “imitation,” dying to the world, being born again, and so on, which I myself was not aware of in 1848.

There is one scenario according to which, on Kierkegaard’s view, a person might both be a devout Christian and continue to deny that he is a Christian. Kierkegaard claims that “if the formula ‘I am not a Christian’ is to be maintained to the end, then it must be done by an ‘apostle’ but in an entirely new style. He must have an immediate relation to Christ and then only in death explain how it all hangs together.”¹⁹ But this is not a scenario that Kierkegaard is certain will ever come about: “Whether or not this will ever happen, I cannot say.”

What, then, are we to make of “My Task” and what arguably might be called Kierkegaard’s last words: “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task.”²⁰ I am not convinced that Kierkegaard conceives of himself as an apostle along the lines just sketched. At the same time, he does seem to be committed to the idea that the maieutic is not ultimately compatible with being a Christian. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, for Kierkegaard to step forward and finally give expression in his own voice to the Socratic part of his nature may also be to acknowledge that he is not capable of being a Christian in the strictest sense. What he is, above all, is a Socratic figure:

Now they can do with me what they will—insult me, envy me, stop reading me, bash in my hat, bash in my head, but they cannot in all eternity deny what was my idea and my life, that it was one of the most original thoughts in a long time, and the most original thought in the Danish language: that Christianity needed a maieutic and I understood how to be that, although no one understood how to appreciate it.²¹

Ultimately, Kierkegaard seems unable to give up Socrates or to cease from conceiving of himself as the Socrates of Copenhagen.

Endnotes

Notes to Introduction

- 1 For an excellent introduction to Kierkegaard, see Patrick Gardiner, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). The first chapter, entitled “Life and Character,” is especially to be recommended.
- 2 *M* 341 (*SVI* 14, 352).
- 3 Kierkegaard defended his *magister* dissertation on September 29, 1841. The defense lasted a grueling seven hours! When the *magister* degree was abolished by the Philosophy faculty in 1854, those with that degree were “officially designated as *doktor*, a usage which by then was already current in common parlance” (Bruce H. Kirmmse, “Socrates in the Fast Lane: Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Irony* on the University’s *Velocifère* (Documents, Context, Commentary, and Interpretation),” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Irony*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 43).
- 4 See especially G. W. F. Hegel, “Socrates,” in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 [1840]).
- 5 Some scholars have argued, unconvincingly in my view, that Kierkegaard’s frequent appeals to Hegel in his dissertation and apparent reliance on aspects of his philosophical methodology should not be taken at face value, but rather treated as an ironic endorsement of something he means to discredit. See, e.g., Louis Mackey, “Starting From Scratch: Kierkegaard Unfair to Hegel,” in *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1986). That Kierkegaard takes himself to have been heavily influenced by Hegel in his dissertation is best indicated by an 1850 entry from his journals (entitled “A passage in my dissertation”): “Influenced as I was by Hegel and whatever was modern, without the maturity really to comprehend greatness, I could not resist pointing out somewhere in my dissertation that it was a defect on the part of Socrates to disregard the whole and only consider numerically the individuals. What a Hegelian fool I was! It is precisely this that powerfully demonstrates what a great ethicist Socrates was” (*JP* 4: 4281; *Pap.* X.3 A 477; this is cited at *CI* 453). For a recent reassessment of Kierkegaard’s relationship to Hegel, see Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 6 See, e.g., *CI* 154 (*SKS* 1, 204-205). Cf. Tonny Aagaard Olesen, “Kierkegaard’s Socratic Hermeneutic in *The Concept of Irony*,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Irony*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

- 7 *CI* 76 (*SKS* 1, 134, 31-32); *CI* 80 (*SKS* 1, 138, 22-23; italics mine; trans. modified); *CI* 126 (*SKS* 1, 177, 32-33; italics mine; trans. modified). Kierkegaard also, however, somewhat provocatively maintains that the *Apology* “is in its entirety an ironic work” (*CI* 37; *SKS* 1, 99, 25; trans. modified).
- 8 This claim may come as a surprise to those who are familiar with the special role that Kierkegaard assigns to Aristophanes’ depiction of Socrates. Thus the third and seventh theses that Kierkegaard attached to his dissertation read: “III. If a comparison is made between Xenophon and Plato, one will find that the first takes too much from Socrates, the second raised him too high; neither of them finds the truth”; “VII. Aristophanes has come very close to the truth in his depiction of Socrates” (*CI* 6; *SKS* 1, 65). Without wanting to detract from Kierkegaard’s very provocative discussion of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (*CI* 128-153; *SKS* 1, 179-203), in which he convincingly makes the case that this text has things to teach us about Socrates, it’s worth keeping in mind that the scope of these two theses about the relative merits of Xenophon vs. Plato vs. Aristophanes does not arguably include Plato’s *Apology*; nor does it extend to the whole of Kierkegaard’s discussion of Socrates within the dissertation. Rather, these theses only concern the first chapter (“The Conception Made Possible”), in which Kierkegaard seeks to show that his own conception of Socrates is capable of accounting for the differences found in the three principal contemporary depictions of him. While Aristophanes may be held to be *closer* to the truth than either Xenophon or Plato, Kierkegaard nevertheless does not think that *any* contemporary of Socrates has accurately depicted him: “even though we lack an altogether reliable conception of [Socrates], we do have in recompense all the various nuances of misunderstanding” (*CI* 128; *SKS* 1, 180, 2-4; trans. modified). Nor does he think, for that matter, that anyone else has an accurate conception of him: the ultimate aim of his dissertation is to argue that it is only Søren Kierkegaard who has actually arrived at the truth about Socrates.
- 9 See especially the two books by Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and the chapter by the pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus entitled “The Socratic Definition of Sin” (*SUD* 87-96; *SVI* 11, 199-207). I discuss Climacus and his two books in the second part of this dissertation.
- 10 See especially the criticisms developed by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*. See *CUP* 503 (*SKS* 7, 456, 14-16): “What, then, is irony, if one wants to call Socrates an ironist and does not, like Magister Kierkegaard, consciously or unconsciously want to bring out only the one side?” See also *CUP* 90 (*SKS* 7, 89, 28-32); *Pap.* VI B 35, 24 (this is cited at *CUP* 2 35 and is from a draft of *CUP*). Cf. Winfield Nagley, “Kierkegaard’s Early and Later View of Socratic Irony,” *Thought* 55 (1980); Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Kierkegaard’s Socrates: A Venture in Evolutionary Theory,” *Modern Theology* 17 (2001).

- 1 A version of this chapter was previously published in *Kierkegaardiana* and later reprinted in an abridged form with a new opening section. See Paul Muench, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Point of View," *Kierkegaardiana* 24 (2005); reprinted in *A Companion to Socrates*, edited by Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
- 2 *M* 340-347 (*SVI* 14, 350-357). Kierkegaard defended his *magister* dissertation on September 29, 1841. In general, when Kierkegaard discusses his activities as a writer and thinker he excludes from consideration his dissertation and the juvenilia that preceded it (including his first published book, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, a critique of Hans Christian Anderson's *Only a Fiddler*). While scholars generally mark the beginning of his authorship proper with the publication of *Either/Or* (February 15, 1843), Kierkegaard makes clear in the text we are considering here that he conceives of what he is calling his task as something upon which he "has spent not only fourteen years but essentially his entire life" (*M* 343-344; *SVI* 14, 354). If we focus on the first half of this quotation, it appears that Kierkegaard thinks that what he is describing in the fall of 1855 has been going on for fourteen years (which would take us back to the fall of 1841 and to the time when he defended his dissertation). For Kierkegaard, as with many graduate students, the completion and defense of his dissertation marks both the end of his apprenticeship and the beginning of his mature work.
- 3 Excluding the many reflections of a critical nature that can be found in Kierkegaard's journals, the chief examples in Kierkegaard's corpus of this sort of critical, methodological text include (1) An appendix (entitled "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature") found in the middle of the 1846 pseudonymous work *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (*CUP* 251-300; *SKS* 7, 228-273), in which the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus discusses all of the previous works that have been published (those by the other pseudonymous authors, his own earlier book *Philosophical Fragments*, and works that appeared under Kierkegaard's own name) and that Kierkegaard calls "a section with which [he] would ask the reader to become familiar" (*PV* 31; *SVI* 13, 523); (2) a short document entitled "A First and Last Explanation" that Kierkegaard attached without page numbers to the end of the *Postscript*, where he acknowledged for the first time that he was the creator of the various pseudonymous authors and their respective books (*FLE* 625-630; *SKS* 7, 569-573); (3) *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, written in 1848 but not published until after Kierkegaard's death, and the most substantial of this group of texts; (4) *On My Work as an Author* (*MWA* 1-20; *SVI* 13, 489-509), a short work published in 1851 (partly an extract of *The Point of View*); (5) "Armed Neutrality" (*AN* 127-141; *Pap.* X.5 B 107, 288-301), another short work that remained unpublished during Kierkegaard's lifetime; and (6) the text we are examining here, "My Task." I discuss (1) in Chapter 3, section 3.4; (2) in Chapter 2, section 2.1; (3) and (4) in Chapter 2 (throughout). For a discussion of the dangers of attaching too much significance to any one of these texts, see Joakim Garff, "Argus' Øjne: 'Synspunktet' og synspunkterne for Kierkegaards 'Forfatter-Virksomhed' [The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View With Respect to Kierkegaard's 'Activity as an Author']," *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 52 (1989); reprinted in *Kierkegaardiana* 15 (1991), trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse.

- 4 For one recent discussion see Bruce H. Kirmmse, " 'I am not a Christian'—A 'Sublime Lie'? Or: 'Without Authority,' Playing Desdemona to Christendom's Othello," in *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).
- 5 Beginning our study of Kierkegaard with this relatively late work also squares with Niels Jørgen Cappelørn's suggestion that "Kierkegaard's work can only be understood by beginning at the author's conclusion, working backwards through it, with the writings about the authorship and the journals as parallel sources. And these too have to be read and understood retrospectively." See Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "The Retrospective Understanding of Søren Kierkegaard's Total Production," in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, ed. Alastair McKinnon (Montreal: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1982), 36.
- 6 *M* 340 (*SVI* 14, 350; trans. modified); *M* 342-343 (*SVI* 14, 353).
- 7 *M* 340 (*SVI* 14, 350-351; italics mine). Cf. *CUP* 17 (*SKS* 7, 26, 19).
- 8 *M* 340 (*SVI* 14, 350; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 9 *M* 344 (*SVI* 14, 354). There are, however, other places within Kierkegaard's corpus where the significance of denying that one is a Christian is discussed further. This position is most notably associated with the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus as he presents himself in his second book *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (cf. *PV* 43; *SVI* 13, 532; *MWA* 8; *SVI* 13, 497). I discuss Climacus' use of this stance in the *Postscript* in Chapter 5. Among Kierkegaard's methodological texts, the other main place where he ties the denial of being a Christian to his own stance is in "Armed Neutrality" (see, e.g., *AN* 138-139; *Pap.* X.5 B 107 at 298).
- 10 *M* 344 (*SVI* 14, 355); *M* 340-341 (*SVI* 14, 351-352; trans. modified). Cf. *JP* 6: 6872 (*Pap.* XI.1 A 136).
- 11 *M* 341 (*SVI* 14, 352).
- 12 On Kierkegaard's conception of Socrates see, e.g., Jens Himmelstrup, *Søren Kierkegaards Opfattelse Af Sokrates* [Søren Kierkegaard's Conception of Socrates] (Copenhagen: Arnold Busck, 1924); Winfield Nagley, "Kierkegaard's Early and Later View of Socratic Irony," *Thought* 55 (1980); Harold Sarf, "Reflections on Kierkegaard's Socrates," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983); Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Kierkegaard's Socrates: A Venture in Evolutionary Theory," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001). On Kierkegaard's Socratic method see, e.g., Mark C. Taylor, "Socratic Midwifery: Method and Intention of the Authorship," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Pierre Hadot, "The Figure of Socrates," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Paul Muench, "The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of 'Taking Away'," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, eds. Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003).
- 13 Except where specifically noted, all references to Plato's writings are to John M. Cooper, ed., *Complete Works of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

- 14 In the *Apology* Socrates singles out by name Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias (Protagoras is notably absent from this list) as examples of those who “can go to any city and persuade the young, who can keep company with anyone of their own fellow-citizens they want without paying, to leave the company of these, to join themselves, pay them a fee, and be grateful besides” (19e-20a). Socrates contrasts any wisdom he might be said to possess (what he terms “human wisdom”) with that which might be possessed by the sophists in question: “those whom I mentioned just now may be wise with a wisdom more than human, or else I don’t know what to say about it” (20d-e; trans. modified following Helm). See James J. Helm, ed., *Plato: Apology* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1997).
- 15 On the oracle at Delphi: “You know Chaerephon.... Surely you know the kind of man he was, how impulsive in any course of action. He went to Delphi at one time and ventured to ask the oracle...if any man was wiser than I, and the Pythian [priestess] replied that no one was wiser” (21a; cf. 33c). On Socrates’ *daimonion*: “I have a divine or spiritual sign which Meletus has ridiculed in his deposition. This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything” (31d; cf. 40a-c).
- 16 See 21b-23b.
- 17 On the young men: “The young men who follow me around of their own free will, those who have most leisure, the sons of the very rich, take pleasure in hearing people questioned”; “They enjoy hearing those being questioned who think they are wise, but are not. And this is not unpleasant” (23c; 33c).
- 18 21d; 28e-29a. Socrates claims that it is because he has pursued this god-given task that he has not been a conventionally model public servant and that his own personal affairs have been neglected: “Because of this occupation, I do not have the leisure to engage in public affairs to any extent, nor indeed to look after my own, but I live in great poverty because of my service to the god” (23b; cf. 31b-c). On being a gadfly: “I was attached to the city by the god—though this seems a ridiculous thing to say—as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfill some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city” (30e).
- 19 Myles Burnyeat, e.g., argues that “readers are invited...to reach a verdict on the case before [them]” (Myles Burnyeat, “The Impiety of Socrates,” *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997), 2). If we were to imagine Socrates’ defense as a monologue he performed on stage, then it might be natural for him to speak to the audience as though they constituted his jury (where Plato, of course, would be the playwright/director). With the invention of paper and the printing press, this audience becomes more and more the isolated, individual reader, thus perhaps better approximating the individual interlocutors whom Socrates seeks to engage *qua* individuals: “For I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I’m saying, and that’s the man I’m having a discussion with. The majority I disregard. And I do know how to call for a vote from one man, but I don’t even discuss things with the majority” (Plato, *Grg.* 474a-b). One of the devices that helps draw the reader into a

dialogue with the text of the *Apology* is Socrates' frequent personification of one or more members of his jury and his subsequent interaction with this imagined figure or figures. So, for example, after he denies that he engages in activities comparable to those practiced by the sophists, he says, "One of you might perhaps interrupt me and say: 'But Socrates, what is your occupation? From where have these slanders come? For surely if you did not busy yourself with something out of the [ordinary], all these rumors and talk would not have arisen.... Tell us what it is, that we may not speak inadvisedly about you.' Anyone who says that seems to be right, and I will try to show you what caused this reputation and slander" (20c-d; see also 28b; 29c-e; 34c; 37e). It will be quite natural, as a reader, to slip into a frame of mind in which one treats Socrates' use of the second person "you" as also directed at oneself. For example, "I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: 'Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?' Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him and test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things.... Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god" (29d-30b).

- 20 In general Plato does not cast himself as a character in his writings. The *Apology* is one of two places within his corpus where he is mentioned by name, and the one place where Plato stresses that he—the author of the text in question—was present at the set of events his text purports to represent (see 38b; 34a; *Phd.* 59b). While this device in no way ensures that what is represented is somehow more veridical (for there are plenty of uses of this device by ancient authors where we have independent reasons for thinking that the author in question could not have been present), the fact that Plato only avails himself of this device once in his entire corpus surely suggests that he attaches a special significance to asserting that he was in fact a first-hand witness of Socrates' defense.
- 21 The one exception being perhaps the young men who follow Socrates around and who enjoy listening to him examine those reputed to be wise. Kierkegaard does not present himself as someone who has had such followers, but he remains deeply interested in the youth and the problems a Socrates faces when seeking to interact with them. See, e.g., his discussion of Alcibiades at *CI* 47-52 (*SKS* 1, 108-113); *CI* 187-192 (*SKS* 1, 234-239); *PF* 24 (*SKS* 4, 231-232); *JP* 4: 4300 (*Pap.* XI.1 A 428). See also Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.
- 22 In general, when Kierkegaard speaks of the sophists he primarily has in mind, above all, Protagoras as he is portrayed in Plato's *Protagoras* (see, e.g., *CI* 33; *SKS* 1, 94-95; *CI* 52-62; *SKS* 1, 113-122), together with Hippias and Prodicus (as also portrayed there: see *CI* 203; *SKS* 1, 248), Gorgias, Polus and Callicles as portrayed in Plato's *Gorgias* (see, e.g., *CI* 33; *SKS* 1, 94; *CI* 33-34; *SKS* 1, 95-96; *CI* 36; *SKS* 1, 98), and Polemarchus and Thrasymachus as portrayed in the first book of Plato's *Republic* (see *CI* 109-119; *SKS* 1, 163-171). His more general discussion of Socrates' relationship to the sophists can be

- found at *CI* 201-214 (*SKS* 1, 246-259). That being said, a word of caution may be in order concerning the term "sophist." Henry Sidgwick famously argued that this term does not have a univocal application. See Henry Sidgwick, "The Sophists," in *Lectures on The Philosophy of Kant and Other Philosophical Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1905). He claims that even within Plato's corpus we ought to distinguish between (1) sophists like Protagoras who claim to teach the art of virtue and who prefer delivering speeches to the give and take of Socrates' question-and-answer approach and (2) those sophists who more closely "ape" Socrates' own methods and so represent a "post-Socratic Sophistry" (caricatured in Plato's *Euthydemus*) where "instead of pretentious and hollow rhetoric we have perverse and fallacious dialectic" (343; 334). Sidgwick further calls into question the legitimacy of assimilating Callicles and Thrasymachus (open defenders of an egoistic moral skepticism) to the first group of sophists. It may be worth noting, however, that this latter claim seems partly to rest on Sidgwick's being under the impression that Plato does not portray Protagoras as someone whom Socrates attacks because his doctrines are "novel or dangerous" but only because they are "superficial and commonplace," a view Kierkegaard surely would not be alone in rejecting (360; cf. Plato, *Meno* 91e).
- 23 *M* 341 (*SVI* 14, 352; trans. modified); *M* 340 (*SVI* 14, 351). It should be noted, however, that one dissimilarity between the pastors and theologians under criticism by Kierkegaard and the sophists of Socrates' day is that while the former are part of the official establishment and as such were generally recognized as legitimate authorities, the latter were usually outsiders who traveled to Athens and who were often viewed with considerable suspicion by those in power. Compare Anytus' discussion of the sophists in Plato, *Meno* 91b-92c.
- 24 At the close of "My Task," Kierkegaard addresses the common man (*menige Mand*) and warns him to "avoid the pastors, avoid them, those abominations whose job is to hinder you in even becoming aware of what true Christianity is and thereby to turn you, muddled by gibberish and illusion, into what they understand by a true Christian, a contributing member of the state Church, the national Church, and the like. Avoid them; only see to it that you willingly and promptly pay them the money they are to have. One must at no price have money differences with someone one scorns, lest it be said that one was avoiding them in order to get out of paying. No, pay them double so that your disagreement with them can become obvious: that what concerns them does not concern you at all, money, and that, on the contrary, what does not concern them concerns you infinitely, Christianity" (*M* 347; *SVI* 14, 357).
- 25 On Kierkegaard's conception of a "crowd" and the related notion of "the public," see Chapter 2, note 120.
- 26 In the *Apology* Socrates makes clear that independent of any danger the sophists may represent, he takes it to be the case that the Athenian populace as a whole (which after all, in the form of the jury, will put him to death) is itself a significant force: "Do not be angry with me for speaking the truth; no man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of many unjust and illegal happenings in the city. A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive

for even a short time” (31e-32a). In the *Republic*, this topic of the relationship between the individual sophists and the larger Athenian society is returned to: “Do you agree with the general opinion that certain young people are actually corrupted by sophists—that there are certain sophists with significant influence on the young who corrupt them through private teaching? Isn’t it rather the very people who say this who are the greatest sophists of all...?....Not one of those paid private teachers, whom the people call sophists..., teaches anything other than the convictions that the majority express when they are gathered together. Indeed, these are precisely what the sophists call wisdom. It’s as if someone were learning the moods and appetites of a huge, strong beast that he’s rearing—how to approach and handle it, when it is most difficult to deal with or most gentle and what makes it so, what sounds it utters in either condition, and what sounds soothe or anger it. Having learned all this through tending the beast over a period of time, he calls this knack wisdom, gathers his information together as if it were a craft, and starts to teach it. In truth, he knows nothing about which of these convictions is fine or shameful, good or bad, just or unjust, but applies all these names in accordance with how the beast reacts—calling what it enjoys good and what angers it bad” (492a-493c).

- 27 *M* 341-342 (*SVI* 14, 352; trans. modified).
- 28 *M* 345 (*SVI* 14, 356); *M* 340 (*SVI* 14, 351; trans. modified). Thus refusing to call himself a Christian is, in part, an expression of Kierkegaard’s religious convictions and may be tied to his idea that one never *is* a Christian in this life, though each person certainly can embark on the lifelong task of *becoming* a Christian.
- 29 *M* 340 (*SVI* 14, 351; italics mine; trans. modified); *M* 341 (*SVI* 14, 352). The Danish verb phrase “indbilde sig” can also mean to be under an illusion or under a delusion. Those who are under the illusion that they already *are* something will not be in the practice of examining whether they *really* are that, nor will they set about trying to *become* something that they think they already are. We will return to this topic in Chapter 2, section 2.3.
- 30 *M* 342 (*SVI* 14, 352-353; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 31 Kierkegaard frequently characterizes his task in terms of these two dimensions, so that one and the same activity is partly constitutive of what in his own case he takes to be an authentic life while also being directed at helping others to gain a greater awareness of the lack of fit between their avowed commitments and how they actually live. As a result, he argues that his method of approach has an intrinsic worth to it independent of how successful it is with his interlocutors, since it helps constitute his own life whether or not, in the end, it manages to make the others more aware: “That is why this approach has intrinsic worth. Ordinarily it holds true that an approach has worth only in proportion to what is achieved by it. One judges and condemns, makes a big noise—this has no intrinsic worth, but one reckons on achieving a great deal thereby. It is different with the approach described here. Assume that a person had devoted his whole life to using it, assume that he had practiced it all his life, and assume that he had achieved nothing—he nevertheless has by no means lived in vain, because his life was true self-denial” (*PV* 44; *SVI* 13, 532-533). On the significance of self-denial for Kierkegaard, see, e.g., *WL* 361 (*SKS* 9, 356, 3-4); *WL* 194 (*SKS* 9, 194, 2-10).

- 32 31a. The idea that a philosopher's primary role is to serve as a gadfly for her fellow citizens is rather removed from how philosophy tends to be thought of these days. Reminding ourselves that Socrates thought of his philosophical activity in these terms will better position us to appreciate the sense in which Kierkegaard might readily call himself a philosopher in spite of his general tendency to ridicule and set himself against most modern forms of philosophy.
- 33 Socrates' ignorance has remained an enduring source of puzzlement; this is especially so for philosophers, since ignorance is normally thought to be a condition that philosophy helps one to overcome. It might seem that insofar as Socrates remains ignorant he lies outside the proper province of philosophy. One might even feel like asserting, "If Socrates is still ignorant after seventy years isn't this reason enough to admit that his method is inadequate at best and ultimately a failure?" In his essay, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," Gregory Vlastos nicely captures this sentiment and brings into view the seemingly inherent tension between Socrates' unvarying stance of ignorance and his presentation of himself as a virtuous person: "If after decades of searching Socrates remained convinced that he still knew nothing, would not further searching have become a charade—or rather worse? For he holds that virtue 'is' knowledge: if he has no knowledge, his life is a disaster, he has missed out on virtue and, therewith, on happiness. How is it then that he is serenely confident he has achieved both? [In a footnote to this passage:] His avowals of epistemic inadequacy, frequent in the dialogues, are never paralleled by admission of moral failure; the asymmetry is striking" (Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43). Socrates' stance of ignorance is sometimes treated as a rhetorical device that he uses to draw out his interlocutor. Norman Gulley, e.g., claims that Socrates' profession of ignorance is "an expedient to encourage his interlocutor to seek out the truth, to make him think he is joining with Socrates in a voyage of discovery" (quoted by Vlastos, 39). Hence his stance of ignorance is sometimes called a mere ironic pose; consider this common dictionary definition of Socratic irony: "pretense of ignorance in a discussion to expose the fallacies in the opponent's logic" (Michael Agnes, ed., *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, 2002), 755). In the *Republic*, Thrasymachus is just as suspicious of Socrates' claim to be ignorant, only he treats it as a tactic adopted by Socrates to avoid having to be questioned by others: "By Heracles, [Thrasymachus] said, that's just Socrates' usual irony. I knew, and I said so to these people earlier, that you'd be unwilling to answer and that, if someone questioned *you*, you'd be ironical and do anything rather than give an answer" (337a). In contrast to these positions Kierkegaard, who is best known for having argued in his dissertation that Socrates is an ironist through and through, never conceives of Socrates' ignorance as feigned or merely tactical, as though it did not go all the way down. See, e.g., *CI* 169-177 (*SKS* 1, 217-224); *CI* 269-271 (*SKS* 1, 306-308). Among modern commentators who discuss Socrates' irony, Alexander Nehamas seems to come closest to Kierkegaard's position. Commenting on Vlastos' discussion, he calls the relationship between Socrates' disavowal of knowledge and his conviction that he has lived a virtuous life "Socrates' final and most complex irony. He disavows the knowledge he himself considers necessary for a life of *aretê*. But he is also 'serenely' confident in thinking that he has actually lived such a life....[If we suppose] he

- did live a good life, does he or does he not think that he really has that knowledge? Does he or does he not mean his disavowal seriously?...Plato's early works do not answer [these questions], and they thus endow Socrates with a further ironical dimension. Not just ironical with his interlocutors, he is ironical toward Plato himself (and so towards Plato's readers) as well, for even Plato cannot answer the question Socrates poses for him. Though Socrates is Plato's creature, his own literary character, he remains opaque to him: he is a character his own creator admits he cannot understand" (Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 86-87).
- 34 *M* 342 (*SVI* 14, 353; italics mine; trans. modified). See Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.
- 35 A passage in the *Laches* nicely brings out the connection between Socrates' interest in what an individual knows and his deeper interest in examining how that person lives: "You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. And when he does submit to this questioning, you don't realize that Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail" (187e-188a; cf. *Ap.* 29e-30a).
- 36 One definition of sophistry might be any approach to ethical and religious matters that fosters the illusion that a theoretical knowledge of such matters is possible independent of the practical understanding that one only acquires by living a certain kind of life. Kierkegaard believes that with the rise in his day of Hegelian philosophy a new species of sophistry is born, a sophistry that holds out the promise of a systematic, theoretical comprehension of ethical and religious matters while at the same time leading individuals to neglect the proper realm of ethics and religion: namely the individual herself *qua* ethical and religious agent. Within Kierkegaard's corpus, the main attack against this Hegelian species of sophistry is launched by the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus in his two books *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. I examine Climacus and his two works in the second part of this dissertation.
- 37 22e-23a; cf. 23c-24b and Plato, *Tht.* 151c, where Socrates claims that "people have often before now got into such a state with me as to be literally ready to bite when I take away some nonsense or other from them." Recall that in the *Apology* Socrates claims that his life as a philosopher was given a certain impetus by the oracle's claim that no one is wiser than he is. Socrates finds this a puzzling remark and treats it as a kind of riddle set him by the god. He doesn't think he is an especially wise person but he also thinks he ought to take quite seriously the god's pronouncement. Accordingly, after remaining puzzled for quite a while, he reluctantly turns to what seems to come quite naturally to him, to the activity of questioning and refuting, thinking that in this way he might arrive at some kind of an answer to the god's riddle. Socrates claims that he then proceeded to seek out people who were reputed to be wise, initially with the idea that he might discover someone who is wiser than he is. But we all know how the story goes. Instead of making this kind of

- discovery, Socrates repeatedly encounters people who think they know things they do not and then tries to show this to the individuals in question. This does not always make him the most popular of individuals. Consider his description of his first such encounter, whose generic form nicely captures the basic type of exchange that he claims has led to a climate of hostility in which people have repeatedly slandered him: "When I examined this man...my experience was something like this: I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not. I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but that he was not. As a result he came to dislike me, and so did many of the bystanders" (21c-d). It is this condition of being "unpopular with many people" that Socrates says will lead to his "undoing, if [he] is undone, not Meletus or Anytus but the slanders and envy of many people" (28a).
- 38 *M* 342-343 (*SVI* 14, 353; trans. modified).
- 39 Given the inductive nature of Socrates' enterprise, the strength of his convictions will partly rest on the quality of the interlocutor he encounters, providing him perhaps with further reason for trying to foster a philosophical culture in Athens in which someone might arise who could truly test him, a Socrates who could test Socrates (Plato arguably tries to fulfill that very role over the course of his writings): "These conclusions, at which we arrived earlier in our previous discussions are, I'd say, held down by arguments of iron and adamant, even if it's rather rude to say so. So it would seem, anyhow. And if you [Callicles] or someone more forceful than you won't undo them, then anyone who says anything other than what I'm now saying cannot be speaking well. And yet for my part, my account is ever the same: I don't know how these things are, but no one I've ever met, as in this case, can say anything else without being ridiculous" (Plato, *Grg.* 508e-509a). This picture of Socrates being tested by others, however, remains somewhat of an anomaly within Plato's corpus; his fundamental role is to be the one who asks questions. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates notes that this is how he is commonly thought of and readily ties this view of him to his stance of ignorance: "The common reproach against me is that I am always asking questions of other people but never express my own views about anything, because there is no wisdom in me; and that is true enough. And the reason of it is this, that God compels me to attend to the travail of others, but has forbidden me to procreate. So that I am not in any sense a wise man; I cannot claim as the child of my own soul any discovery worth the name of wisdom" (150c-d).
- 40 In his dissertation Kierkegaard assigns Socrates an essential role in the development of a proper speculative philosophy, but contends that he should only be conceived of as someone who prepares the way for speculative philosophy without himself becoming a speculative philosopher: "In the world-historical sense [Socrates'] significance was that he set the boat of speculation afloat....He himself, however, does not go on board but merely launches the ship. He belongs to an older formation, and yet a new one begins with him" (*CI* 217; *SKS* 1, 261, 19-24; trans. modified).
- 41 On the idea of Socrates' activity being a kind of preliminary cleansing of the soul, consider this passage from the *Sophist*: "They set out to get rid of the belief in one's own wisdom in another way....They cross-examine someone when he thinks he's saying something though

he's saying nothing. Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize him. They collect his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects. The people who are being examined see this, get angry at themselves, and become calmer toward others [ideally speaking: cf. *Ap.* 23d]. They lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves that way, and no loss is pleasanter to hear or has a more lasting effect on them. Doctors who work on the body think it can't benefit from any food that's offered to it until what's interfering with it from inside is removed. The people who *cleans the soul*, my young friend, likewise think the soul, too, won't get any advantage from any learning that's offered to it until someone shames it by refuting it, removes the opinions that interfere with learning, and exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does, and nothing more" (230b-d; italics mine). By denying that Socrates' life should be understood as incomplete, Kierkegaard radicalizes this activity of cleansing the soul, insisting that this activity is never finished, never perfected but instead is of such a nature that an individual must conceive of it as a task to which she must devote her entire life.

42 20e-21b.

43 23a-b.

44 Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus puts it this way: "Let us never forget—but how many ever really knew it or thought it?—let us never forget that Socrates' ignorance was a kind of fear and worship of God, that his ignorance was the Greek version of the Jewish saying: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Let us never forget that it was out of veneration for God that he was ignorant, that as far as it was possible for a pagan he was on guard duty as a *judge* on the frontier between God and man, keeping watch so that the deep gulf of qualitative difference between them was maintained, between God and man, that God and man did not merge in some way, *philosophice*, *poetice* [philosophically, poetically], etc., into one. That was why Socrates was the ignorant one, and that was why the deity found him to be the wisest of men" (*SUD* 99; *SVI* 11, 209-210; underlining mine).

45 Compare two passages from Kierkegaard's journals: "During the most developed period of the most intellectual nation Socrates attained ignorance (ignorance, with which one [normally] begins in order to know more and more) and how? Because in radical ethicality he took his task to be that of preserving himself in ignorance, so that no temptation without and no temptation within would ever trick him into admitting that he knew something, he who nevertheless in another sense did know something"; "The significance of Socratic ignorance was precisely to keep ethics from becoming scholarly knowledge—instead of practice. There is nothing more dangerous than to transform into scholarly knowledge something which should be practiced" (*JP* 1: 972; *SKS* 22, NB11: 62; *JP* 4: 3871; *Pap.* XI.2 A 362).

46 *M* 344 (*SVI* 14, 355; trans. modified).

47 *M* 341 (*SVI* 14, 352; trans. modified).

- 48 This also arguably marks a difference between Kierkegaard and Socrates, for however isolated Kierkegaard is he still has the image and example of Socrates to help him maintain his bearings. Personal outpourings of this sort also mark his writings as much more a product of modernity and the Christian tradition of confession than anything we find written about Socrates. The ancient accounts of Socrates don't really concern themselves with what we might call Socrates' inner life. In the *Apology*, Socrates claims that he is the "same man" whether in public life or in private discussion: "Throughout my life, in any public activity I may have engaged in, I am the same man as I am in private life....If anyone says that...he heard anything privately that the others did not hear, be assured that he is not telling the truth" (32e-33b). Yet we often have the feeling when reading about him that there is more there, more to him than what lies open to us. This may partly be why we continue to be fascinated by Plato's version of Socrates in particular, who seems to have a hidden depth which is never brought fully out into the open. Alexander Nehamas nicely puts it this way: "Incomprehensible and opaque, to his author as well as to us, Plato's early Socrates has acquired a solidity and robustness few literary characters can match" (Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 91). Yet Socrates' opaqueness often acts as a spur, seemingly encouraging us to probe further and inviting us to think that progress can be made in our quest to understand him. Alcibiades nicely captures this idea with his claim that Socrates is like a Silenus statue, ugly and grotesque on the outside, while hidden inside lie little statues of the gods: "I'm going to show you what [Socrates] really is. To begin with, he's crazy about beautiful boys; he constantly follows them around in a perpetual daze. Also, he likes to say he's ignorant and knows nothing. Isn't this just like Silenus? Of course it is! And all this is just on the surface, like the outsides of those statues of Silenus. I wonder, my fellow drinkers, if you have any idea what a sober and temperate man he proves to be once you have looked inside. Believe me, it couldn't matter less to him whether a boy is beautiful. You can't imagine how little he cares whether a person is beautiful, or rich, or famous in any other way that most people admire. He considers all these possessions beneath contempt, and that's exactly how he considers all of us as well. In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game—a game of irony. I don't know if any of you have seen him when he's really serious. But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus' statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I no longer had a choice—I just had to do whatever he told me" (Plato, *Smp.* 216d-217a). Of course, we all know that Alcibiades did not turn out so well (did not "do whatever [Socrates] told [him]"). This fact, together with Socrates' claim to be the same person both in public and private, casts doubt on whether Alcibiades is entirely clear when he attempts to draw a distinction between Socrates' outward stance of irony and his supposedly more serious inward condition. Kierkegaard discusses Alcibiades' claim to have glimpsed what lies within Socrates at *CI* 50-51 (*SKS* 1, 111-112). See also Chapter 2, section 2.4.
- 49 *M* 345 (*SVI* 14, 356).
- 50 Kierkegaard would not dispute this. In *The Point of View* he says that he does not place a lot of stock in the mere fact that an author claims that her book has such and such significance: "I do not...think much of assurances [*Forsikkringer*] in connection with

literary productions and am accustomed to take a completely objective attitude to my own. If in the capacity of a third party, as a reader, I cannot substantiate from the writings that what I am saying is the case,...it could never occur to me to want to win [by assurances] what I thus consider lost [with respect to the texts themselves]....*qua* author it does not help very much that I *qua* human being make assurances that I have intended this and that" (PV 33; SVI 13, 524; trans. modified).

- 51 But in doing so Kierkegaard clearly is not an easy act to follow; he seems to do everything so well himself. He composes intricate, existentially challenging texts and then proceeds to develop powerful tools for reading and interpreting those texts. Anyone who wants to develop her own accounts must learn to be guided by his remarks without turning them into dogma, following them as long they keep the texts fresh and alive while not being afraid to jettison them when they seem to drain the texts of their vitality.
- 52 M 343 (SVI 14, 353).
- 53 M 343-344 (SVI 14, 354; trans. modified).
- 54 M 344 (SVI 14, 354-355).
- 55 CI 48-49 (SKS 1, 109, 25-31). And to seek such an understanding, as I do, while inviting others to accompany one is to run the further risk of having one's moments of misunderstanding very much on display. As Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus puts it, "Anyone who begins to exercise himself in this understanding no doubt will frequently enough catch himself in a misunderstanding, and if he wants to become involved with others, he had better take care" (PF 102; SKS 4, 299, 2-4).
- 56 Plato, *Smp.* 221c-d.
- 57 Kierkegaard focuses on Socrates in all of Part One of the dissertation and in Part Two in the second half of the chapter entitled, "The World-Historical Validity of Irony, the Irony of Socrates" (CI 7-237; SKS 1, 69-278; CI 264-271; SKS 1, 302-308). In the introduction to Part Two, Kierkegaard claims that he has "dealt in the first part of the dissertation solely with Socrates" (CI 241; SKS 1, 281, 16). Perhaps because of Kierkegaard's focus on Socrates in the dissertation, his dissertation director, Frederik Christian Sibbern, suggested that he change the title of his dissertation to "Socrates as Ironist with a Contribution to the Development of the Concept of Irony in General, Particularly with Regard to the Most Recent Times" (quoted in Tonny Aagaard Olesen, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Hermeneutic in *The Concept of Irony*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Irony*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 103; see also SKS K1, 134; Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Socrates in the Fast Lane: Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* on the University's Velocifère (Documents, Context, Commentary, and Interpretation)," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Irony*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 23).

- 1 The phrase “my work as an author” (*min Forfatter-Virksomhed*) appears in the titles of both of these texts. While “virksomhed” can mean “work” it can also simply mean “activity” (giving us more literally “my author-activity” or “my activity as an author”). We might say that Kierkegaard conceives of his body of writing as an expression of a certain activity on his part. He *acts* in the world through his writing. Cf. *JP* 6: 6780 (*Pap.* X.4 A 383), where he claims that *On My Work as an Author* “is not a literary work but an act.” Kierkegaard drafted the manuscripts for *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* in the late 1840s. Although he completed the manuscript for *The Point of View* during the summer and fall of 1848, he decided it could not be published during his lifetime. It was published posthumously by Kierkegaard’s brother in 1859. See *JP* 6: 6258 (*SKS* 21, NB7: 36; cf. *SKS* K21, 86); *JP* 6: 6327 (*SKS* 21, NB9: 78). *On My Work as an Author* is a much shorter work and reads a bit like an extract of the longer *Point of View*. While the main section, “The Accounting,” appears to have been completed in 1849 (this is dated March, 1849 in the published work; there is also a footnote that discusses the pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus that is dated October, 1849), Kierkegaard did not publish *On My Work as an Author* for another two years. See *MWA* 5 (*SVI* 13, 493); *MWA* 6 (*SVI* 13, 494); *JP* 6: 6388 (*SKS* 21, NB10: 185; cf. *SKS* K21, 323).
- 2 *PV* 41 (*SVI* 13, 529); *PV* 43 (*SVI* 13, 531). The Hongs translate “æsthetisk/det Æsthetiske” as “esthetic/the esthetic.” Throughout this dissertation I modify their translations, rendering every occurrence of “esthetic” as “aesthetic.”
- 3 During this eight year period Kierkegaard published twenty-seven books (ten of which were pseudonymous). After publishing *On My Work as an Author* in 1851, Kierkegaard published one additional edifying work, *For Self-Examination*, and then fell silent for over three years. In the last year of his life he broke this silence and published a series of newspaper articles in *The Fatherland*, nine issues of his serial *The Moment*, and three short pamphlets.
- 4 The Hongs uniformly (but incorrectly) capitalize this term, treating “de Silentio” as though, in George Pattison’s words, it were “some kind of surname (like ‘de Tocqueville’).” Whatever its precise status, Kierkegaard and the other pseudonymous authors who refer to the author of *Fear and Trembling* consistently refrain from capitalizing “silentio.” See George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 2005), 191 (note 17).
- 5 Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 247.
- 6 See, e.g., *FLE* 625 (*SKS* 7, 569, 23); *FLE* 627 (*SKS* 7, 571, 20-21). Cf. Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 55.
- 7 The Hongs translate “opbyggelige Taler” as “upbuilding discourses.” I prefer to follow Swenson and Lowrie in translating “opbyggelig” as “edifying,” which sounds more natural in English and more readily indicates that these writings have a devotional character. A less abstract translation of “tale” would simply be “speech” or “talk.” Kierkegaard often urges

his readers to read his edifying works aloud, and I think his calling them speeches or talks is partly meant to draw a contrast between these texts and his other writings. Cf. *CUP 257* (*SKS 7*, 233-234), where Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus speaks of "the upbuilding address" (*Foredrag*) and the relationship between the "listener" and "the upbuilding speaker." The edifying works often read a bit like sermons but Kierkegaard is keen to restrict this term to that which can only be delivered by an ordained minister. In the preface that accompanied each book of edifying speeches that was published during 1843-1844, Kierkegaard writes, "this little book ... is called 'discourses,' not sermons, because its author does not have authority to preach" (*EUD 5*; *SKS 4*, 13, 2-3; this preface is repeated at *EUD 53*; 107; 179; 231; 295; see David R. Law, "The 'Ultimatum' of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Part Two, and the Two Upbuilding Discourses of 16 May 1843," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part II*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 260). Cf. *CUP 256-257* (*SKS 7*, 232-233); *CUP 272-273* (*SKS 7*, 247-248). Kierkegaard frequently describes himself as someone who writes "without authority," and so as someone who would not be in a position to deliver sermons proper: "Authority is appropriate to the 'ordained' pastor, and to the preaching of sin and grace in the decisive sense. But from the very beginning... I have stereotypically repeated that I was without authority...." (*Pap. X.5 B 204*; this is cited at *PV 261* and is from a draft of *MWA*). See also *MWA 6* (*SVI 13*, 495).

- 8 These qualities may also point to why, in general, the pseudonymous works have received the most attention from Kierkegaard's readers.
- 9 Kierkegaard recounts how one of his acquaintances who had been very much entertained by *Either/Or* was utterly disappointed by his next book, *Two Upbuilding Discourses*: "I... recall that one of my acquaintances came to me and complained that he had in good faith gone and bought them, thinking that since they were by me they must be something rather witty and clever. I also recall that I promised him that he would have his money back if he so desired" (*PV 36*; *SVI 13*, 527). For further discussion of Kierkegaard's edifying writings, see, e.g., George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002); Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003).
- 10 Cf. *JP 6*: 6553 (*SKS 22*, NB14: 95): "I use pseudonyms, invented characters (consequently not myself) to represent the ecstatic, while in the upbuilding discourses I myself speak gently and quietly."
- 11 Kierkegaard notes that "simultaneously with the publication of a [pseudonymous] book the printer and the censor *qua* public official have always been officially informed who the author was" (*FLE 625*; *SKS 7*, 569, 14-16). That a number of his contemporaries at least suspected that Kierkegaard was the author can readily be seen by examining what they wrote at the time in their correspondence about the strange and engaging books that had the whole town talking. See Bruce H. Kirmmse, ed., *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also George Pattison, "The Reception of *Either/Or*,"

- in *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 12 *CUP* 284 (*SKS* 7, 258, 33-34). See also *CUP* 270 (*SKS* 7, 245, 16-17): “The pseudonymous books are generally ascribed to one source [*Firma*]” (trans. modified); *COR* 46 (*SVI* 13, 431).
- 13 *FLE* 627 (*SKS* 7, 571, 13-15). See *FLE* 625 (*SKS* 7, 569, 2-3): “For the sake of form and order, I hereby acknowledge, something that really can scarcely be of interest to anyone to *know*, that I am, as is said, the author of...” (after which Kierkegaard proceeds to list the pseudonymous works published between 1843-1846). This was not the first time, however, that Kierkegaard’s name was publicly associated with the pseudonyms. As early as 1844 (so just one year after he published *Either/Or*), Kierkegaard listed himself on the title page as the publisher/editor (*Udgiver*) of one of his pseudonymous works (*Philosophical Fragments*). See *PF* 1 (*SKS* 4, 213); *FLE* 627 (*SKS* 7, 570, 31-34); *Pap.* VII.1 B 76 at 270 (this is cited at *CUP* 2 113 and is from a draft of *CUP*). He is thus simply mistaken when he claims in *The Point of View* that the *Postscript* was the first pseudonymous work to which he added “[his] name as editor” (*PV* 31; *SVI* 13, 523). See also Kierkegaard’s 1845 article in the *Fatherland*, “An Explanation and a Little More,” where he responds to a recent review in a newspaper that had the audacity to draw attention to “the rumor” (which it claims “presumably is correct”) that he is the author of *Either/Or* and the other pseudonymous works (*COR* 24-27; *SVI* 13, 418-421; the Hongs quote the original newspaper review at *COR* 274-275).
- 14 Hence Kierkegaard’s request that his pseudonyms be cited when quoting or referring to the pseudonymous works: “If it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the [pseudonymous] books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author’s name, not mine” (*FLE* 627; *SKS* 7, 571, 3-6). Cf. *JP* 6: 6567 (*Pap.* X.6 B 245).
- 15 *FLE* 627 (*SKS* 7, 570, 27); *FLE* 627 (*SKS* 7, 571, 13 and 20-21); *FLE* 625-626 (*SKS* 7, 569, 22-27; I have removed Kierkegaard’s italics); *JP* 6: 6786 (*Pap.* X.6 B 245 at 202; trans. modified).
- 16 I am simplifying here a bit. Many of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works have much more complicated literary structures. For example, *Either/Or* has a pseudonymous editor, Victor Eremita, and two pseudonymous authors, A and Judge William. A, in turn, represents himself as the editor of “The Seducer’s Diary” (*EOI* 301-445; *SKS* 2, 291-432), most of which is written from the first person point of view of the seducer, Johannes. Victor Eremita draws attention in his preface to how in *Either/Or* “one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle” (*EOI* 9; *SKS* 2, 16, 27-28).
- 17 Kierkegaard considered ceasing to be an author at several points in his life. For example, in *The Point of View* he claims that it was his original plan to write *Either/Or* as a way of ridding or “emptying [himself] of the poetic” and then to cease writing in order “to take to the country as a rural pastor” (*PV* 86; *SVI* 13, 570). But his “need to write was so great that [he] could not do otherwise.” Later, with the publication of the *Concluding Unscientific*

- Postscript* (in which Kierkegaard acknowledged in *FLE* that he was the creator of the different pseudonymous works), he declared in his journals that his “activity as an author is finished”: “It has been granted me to conclude it myself, to understand myself when it ought to stop....” While he was never to become a rural pastor, he repeatedly considered this as an alternative to the writing life: “if I only could [now] make myself become a pastor. Out there in quiet activity...I shall breathe more easily, however much my present life has gratified me” (*JP* 5: 5887 at 318; *SKS* 20, NB: 7 at 19, 12-15); “In a sense the whole authorship can be considered, if I may speak this way, as my program for becoming a rural pastor” (*Pap.* X.5 B 201; this is cited at *PV* 261 and is from a draft of *MWA*). See, e.g., the Hongs’ historical introduction to *For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself!* (*KW* 21, vii-ix).
- 18 Arguably Kierkegaard’s first attempt to conceive of the pseudonymous and edifying works as part of a single enterprise was presented in the *Postscript* by his pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus (*CUP* 251-300; *SKS* 7, 228-273). Perhaps underestimating the difficulty of obtaining a synoptic overview of his authorship, Kierkegaard claims that “this is something any third person can do without the slightest trouble at all [!], and what I myself as a third person can so very easily do, indeed have shown that I can do [*In margin: Note.* For example, Johannes Climacus’ report on the pseudonymous writers...by me as third person by a third person]” (*CUP* 2 150; *Pap.* X.5 B 168 at 363). See Chapter 3, section 3.4.
- 19 Kierkegaard wrote a third methodological work about his authorship, “Armed Neutrality,” in 1849 but did not publish this during his lifetime. See *AN* 127-141 (*Pap.* X.5 B 107, 288-301).
- 20 At one point Kierkegaard even seems to have considered composing a work about his authorship that was to be entitled, “A Defense” (*en Apologie*). See *Pap.* VIII.2 B 179-181 (cited at *PV* 156-159).
- 21 The Hongs refer their readers to a passage in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (4.8.5). A similar passage occurs in Xenophon’s *Apology*, where Socrates claims that his daimonion twice opposed him when he tried to consider in advance what to say at his defense (*Xen. Ap.* 4); he later adds, “the gods [*hoi theoi*] were right to oppose me and prevent me from working on my speech when we thought that we ought to find some way to secure my acquittal, whatever it took” (8; I quote the Tredennick and Waterfield translation). See Robin Waterfield, *Xenophon: Conversations of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield (London: Penguin, 1990). Cf. Plato, *Ap.* 40a-b, where Socrates notes that his daimonion has not opposed him during the day of his trial: “My divine sign has not opposed me, either when I left home at dawn, or when I came into court, or at any time that I was about to say something during my speech. Yet in other talks it often held me back in the middle of my speaking, but now it has opposed no word or deed of mine.”
- 22 *PV* 24-25 (*SVI* 13, 518-519; trans. modified following *PV_L* 6-7). Cf. Plato, *Ap.* 30d-e: “Indeed, men of Athens, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god’s gift to you by condemning me.” On some of the senses in which Plato’s *Apology* is “something other than a defense, as that term is generally understood,” see R. E. Allen, “Irony and

- Rhetoric in Plato's *Apology*," in *Socrates and Legal Obligation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 4.
- 23 When I first learned of the existence of *The Point of View*, I immediately sought out my own copy. Upon being informed that it was out of print (this was 1993 before the new translation by the Hongs had become available), I went straight to my neighborhood used-book store and was rewarded for my effort with the discovery of a 1939 edition of Walter Lowrie's translation. Later that night I began with the first page and immediately realized that this was a book I would not put down until I had read it all the way through. It is one of Kierkegaard's finest literary achievements and repays multiple readings. (Compare the experience a reader of Nietzsche might have upon first encountering *Ecce Homo*.)
- 24 Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus puts it this way: "As if in a purely legal sense an author were the best interpreter of his own words, as if it could help a reader that an author 'intended this and that' when it was not carried out; or as if it were certain that it had been carried out, since the author himself says so in the preface" (*CUP* 252; *SKS* 7, 229, 5-9). See also Chapter 1, note 50.
- 25 This broadly deconstructive literary critical approach has been pursued by, among others, Christopher Norris, "Fictions of Authority: Narrative and Viewpoint in Kierkegaard's Writing," in *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1983); Louis Mackey, "Points of View for His Work as an Author: A Report From History," in *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1986); Joakim Garff, "Argus' Øjne: 'Synspunktet' og synspunkterne for Kierkegaards 'Forfatter-Virksomhed' [The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View With Respect to Kierkegaard's 'Activity as an Author']," *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 52 (1989); reprinted in *Kierkegaardiana* 15 (1991), trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse; Stuart Dalton, "How to Avoid Writing: Prefaces and Points of View in Kierkegaard," *Philosophy Today* 44 (2000). Garff's paper in particular is especially to be recommended.
- 26 Dalton, e.g., in what would be a brilliant parody of the deconstructive approach to Kierkegaard's texts (if it were meant as a parody), argues that *On My Work as an Author* is "an ironic review of his own work that Kierkegaard published in order to protect his authorship from being reduced to a paragraph in a book review, or a paragraph in the System" (Dalton, "How to Avoid Writing," 130). That other, supposedly less able readers have missed this irony may be due, according to Dalton, to the fact that "Kierkegaard presents himself with a completely straight face," making it difficult for readers to find the irony unless they are well acquainted with the pseudonymous writings (how exactly, however, a familiarity with the pseudonymous works leads to the genuine detection of irony in *On My Work as an Author* remains a bit mysterious). Dalton even concedes that "there is *nothing* in the tone of this piece to tip off the reader that the text is not to be taken at face value" (italics mine). Difficult indeed!
- 27 *MWA* 6 (*SVI* 13, 495).
- 28 *PV* 23 (*SVI* 13, 517-518; trans. modified).

- 29 Of course, it might be argued that the religious “response” to “The Seducer’s Diary” appears in the second volume of *Either/Or*, in the concluding section called the “Ultimatum” (*EO2* 335-354; *SKS* 3, 315-332). See Robert L. Perkins, “Either/Or/Or: Giving the Parson His Due,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part II*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995); Law, “*Either/Or's* Ultimatum.”
- 30 *PV* 53 (*SVI* 13, 540-541; trans. modified). See also *MWA* 7 (*SVI* 13, 495); *JP* 1: 653 at 288 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 85, 24); *WL* 276-277 (*SKS* 9, 274-275); *BA* 171 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 12 at 59). Cf. James Conant, “Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors [PTTT],” in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, eds. Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 283-285.
- 31 It might seem scandalous for Kierkegaard to associate Socrates in any way with the use of deception. Vlastos, e.g., takes particular issue with Kierkegaard’s having imputed such a dubious character trait to Socrates. See Gregory Vlastos, “Does Socrates Cheat?,” in *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 132 (note 4); “Socrates’ Disavowal of Knowledge,” in *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65. Kierkegaard, however, strenuously objects to what he calls “a scrupulous and pusillanimous conception of the duty to speak the truth, a conception that leads, consistently, to being totally silent for fear of saying something untrue.” He argues that sometimes “teleological suspension in relation to communication of the truth (temporarily suppressing something precisely in order that the truth can become truer) is a plain duty to the truth” (*PV* 88-89; *SVI* 13, 573-574; trans. modified). As we’ll see below in section 2.3, Kierkegaard has in mind the particular situation where a reader or interlocutor is under the illusion that her life has a certain character when it does not (she thinks she knows what she does not). In such cases we might say that in a certain sense she is not in her right mind and so perhaps is incapable of being told the truth in a straightforward manner (the illusion that she is under stands in the way). Accordingly, Kierkegaard thinks that in such a case the person under the illusion must be led towards the truth by more indirect, so deceptive, means. It is not at all obvious to me that Socrates is opposed to the use of such indirect devices, provided that they are in the service of greater clarity and self-understanding. Compare Socrates’ discussion in Plato’s *Republic* of how the use of falsehood is sometimes not only justified but can actually serve as a kind of *medicine* for a person who is not in her right mind: “When any of those whom we call our friends owing to madness or folly attempts to do some wrong, does it [falsehood in words] not then become useful to avert the evil—as a medicine?” (382c; I quote Shorey’s translation). Cf. 331c: “Everyone I presume would admit, if one took over weapons from a friend who was in his right mind and then the lender should go mad and demand them back, that we ought not to return them in that case and that he who did so return them would not be acting justly—nor yet would he who chose to speak nothing but the truth to one who was in that state.” See Paul Shorey, *Plato: Republic*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

- 32 There's a real danger of becoming too concerned with how Kierkegaard classifies various texts (as one can become too concerned with whether a given Platonic dialogue is from an early, middle, or late period). This can (and has) become a sideshow that often distracts from the goal of reading well the particular texts in question. For sake of completeness, the other texts besides *The Concept of Irony* and Kierkegaard's other early publications that fall outside the classificatory scheme edifying-or-pseudonymous include: (1) *Two Ages, A Literary Review*, published in 1846 under Kierkegaard's own name and which he says was by him "qua critic and not qua author" (MWA 10; SVI 13, 498—see TA; SKS 8, 7-106); (2) *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, published in 1849 under the initials H. H. and which Kierkegaard calls "anonymous" (rather than pseudonymous), claiming that it "does not stand in the authorship as much as it relates totally to the authorship...it defines the boundary of the authorship" (MWA 6; SVI 13, 494—see WA 47-108; SVI 11, 49-109); (3) the cycle of writings Kierkegaard published during the last year of his life, which include the numerous newspaper articles he published in *The Fatherland* and the serial he brought out called *The Moment* (see M; SVI 14); and (4) *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* themselves, two texts that arguably occupy a role analogous to the one he assigns to *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, since they also do not stand "in the authorship" as much as they relate "totally to the authorship."
- 33 See *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* and *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (SKS 5). Interestingly, when Kierkegaard discusses in *The Point of View* what he calls the "first division" of his writings, he first records the pseudonymous writings that he published between 1843-1845 and then adds "together with the eighteen upbuilding discourses, which came out successively" (PV 29; SVI 13, 521). For whatever reason he neglects to mention *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (published in 1845). Cf. CUP 257 (SKS 7, 233, 24); CUP 273 (SKS 7, 248, 4 and 23); CUP 256 (SKS 7, 233, 4-5), where Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus maintains that these early edifying works are "philosophical" and even "speculative" ("since they use only ethical categories of immanence, not the doubly reflected religious categories in the paradox"). This designation gains significance since, contra Garff's suggestion that Climacus is "unacquainted" with Kierkegaard ("Eyes of Argus," 31), Climacus makes clear that he and Magister Kierkegaard (who, after all, is the editor of both of his books) are on regular speaking terms: "Oddly enough, according to what the Magister told me, it turned out that some promptly called the upbuilding discourses sermons" (CUP 257; SKS 7, 233, 14-16). Cf. Pap. VI B 98, 52; Pap. VI B 41, 8 (these are cited at CUP2 64 and are from a draft of CUP).
- 34 See especially MWA 7-8 (SVI 13, 496); PV 29 (SVI 13, 521); PV 55 (SVI 13, 542). In both *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* Kierkegaard expressly designates as the "purely religious production" the three works that he published from 1847-1848: *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Works of Love*, and *Christian Discourses* (SKS 8-10; see PV 29; SVI 13, 521; MWA 8; SVI 13, 496-497). In a footnote in *On My Work as an Author*, he draws attention to two further religious works that were also published in 1849: (1) *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air, Three Devotional Discourses*; (2) "The High Priest"—"The Tax Collector"—"The Woman Who Was a Sinner," *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (both works are in WA; SVI 11; see MWA 6; SVI 13, 494).

- Kierkegaard published two further edifying works that he does not address in *On My Work as an Author*: (3) *An Upbuilding Discourse* (1850); (4) *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (1851, published the same day as *On My Work as An Author*; they are both in WA; SVI 12).
- 35 For a recent account of the specifically Christian religious works that Kierkegaard published from 1847-1851, see Sylvia Walsh, *Living Christianly: Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Christian Existence* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).
- 36 See especially PV 29 (SVI 13, 521); PV 31 (SVI 13, 523); PV 41-55 (SVI 13, 529-542); MWA 7 (SVI 13, 496).
- 37 PV 31 (SVI 13, 523; trans. modified); see also MWA 8 (SVI 13, 496).
- 38 MWA 6 (SVI 13, 494). These two works were published after Kierkegaard had completed the manuscript for *The Point of View*, and so do not figure in his reflections about his authorship in that work. Nor do they figure in the main argument of "The Accounting" in *On My Work as an Author*, though the pseudonymous author of these works, Anti-Climacus, is referred to in a footnote in "The Accounting" (from which I am quoting) and at two later points in *On My Work as an Author* (MWA 15; SVI 13, 505; MWA 18; SVI 13, 507).
- 39 The cycle of writings that Kierkegaard published in the last year or so of his life might be said to constitute a fourth phase in his authorship, but these works fall outside the scope of his reflections in *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*.
- 40 Kierkegaard claims that in this period, "the voluminous works were aesthetic" (MWA 8; SVI 13, 497).
- 41 PV 31 (SVI 13, 523). Kierkegaard did not publish any edifying works in 1846.
- 42 PV 31 (SVI 13, 523; trans. modified); MWA 8 (SVI 13, 497). Kierkegaard claims that "there appeared at the end (when for a long period everything was exclusively and voluminously a purely religious production) a little aesthetic article by [the pseudonym] Inter et Inter" (MWA 8; SVI 13, 497; trans. modified). This article, entitled "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress," is dated the summer of 1847 and was published in 1848 in four parts in *The Fatherland*. See C 301-325 (SVI 10, 323-344).
- 43 See note 36.
- 44 Conant, PTTT, 257. It's worth noting, however, that Conant is here discussing the *Postscript*, a work that Kierkegaard actually denies is an aesthetic work. See note 37. See also Chapter 5, section 5.2.; PTTT, 261: "Kierkegaard's primary concern in a work such as the *Postscript* is with what comes to pass when modern philosophy attempts to address itself to that which belongs properly to the categories of the ethical and the religious. What tends to happen, Kierkegaard thinks, when modern (speculative) philosophy attempts, for example, to clarify the category of the religious (and specifically the nature of Christianity) is that it *fails to encounter it* altogether. His view is that whenever modern philosophy tries to speak to the question of what it is to be a Christian, it unwittingly transforms a religious problem into an intellectual (i.e. epistemic or metaphysical) problem" (italics mine).

- 45 Cf. C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 34.
- 46 See "The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical Erotic" (*EOI* 45-135; *SKS* 2, 53-136); "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama" (*EOI* 137-164; *SKS* 2, 137-162).
- 47 In Danish: "verdanskuelse." Kierkegaard invites this comparison at *PV* 37 (*SVI* 13, 528).
- 48 *EO2* 179 (*SKS* 3, 175, 9-11).
- 49 Compare Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* as discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which he contrasts the life of pleasure, the political life (of honor and/or virtue), and the life of contemplation (*NE* 1095^b16-19).
- 50 The specifically Christian is arguably a further life-view, distinct from that of the (generically) religious. See Chapter 5, note 125.
- 51 *EOI* 13 (*SKS* 2, 21, 1-4). Judge William has an extended discussion of the aesthetic life-view at *EO2* 179-195 (*SKS* 3, 175-189). See also, e.g., the discussion of competing conceptions of suffering in the *Postscript*, where Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus contrasts an aesthetic life-view with a religious life-view (*CUP* 431ff.; *SKS* 7, 392ff.).
- 52 In his journals Kierkegaard puts it this way: "My concern was to present the various stages of existence in one work if possible—and this is how I regard the whole pseudonymous production" (*JP* 5: 5893; *SKS* 20, NB: 14, 1-3; trans. modified). See, e.g., *SLW* 476-477 (*SKS* 6, 439, 4-17); *CUP* 501 (*SKS* 7, 455, 1-2); *CUP* 294 (*SKS* 7, 268, 15-18). For a clear exposition of these categories, along with a discussion of the specifically Christian life-view, see Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*.
- 53 *CUP* 288 (*SKS* 7, 263, 2-5; trans. modified).
- 54 *CUP* 572 (*SKS* 7, 519, 30-36).
- 55 Cf. Conant, PTTT, 313-314 (note 37).
- 56 It is less clear in what sense a person might possess capacities associated with a higher life-view. An ethically-minded person, for example, can certainly take part to some extent in religious practices, employ religious concepts, etc. But insofar as her life is organized around an ethical outlook, she arguably will not be in possession of religious capacities that are more intimately tied to a person's having a religious life-view.
- 57 *MWA* 8 (*SVI* 13, 497). On the existential ranking of different life-views, see Chapter 5, section 5.4 (especially note 124).
- 58 See, e.g., *PV* 55 (*SVI* 13, 542); *MWA* 5-6 (*SVI* 13, 494). See also section 2.3.
- 59 See, e.g., *CUP* 318 (*SKS* 7, 290, 8-9): "The aesthetic and intellectual are disinterested."
- 60 *PC* 233-234 (*SVI* 12, 213-214).
- 61 *CUP* 324 (*SKS* 7, 18-22). Cf. *CUP* 561 (*SKS* 7, 510, 10-13); *CUP* 580 (*SKS* 7, 527, 33-34).

- 62 Conant, PTTT, 257.
- 63 On the party of aesthetes in *Stages*, see “In Vino Veritas,” *SLW* 7-86 (*SKS* 6, 15-84). With respect to the non-aesthetic life-views that are exhibited by some of the pseudonyms, Judge William purportedly has an ethical life-view in both *Either/Or* and the second part of *Stage's on Life's Way*; *Fear and Trembling's* Johannes de silentio arguably has an even more developed ethical life-view (which incorporates elements of the religious life, namely infinite resignation; cf. John Lippitt, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39); while the pseudonyms Frater Taciturnus (pseudonymous author of the third part of *Stages on Life's Way*) and Johannes Climacus are each represented to have a humorous life-view (*CUP* 291; *SKS* 7, 265, 21-22; *CUP* 617; *SKS* 7, 560, 1-7), a view of life that Climacus holds ranks existentially higher than the ethical life-view but lower than the religious life-view. See especially *CUP* 520-521 (*SKS* 7, 472-474). I discuss the Kierkegaardian conception of humor further in Chapter 5, section 5.4.
- 64 M. Holmes Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver: The Nature and Meaning of His Pseudonymous Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 22.
- 65 Hartshorne, *Godly Deceiver*, 24.
- 66 Hartshorne, *Godly Deceiver*, 11.
- 67 Kierkegaard seems to recognize this distinction between aesthetic criticism and aesthetic production when he claims that one of his works, “the literary review of *Two Ages*,” is “not, after all, aesthetic in the sense of poetic production but is critical” (*PV* 31; *SVI* 13, 523; trans. modified).
- 68 George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 120. Cf. *AN* 130 (*Pap.* X.5 B 107, 289-290): “The medium for being a Christian has been shifted from existence and the ethical to the intellectual, the metaphysical, the imaginal; a more or less theatrical relationship has been introduced between thinking Christianity and being a Christian—and in this way has abolished being a Christian.”
- 69 *PV* 92 (*SVI* 13, 577).
- 70 *PV* 53 (*SVI* 13, 540; trans. modified; I have removed Kierkegaard's italics).
- 71 *CUP* 313 (*SKS* 7, 285, 30-33).
- 72 Compare the predicament often faced by Socrates, where his interlocutors frequently imagine that they already know something and so do not feel a need to investigate the matter further. Socrates' first order of business is to reduce them to perplexity (*aporia*), to undercut their confidence so that they no longer think they know what they do not know. See, e.g., Plato, *Meno* 84a-c (Socrates is describing to Meno the progress that Meno's young attendant has made): “At first he did not know...; even now he does not know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself at a loss [*aporein*], but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows...now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before

- he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences..." (cf. 80a-b, where Meno claims that talking with Socrates has made him "quite perplexed," making "both [his] mind and [his] tongue numb" so that he finds himself unable to give an account of what virtue is despite the fact that in the past he has "made many speeches about virtue, before large audiences on a thousand occasions").
- 73 PV 41 (SVI 13, 529-530; trans. modified). See also PV 23 (SVI 13, 517-518): "My entire work as an author pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aim at that enormous illusion Christendom, or the illusion that in such a country all are Christians of a sort" (trans. modified). On Kierkegaard's status as a philosopher who diagnoses and seeks to remove illusions, see, e.g., Stanley Cavell, "Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy," *Dædalus* 93 (1964); reprinted in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), esp. 217-234; O. K. Bouwsma, "Notes on Kierkegaard's 'The Monstrous Illusion'," in *Without Proof or Evidence*, eds. J. L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Conant, PTTT, 271-281.
- 74 PV 42 (SVI 13, 530-531).
- 75 PV 43 (SVI 13, 531-532); PV 45 (SVI 13, 533; I have changed Kierkegaard's use of the second person "you" in this last sentence to the third person singular "one").
- 76 PV 43 (SVI 13, 531).
- 77 The terms "indirect communication" (*indirecte/indirekte Meddelelse*) and "direct communication" (*ligefrem/directe/direkte Meddelelse*), though often assigned great significance within Kierkegaard's thought, are surprisingly rare in the published writings. All but a small handful of references appear in just four texts: Climacus' *Postscript* (see especially CUP 72-80; SKS 7, 73-80; CUP 242-243; SKS 7, 220-221; CUP 249-250; SKS 7, 226-227; CUP 274-278; SKS 7, 249-254), Anti-Climacus' *Practice in Christianity* (see especially PC 123-144; SVI 12, 115-134), and *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*. Kierkegaard also planned to deliver a series of lectures on indirect communication. While he did not end up ever delivering these lectures, he did leave behind some of the material he had drafted in late 1847/early 1848. See JP 1: 648-657 (*Pap. VIII.2 B 79-89*). For one particularly fine discussion of indirect communication, see Poul Lübcke, "Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication," *History of European Ideas* 12 (1990). Lübcke's paper very helpfully argues against the common tendency among Kierkegaard scholars to conceive of indirect communication as "a semantic problem," as "an attempt to express the inexpressible," as though there were "something in the world which we cannot express in words and understand using a so-called 'direct communication' " (31-32). Instead Lübcke suggests that indirect communication is primarily a matter of pragmatics, concerning not "the relation of signs to their designata and so to the objects which they may or do denote" but "the relation between language users and signs" (32). While I am not as convinced as Lübcke seems to be that we can always draw a sharp distinction between "the understanding of what is said" (semantics) and "the interested decision, wherein the individual applies what is understood and accepted to his life" (pragmatics), I think his paper nevertheless

- points us in the right direction. See also James Conant, "Must We Show What We Cannot Say? [MWS]," in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, eds. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989); Paul Muench, "The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of 'Taking Away,'" in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, eds. Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003).
- 78 Commenting upon the art that is involved in the successful use of indirect communication, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus also includes under the scope of direct communication those situations where what is communicated is communicated not in order to remove ignorance but to be presented to an expert for her assessment: "Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense different from what one ordinarily assumes it to be in supposing that the communicator has to present the communication to a knower, so that he can judge it, or to a nonknower, so that he can acquire something to know" (*CUP 277*; *SKS 7*, 250-251). I discuss this passage in Muench, "Climacus' Socratic Method," 141-142. See also Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.
- 79 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541)*.
- 80 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541)*. Cf. *MWA 8 (SVI 13, 496)*: "In relation to pure receptivity, like the empty vessel that is to be filled, direct communication is appropriate" (trans. modified; I have removed Kierkegaard's italics).
- 81 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541)*.
- 82 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541; trans. modified)*.
- 83 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541; trans. modified)*. Compare those cases where the lost work of a master painter is recovered when a layer of paint is removed from a canvas; the masterpiece had been painted over, perhaps to hide it or simply because it wasn't recognized as such and someone else needed the canvas.
- 84 *PV 43 (SVI 13, 531)*.
- 85 *PV 43-44 (SVI 13, 532)*.
- 86 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541)*.
- 87 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541; italics mine; trans. modified)*.
- 88 *PV 54 (SVI 13, 541)*. While readily acknowledging that Socrates "was no Christian," Kierkegaard claims that he is nevertheless "convinced that he has become one." He then attests to the value that Socrates has had for him: "Qualitatively two altogether different magnitudes are involved here, but formally I can very well call Socrates my teacher—whereas I have believed and believe in only one, the Lord Jesus Christ" (*PV 54-55; SVI 13, 541-542*). Cf. *FSE 9 (SVI 12, 301)*, where Kierkegaard, speaking of Socrates (calling him "that simple wise person of antiquity"), says he is someone "whom I cannot in a Christian sense be said to owe anything—indeed, he was a pagan—but to whom I nevertheless feel personally very indebted, and who also lived in circumstances that in my opinion quite correspond to our situation today."

- 89 This presumably will vary depending on a given pseudonymous work and the means that are employed to engage the reader. In the second part of this dissertation we will consider in more detail how the pseudonym Johannes Climacus engages his readers in his two books, *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Postscript*.
- 90 *PV* 88 (*SVI* 13, 573).
- 91 *PV* 44 (*SVI* 13, 532); *PV* 46 (*SVI* 13, 534).
- 92 *MWA* 9 (*SVI* 13, 497).
- 93 *PV* 36 (*SVI* 13, 526).
- 94 *CUP* 284 (*SKS* 7, 258, 27-28).
- 95 *PV* 44 (*SVI* 13, 532); *MWA* 7 (*SVI* 13, 496; trans. modified). Kierkegaard notes that “what follows from this [a person’s being made aware] no one can predict, but he must become aware. It is possible that he actually comes to his senses about what it was supposed to mean that he has called himself a Christian. It is possible that he becomes enraged with the person who has ventured to [make him become aware]; but he has become aware, he is beginning to judge” (*PV* 51-52; *SVI* 13, 539; trans. modified).
- 96 *PV* 51 (*SVI* 13, 539). Cf. *MWA* 9 (*SVI* 13, 497-498): “At the very same time when the sensation *Either/Or* created was at its peak, at that very same time appeared *Two Upbuilding Discourses* (1843).”
- 97 At one point Kierkegaard wonders whether “it actually occurred to anyone for a single moment, when he saw *Either/Or*, that its author was a religious person, or that he himself, if he were to follow my work as an author, would in two or three years speedily find himself right in the middle of the most decisive Christian writings” (*PV* 85-86; *SVI* 13, 570).
- 98 *PV* 23-24 (*SVI* 13, 518; italics mine; trans. modified, partly following *PV*_L 6). Compare Wittgenstein’s closing words in the *Tractatus*: “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands *me* finally recognizes *them* as nonsensical...” (6.54; italics mine). See Cora Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” in *Bilder der Philosophie*, eds. Richard Heinrich and Helmuth Vetter (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1991); reprinted in *The New Wittgenstein*, eds. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 150; Conant, PTTT, 285.
- 99 Kierkegaard claims that the pseudonym Johannes Climacus will “draw attention to the path being traced by the first group of pseudonymous writings” in his “A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature” (*CUP* 251-300; *SKS* 7, 228-273), which Kierkegaard calls “a section with which [he] would ask the reader to become familiar” (*PV* 31; *SVI* 13, 523). See Chapter 3, section 3.4.
- 100 *MWA* 5-6 (*SVI* 13, 494); *PV* 55 (*SVI* 13, 542); *PV* 78 (*SVI* 13, 563; all three trans. modified; I have added italics to the last passage). When Kierkegaard draws attention to the pseudonyms’ sometimes calling themselves police officers and street inspectors, I take it that he means to suggest that they are active participants in the authorship and join him, the

- author of the pseudonymous authors, in seeking to move readers back from the aesthetic and the speculative towards the Christianly religious.
- 101 Cf. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, 57.
- 102 *PV* 78 (*SVI* 13, 563); cf. *PV* 35 (*SVI* 13, 526).
- 103 *PV* 77-78; (*SVI* 13, 562-563).
- 104 Cf. *Pap.* X.6 B 145 at 204, 29-33.
- 105 *PV* 37 (*SVI* 13, 528).
- 106 *PV* 94 (*SVI* 13, 579). *Fragments* and the *Postscript* clearly have closely related philosophical concerns. The pseudonymous author of both works, Johannes Climacus, describes the main part of the *Postscript* as “a renewed attempt in the same vein as the pamphlet [*Fragments*]” (*CUP* 17; *SKS* 7, 26, 25-26). At one point Kierkegaard even claims that he has described “in a series of books” what he typically assigns just to the *Postscript*: “the movement...from the philosophical, the systematic...” (*PV* 120; *SVI* 13, 606). Thus I think there are grounds for treating *Fragments* as also playing a part in tracing the second path (we will discuss in greater detail the differences between *Fragments* and the *Postscript* in the second part of this dissertation). While *Fragments* is clearly included by Kierkegaard in what he calls his aesthetic production, it is the only member of this class that shares with the *Postscript* and the later more explicitly Christian pseudonymous works by Anti-Climacus the rare status of Kierkegaard's having included his name on the title page as editor (cf. *PV* 31-32; *SVI* 13, 523). Though *Fragments* does not openly address Christianity the way that the *Postscript* does (and only mentions it by name at the very end of the work), Kierkegaard claims to have included his name as editor because “the absolute significance of the subject required in actuality the expression of dutiful attention, that there was a named person responsible for taking upon himself what actuality might offer” in response to such a work (*FLE* 627; *SKS* 7, 570, 32-34). Cf. Niels Thulstrup, *Søren Kierkegaard: Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift udgivet med Indledning og Kommentar*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962); reprinted *Commentary on Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Robert J. Widenmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 115-116. See also note 13 above.
- 107 See *PV* 31 (*SVI* 13, 523).
- 108 *PV* 55 (*SVI* 13, 542). See the first paragraph of section 2.2.
- 109 *PV* 31 (*SVI* 13, 523); cf. *MWA* 8 (*SVI* 13, 496).
- 110 *MWA* 9 (*SVI* 13, 497); see also *PV* 115 (*SVI* 13, 601).
- 111 *PV* 92 (*SVI* 13, 577). For example, the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus predicts that most of his readers will stop reading quidam's diary out of boredom: “I pronounce the matchless prophecy that two-thirds of the book's readers will quit before they are halfway through, which can also be expressed in this way—out of boredom they will stop reading and throw the book away” (*SLW* 398; *SKS* 6, 369, 10-14). See also *CUP* 287 (*SKS* 7, 261, 29-30) and Chapter 5, section 5.1.

- 112 *JP* 6: 6223 (*SKS* 21, NB6: 54).
- 113 *PV* 93 (*SVI* 13, 578).
- 114 *JP* 6: 6308 (*SKS* 21, NB9: 39, 8-11). One of the ways that Kierkegaard conceives of his authorship is as an activity whereby he personally seeks to overcome what he takes to be an inherent tension between his desire both to be a writer and to do philosophy and his desire to devote himself to a religious life: "The process is this: a poetic and philosophic nature is set aside in order to become a Christian" (*PV* 77; *SVI* 13, 562).
- 115 *MWA* 7 (*SVI* 13, 495-496; trans. modified; I have removed Kierkegaard's use of bold and italics); cf. *PV* 31 (*SVI* 13, 523). Kierkegaard sometimes characterizes Socrates as a midwife ("en Gjordemoder") or a practitioner of the art of midwifery ("Gjordemoderkunsten"), and frequently employs the term "maieutic" ("maeutisk," "det Maieutiske") to characterize the Socratic manner of approach.
- 116 *JP* 6: 6786 (*Pap.* X.6 B 145 at 203; trans. modified). As a rule of thumb, Kierkegaard restricts his use of indirect communication to whatever role is played by the pseudonymous works within his authorship, while he classifies the edifying speeches as direct communication. Furthermore, he also maintains that works about his authorship such as *On My Work as an Author* also represent direct communication: "It must be pointed out that here [in *On My Work as an Author*] it is not a question of direct communication, pure and simple, for this is not really the first instance of that, since all the upbuilding writing has been direct communication. No, it is direct communication *about the authorship*, about the total authorship, an authorship which has consisted of indirect communication through the pseudonyms and then of direct communication in the upbuilding" (*JP* 6: 6701; *Pap.* X.3 A 629; italics mine).
- 117 *MWA* 7 (*SVI* 13, 496; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 118 *JP* 5: 5991 (*SKS* 20, NB: 160).
- 119 *JP* 6: 6654 (*Pap.* X.3 A 258; trans. modified).
- 120 Kierkegaard claims that "a crowd makes for impenitence and irresponsibility altogether, or for the single individual it at least weakens responsibility by reducing the responsibility [of the individual] to a fraction" (*PV* 107; *SVI* 13, 593-594). For one discussion of Kierkegaard's conception of a "crowd" and what he calls "the public," see "For the Dedication to 'That Single Individual'," the first of two brief essays that Kierkegaard attached as a supplement to *The Point of View* (*PV* 105-112; *SVI* 13, 591-598).
- 121 *MWA* 9 (*SVI* 13, 497; I have removed Kierkegaard's use of bold and italics). Compare Socrates' claim that while he does not engage with "the many" (*hoi polloi*), he does know how to engage his individual interlocutor: "For I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I'm saying, and that's the man I'm having a discussion with. The many I disregard. And I do know how to call for a vote from one man, but I don't even discuss things with the many" (Plato, *Grg.* 474a-b; trans. modified).

- 122 *PV* 117 (*SVI* 13, 603). This passage appears in “A Word on the Relation of My Work as an Author to ‘the Single Individual’,” the second of two brief essays that Kierkegaard attached as a supplement to *The Point of View* (*PV* 113-124; *SVI* 13, 599-610). Kierkegaard assigns great importance to this notion of the single individual, claiming that in it lies “an idea (the single individual versus the public) in which a whole life- and world-view is concentrated” (*PV* 37; *SVI* 13, 528). At one point he even suggests that any ethical significance that he has as a writer and thinker can be traced to his employment of this category: “My possible ethical significance is unconditionally linked to the category *the single individual*” (*PV* 119; *SVI* 13, 605). Furthermore, by appealing to this notion Kierkegaard once again ties his task to what he claims was accomplished by Socrates in Athens. He calls Socrates the “inventor” of the category of the single individual and maintains that previously it “has been used only once, its first time, in a decisively dialectical way, by Socrates, in order to disintegrate paganism” (*PV* 69; *SVI* 13, 554; *PV* 123; *SVI* 13, 609).
- 123 Socrates develops the comparison between midwifery and his practice of philosophy at *Tht.* 148e-151d.
- 124 See especially *CI* 29 (*SKS* 1, 91, 9-12); *CI* 191 (*SKS* 1, 238, 1-5); *PF* 10-11 (*SKS* 4, 219-220); *CUP* 80 (*SKS* 7, 80, 10-12); *WL* 276-278 (*SKS* 9, 274-276).
- 125 149a.
- 126 148e; 149a (trans. modified). Theaetetus may have heard some of these things about Socrates from his peers, the youth who are often in Socrates’ company (*Ap.* 23c). Cf. Plato, *Chrm.* 156a: “You [Socrates] are no small topic of conversation among us boys”; *Lch.* 180e: “When the boys here are talking to each other at home, they often mention Socrates and praise him highly.”
- 127 149a. Noting “the power of the image” of the midwife and how it seems to strike people “as so absolutely the ‘right’ representation of what Socrates does,” Myles Burnyeat has interestingly argued that Theaetetus’ never having heard anyone characterize Socrates as a midwife is just one of the explicit signposts in the text by which “Plato makes it abundantly clear that the comparison is *not*, in any sense, to be attributed to the historical Socrates”; that is, that this was not “how Socrates himself viewed his role as educator of the young.” See Myles Burnyeat, “Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 24 (1977); reprinted in *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 53-54.
- 128 150b. Socrates is not commonly portrayed having discussions with women. For one important exception, see his discussion with Diotima about love (Plato, *Smp.* 201d-212c). See also Plato, *Mx.* 235e (where Socrates claims that Aspasia is his “teacher of oratory”); Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.11 (an exchange between Socrates and “a beautiful woman called Theodote”); *Smp.* 2.10, where Socrates replies to Antisthenes’ claim that Xanthippe (Socrates’ wife) “is of all living women...the most difficult to get on with,” by maintaining, “since I wish to deal and associate with people, I have provided myself with this wife, because I’m quite sure that, if I can put up with her, I shall find it easy to get on with any

- other human being.” Xenophon notes that Socrates’ “explanation was not thought to be far off the mark.” In Waterfield, *Xenophon: Conversations of Socrates*, 167-171; 232.
- 129 149c-d.
- 130 151b. Socrates says that in such cases he plays the role of matchmaker and tries to determine “with whom they might profitably keep company” (often proposing, perhaps ironically, that it would be best if they spent some time with Prodicus or one of the other sophists).
- 131 151a.
- 132 Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 337a.
- 133 150c-d; trans. modified following John McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). There appears to be an ambiguity in the Greek verb “gennaô” that the Levett/Burnyeat translation nicely captures with “procreate”: *LSJ*, I, 1: “...of the father, beget...of the mother, bring forth, bear...” Socrates appears both to be denying that the god has allowed him to become pregnant and thereby to give birth (since he is ignorant, there are no intellectual children within him to be brought forth), while also denying that the god has allowed him to impregnate others (for his ignorance makes him unable to beget the intellectual children of those with whom he converses).
- 134 150d (italics mine; trans. modified). Cf. Plato, *Chrm.* 160d: “Start over again, Charmides,...and look into yourself with greater concentration...” Kierkegaard discusses in his dissertation why some of those who conversed with Socrates might nevertheless feel that what they had discovered within themselves had come from him: “[Socrates] had turned his pupils’ gazes inward, and therefore in gratitude the gifted ones were bound to feel that they owed it to him” (*CI* 188; *SKS* 1, 235, 31-33). He suggests that Plato, in particular, was one of the worst cases: “...how much this grateful pupil not only believed he owed Socrates but also how much this adoring youth with youthful ardor wished to owe him—because he cherished nothing unless it came from Socrates” (*CI* 30; *SKS* 1, 91, 16-19). Cf. Plato, *Ap.* 33a-b.
- 135 150d-e (trans. modified).
- 136 150e.
- 137 150b.
- 138 150c. Socrates’ chief means of testing what people say is, of course, his elenctic method of refutation.
- 139 151e; 160e-161a: “we must take care that we don’t overlook some defect in this thing that is entering into life; it may be something not worth bringing up, a wind-egg [*anemiaion*], a falsehood.”
- 140 151b-c.
- 141 151c-d. *Lêros*, *LSJ*, I, 1: “...of what is showy but useless...a mere *trifle*...”
- 142 210b; 210c.

- 143 210c.
- 144 Recall, however, that the one example Socrates gives of someone with whom those “who do not seem to [him] somehow to be pregnant...might profitably keep company” is—the sophist Prodicus, along with “other wise and inspired persons” (*Tht.* 151b). If pregnancy were to arise from interacting with such a figure, it would not be surprising if any offspring turned out to be of the phantom or wind-egg variety rather than the genuine intellectual children Socrates is perpetually in search of.
- 145 *WL* 276 (*SKS* 9, 274, 18-24; trans. modified). Kierkegaard does not refer to Socrates by name in this passage, instead calling him “that noble, simple soul of ancient times” and “that noble rogue” (the context makes clear that it is Socrates that he has in mind). Socrates is notably absent as a figure in the directly religious writings (those published from 1843-1845; for one exception see *EUD* 336; *SKS* 5, 325, 4). In the exclusively religious writings (published from 1847-1851), it is Kierkegaard’s general practice not to refer to Socrates by name but instead to use the fixed phrase “that simple wise person of antiquity” (*hiin eenfoldige Vise i Oldtiden*) or some variation thereof, as in the present case. See, e.g., *UDVS* 95 (*SKS* 8, 200, 6-7); *WL* 96 (*SKS* 9, 101, 2-3); *CD* 218 (*SKS* 10, 226, 23). For one exception, see *WL* 369 (*SKS* 9, 362, 21-23).
- 146 *PF* 11 (*SKS* 4, 220, 3-4; italics mine); *PF* 10 (*SKS* 4, 219, 4-7). See Chapter 4, section 4.2.2.
- 147 From the point of view of Christianity, this is because everyone is in the fallen state of sin. Ethical and religious truth can only ultimately be obtained through acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s personal savior.
- 148 *PF* 11 (*SKS* 4, 220, 4).
- 149 *PF_s* 6. Entry 3.2 of “at føde” in *Orbog over det danske Sprog* supports Swenson, noting that when this verb is used with respect to fathers it has the same sense as “at avle,” which means “to beget” (see <http://ordnet.dk/ods>).
- 150 Kierkegaard seems to conceive of the pseudonymous works as having above all an ethical aim: “Before the decisively religious is introduced a beginning must be made maieutically with aesthetic works, yet ethically oriented: Either/Or” (*Pap.* X.5 B 173; cited at *PV* 279); “Before there could be any question of even introducing the religious, the ethically strengthening *Either/Or* had to precede, so that maieutically a beginning might be made with aesthetic writings (the pseudonyms) in order if possible to get hold of people, which after all comes first before there can even be any thought of moving them over to the religious” (*JP* 6: 6255; *Pap.* IX B 63, 7; trans. modified).
- 151 *PC* 142 (*SVI* 12, 132); cf. *PC* 131 (*SVI* 12, 122); *PC* 143 (*SVI* 12, 133).
- 152 *PC* 125 (*SVI* 12, 117); *JP* 1: 650, 15 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 82; trans. modified). On the importance of “self-activity” see also *CUP* 242-244 (*SKS* 7, 220-222).
- 153 *WL* 277 (*SKS* 9, 275, 23-24). Kierkegaard claims that his use of a dash (“—”) gives the phrase “to stand alone—through another’s help” an ironic form that marks the need for the midwife’s help to remain hidden from the one she seeks to engage: “The first statement says

- one thing, and that which comes after the dash ironically slips in the opposite as the explanation. To stand alone is not to stand through another's help, but the maieutic's help is hidden, and therefore the ironical 'to stand alone—through another's help' ” (*JP* 1: 650, 15; *Pap.* VIII.2 B 82, 15; trans. modified). Cf. *WL* 277 (*SKS* 9, 275, 7-12).
- 154 *JP* 1: 651 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 83); *JP* 1: 649, 24 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 81, 22); *JP* 1: 650, 15 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 82, 15; trans. modified). The pseudonym Anti-Climacus puts it this way: “The art consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody....an absentee, an objective something, a nonperson” (*PC* 133; *SVI* 12, 124). Cf. *JP* 1: 657 at 307 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 89); *JP* 1: 653, 23 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 85, 23). This is the shape of indirect communication as it is conceived by Kierkegaard up through and including *The Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*. In the later work *Practice in Christianity*, the pseudonym Anti-Climacus claims that indirect communication “can be produced in two ways”: (1) the communicator employs “double-reflection” and remains personally elusive: 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”; (2) the communicator “is the reduplication of the communication,” where “to exist in what one understands is to reduplicate” (*PC* 133-134; *SVI* 12, 124-125). Our focus will be on the first type of indirect communication. On “double-reflection” see, e.g., *CUP* 72-74 (*SKS* 7, 73-75) and Chapter 5, section 5.3. While I do not agree with many of the details of his discussion, Roger Poole nevertheless has helpfully drawn attention to the distinction between these two types of indirect communication. See Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).
- 155 *JP* 1: 649, 24 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 81, 24).
- 156 *PC* 129 (*SVI* 12, 121); *JP* 1: 653, 24 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 85, 24).
- 157 *PV* 50 (*SVI* 13, 537).
- 158 *WL* 277 (*SKS* 9, 274-275).
- 159 *JP* 1: 109 (*Pap.* X.4 A 388; trans. modified).
- 160 Plato, *Smp.* 215b.
- 161 216e-217a.
- 162 216d.
- 163 See, e.g., *CI* 50-51 (*SKS* 1, 111-112) and Chapter 1, note 48.
- 164 *WL* 276-277 (*SKS* 9, 274, 35-36).
- 165 *JP* 6: 6360 (*SKS* 21, NB10: 68; trans. modified).
- 166 See *PV* 57-70 (*SVI* 13, 543-556). Kierkegaard claims to have adopted two incognitos, the first in conjunction with the (pseudonymous) aesthetic production, the second with the exclusively religious production. Our focus will be on the former.

- 167 *PV 58 (SVI 13, 544); PV 61 (SVI 13, 547-548; trans. modified); PV 69-70 (SVI 13, 555-556)*. The first three words Kierkegaard uses to describe himself in the second passage are arguably synonyms: the Danish terms “dagdriver” and “lediggænger,” and the French term “flâneur” can all mean “loafer.” “Lediggænger” has connotations of being out of work, so idle, whereas “dagdriver” can have connotations of laziness, so of being a slacker. Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes Climacus calls himself a “Lediggænger,” adding that he has a tendency to “loaf” (*at drive*), and calls Socrates a “Dagdriver.” See *PF 5 (SKS 4, 215, 13); CUP 185 (SKS 7, 171, 9-10); CUP 83 (SKS 7, 82, 30)*. See also Chapter 3, section 3.2.1.
- 168 *PV 62 (SVI 13, 548)*.
- 169 It’s worth noting that during the time when Kierkegaard alleges that he had assumed the incognito of the loafer, he continued to published edifying speeches under his own name. He does not, however, to my knowledge address whether, as might reasonably be supposed, he thought such an aesthetic disguise had any effect on his more religiously inclined readers’ willingness to examine his edifying writings.
- 170 *PV 61 (SVI 13, 547); PV 62 (SVI 13, 548; both trans. modified)*.
- 171 *PV 58 (SVI 13, 545; italics mine); PV 59 (SVI 13, 545-546)*.
- 172 *PV 61 (SVI 13, 547)*.
- 173 *JP 5: 5937 at 343-344 (SKS 20, NB: 36 at 40, 15-19; italics mine)*. See also *JP 5: 5896 (SKS 20, NB: 17); JP 5: 6086 (SKS 20, NB3: 50)*.
- 174 *JP 6: 6491 (SKS 22, NB12: 147)*.
- 175 Plato, *Smp.* 216e.
- 176 216d.
- 177 *JP 5: 5899 (SKS 20, NB: 20)*.
- 178 *JP 5: 5892 (SKS 20, NB: 13, 21-22); JP 5: 5942 (SKS 20, NB: 45, 5-6)*.
- 179 *PV 59 (SVI 13, 545)*. Kierkegaard seems to have taken a certain delight in appearing to others to be a loafer while taking himself to be “the most industrious of the younger set.” See *JP 5: 5894 (SKS 20, NB: 15, 12-18)*: “And yet my ironic powers of observation and my soul derived such extraordinary satisfaction from gadding about on the streets and being a nobody in this way while thoughts and ideas were working within me, from being a loafer this way while I was clearly the most industrious of the younger set and appearing irresponsible this way and ‘lacking in earnestness’ while the earnestness of the others could easily become a jest alongside my inner concerns.”
- 180 *PV 65 (SVI 13, 551)*.
- 181 *JP 5: 5942 (SKS 20, NB: 45, 12-15; italics mine; trans. modified)*.
- 182 *PV 76 (SVI 13, 561)*.
- 183 *JP 6: 6346 (SKS 21, NB10: 38 at 276, 20 and 14-15); CUP2 151 (Pap. X.5 B 168 at 363)*.

- 184 *MWA* 12 (*SVI* 13, 500); *JP* 6: 6431 (*SKS* 22, NB11: 204).
- 185 *PV* 77 (*SVI* 13, 562; italics mine). See *PV* 71-90 (*SVI* 13, 556-575).
- 186 *PV* 76-77 (*SVI* 13, 561-562; trans. modified).
- 187 *PV* 73-74 (*SVI* 13, 559); *PV* 76 (*SVI* 13, 561).
- 188 *MWA* 12 (*SVI* 13, 501).
- 189 *PV* 78-79 (*SVI* 13, 563-564).
- 190 *JP* 6: 6533 (*SKS* 22, NB14: 31); *PV* 77 (*SVI* 13, 562).
- 191 Of course, to conclude this about a given pseudonymous work would require just that—a careful examination of a particular text.
- 192 *PV* 77 (*SVI* 13, 562; italics mine; trans. modified); *JP* 6: 6654 (*Pap.* X.3 A 258).
- 193 *Pap.* X.5 B 168 at 363-364 (this is cited at *CUP2* 151 and is from a draft of *PV*; trans. modified).
- 194 See note 191. On Kierkegaard's never-acted-upon desire to become a rural pastor, see note 17.
- 195 *JP* 6: 6440 (*SKS* 22, NB11: 223; trans. modified).
- 196 *JP* 1: 656 at 302 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 88 at 183, 7-17). See Chapter 3, section 3.3 and Chapter 5, section 5.2.
- 197 *JP* 6: 6440 (*SKS* 22, NB11: 223; trans. modified); *JP* 1: 656 at 302 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 88 at 183, 17-21).
- 198 *JP* 1: 650, 13 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 82, 13).
- 199 *MWA* 6 (*SVI* 13, 494). Kierkegaard calls Anti-Climacus “a Christian on an extraordinary level,” but claims that he too has certain limitations: “[Anti-Climacus’] personal guilt, then, is to confuse himself with ideality (this is the demonic in him), but his portrayal of ideality can be absolutely sound, and I bow to it” (*JP* 6: 6431 at 173; *Pap.* X.2 A 510 at 329; *JP* 6: 6433; *SKS* 22, NB11: 209). See also *JP* 6: 6439 (*SKS* 22, NB11: 222).
- 200 *MWA* 6 (*SVI* 13, 494; trans. modified).
- 201 *JP* 6: 6528 (*SKS* 22, NB14: 19).
- 202 *JP* 6: 6431 at 173 (*Pap.* X.2 A 510 at 329; trans. modified).
- 203 *PV* 85-86 (*SVI* 13, 569-570).
- 204 *PV* 86 (*SVI* 13, 570-571).
- 205 *Pap.* VII.1 B 80, 2 (this is cited at *CUP2* 113 and is from a draft of *FLE*).
- 206 *JP* 6: 6433 (*SKS* 22, NB11: 209); *JP* 6: 6532 (*SKS* 22, NB14: 30).
- 207 *JP* 6: 6532 (*SKS* 22, NB14: 30).

- 208 See especially *JP* 2: 1957 (*SKS* 21, NB6: 68); *JP* 2: 1962 (*Pap.* X.4 A 553). See also the conclusion to this dissertation.
- 209 *FLE* 627-628 (*SKS* 7, 571, 18-23; trans. modified).
- 210 *CUP* 257 (*SKS* 7, 234, 29); *FLE* 625 (*SKS* 7, 569, 12-22; trans. modified). Cf. *JP* 5: 5884 (*SKS* 18, JJ: 435).
- 211 *FLE* 628 (*SKS* 7, 571, 24).
- 212 *FLE* 628 (*SKS* 7, 571, 26-28). Cf. Chapter 4, section 4.2.1. On “double-reflection” see Chapter 5, section 5.3.
- 213 *PV* 43 (*SVI* 13, 531; trans. modified, partly following *PV_L* 24-25); *PV* 54 (*SVI* 13, 541).
- 214 *PV* 43 (*SVI* 13, 531).
- 215 *MWA* 8 (*SVI* 13, 496; trans. modified). Cf. *MWA* 15 (*SVI* 13, 505); *JP* 1: 388 (*SKS* 22, NB13: 66).
- 216 Garff, "Eyes of Argus," 44.
- 217 *JP* 6: 6346 (*SKS* 21, NB10: 38 at 276, 11-20; trans. modified).
- 218 *JP* 6: 6346 (*SKS* 21, NB10: 38 at 276, 32-34; trans. modified, partly following Bruce Kirmmse). Quoted in Garff, "Eyes of Argus," 44. Cf. *CI* 90 (*SKS* 1, 146, 20-24): “To have to demonstrate irony through additional research at every single point would, of course, rob it of the surprising, the striking—in short, would enervate it. Irony requires strong contrast and would utterly vanish in such boring company as argumentation” (trans. modified).
- 219 *PV* 91 (*SVI* 13, 576; trans. modified, partly following *PV_L* 93).
- 220 *PV* 34 (*SVI* 13, 525).
- 221 *PV* 34 (*SVI* 13, 525). Kierkegaard adds further that “once the requisite earnestness takes hold, it can also solve [the mystification], but always only in such a way that the earnestness itself vouches for the correctness.”
- 222 Plato, *Ap.* 17c.
- 223 *PV* 23 (*SVI* 13, 517).

- 1 At one point in 1850, Kierkegaard remarks that “in [Socrates’] age to be a human being was comparable to what it is to be a Christian nowadays” (*JP* 1: 390; *Pap.* X.2 A 453).
- 2 *JP* 1: 650, 15 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 82; trans. modified). See section 2.3 and the end of section 2.4 in Chapter 2.
- 3 Their complete titles are as follows: (1) *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy*; (2) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation, An Existential Contribution*. Both works list on their title pages “Johannes Climacus” as the author and “S. Kierkegaard” as the editor (cf. Chapter 2, note 106). The Danish term “smule(r),” which is standardly translated as “fragment(s),” more literally means “bit” or “scrap” or “crumb” (as in the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table). It can also mean “trifle.” A better, less august title, then, of Climacus’ first book might be *Philosophical Crumbs* or *Philosophical Trifles*. Cf. C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 18-19.
- 4 At least in the Anglo-American tradition. On the continent, greater attention has arguably been paid to two other pseudonymous works, Vigilius Haufniensis’ *The Concept of Anxiety* and Anti-Climacus’ *Sickness Unto Death*.
- 5 Notable early essays in English include Stanley Cavell, “Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy,” *Dædalus* 93 (1964); reprinted in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984); Henry E. Allison, “Christianity and Nonsense,” *Review of Metaphysics* 20 (1967); Louis Mackey, “Almost in Earnest: The Philosophy of Johannes Climacus,” in *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). Important longer studies and commentaries include Niels Thulstrup, *Søren Kierkegaard: Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift udgivet med Indledning og Kommentar*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962); reprinted *Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Robert J. Widenmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Niels Thulstrup, “Introduction and Commentary to *Philosophical Fragments*,” in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard’s Thought*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 243-256 and 281-307; Ralph Henry Johnson, *The Concept of Existence in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972); Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard, The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1982); reprinted, revised ed., 1991, 90-156; C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983); H. A. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1983); Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); Evans, *Passionate Reason*; Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading from Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Lafayette, PA: Purdue University Press, 1996); Finn Hauberg Mortensen, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, and Heiko Schulz,

SKS K4: Commentary on Philosophical Fragments (Copenhagen: Gad Publishers, 1998); Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); Michael Lotti, "Who is Johannes Climacus?: Kierkegaard's Portrait of the Philosophical Enterprise" (M. Phil. Thesis, University of Wales, Swansea, 1999); John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000); David E. Mercer, *Kierkegaard's Living Room: Faith and History in Philosophical Fragments* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Tonny Aagaard Olesen, *SKS K7: Commentary on Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Copenhagen: Gad Publishers, 2002); Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994); Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Paul Muench, review of *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 47 (2000); Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, Jon Stewart, and Christian Fink Tolstrup, eds., *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook: Philosophical Fragments* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist, eds., *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook: Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005). Evans' two books are models of clear philosophical prose and remain invaluable; Lippitt's more recent book on the *Postscript* is also especially to be recommended.

- 6 Paul Muench, "The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of 'Taking Away'," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, eds. Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003), 139.
- 7 On Climacus as a Socratic figure in *Fragments*, see especially Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*; Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*. Perhaps due to the sheer size and complexity of the *Postscript* less has been written that specifically focuses on the respects in which Climacus may be a Socratic figure in his second book (though much has been written, of course, about Climacus' philosophical method; this just isn't usually tied to Socrates per se). Lippitt's recent book is one valuable exception. He very fruitfully draws attention to the role that Socrates plays for Climacus in the *Postscript*, calling him "an exemplar of both subjective thinking and indirect communication" (Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 42; see 40, 42-45, 135-174). He also argues that Climacus himself adopts a "maieutic relationship" with his reader, but does not pursue this thought in much detail (26; cf. 67). One very stimulating, if ultimately unconvincing, work that does address Climacus' relationship to Socrates in both *Fragments* and the *Postscript* is Lotti, "Who is Johannes Climacus?" Lotti argues that Climacus is best conceived of as a contemplative thinker, by which he means someone who conceives of philosophy as an activity that "aims only to see things clearly, with the understanding that this implies nothing with regard to existence" (43). He contends that Climacus has much in common with Socrates as he is represented in *Fragments* (who is also a contemplative thinker by his lights) but that he is radically unlike the Socrates we encounter in the *Postscript* (since he thinks Climacus remains a contemplative thinker while Socrates undergoes a transformation from

- contemplative to ethical thinker). As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, I think Climacus employs two Socratic stances or incognitos in his two books but see no compelling reason to conceive of this activity as strictly contemplative. In both cases, he is arguably engaging in the same type of ethical activity that Socrates does, regulating his own life while maieutically interacting with his reader.
- 8 *SUD* 23 (*SVI* 11, 137; italics mine; trans. modified following *SUD_H* 53). Cf. David D. Possen, "Anti-Climacus and the 'Physician of Souls'," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, eds. Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003).
 - 9 See *PF* 109 (*SKS* 4, 305, 14-18). I say "broadly construed" because while the non-Christian conception is tied to Socrates in *Fragments*, it is also characterized by appeal to what is usually taken to be a Platonic notion, namely the theory (or myth) of recollection that Socrates invokes in the *Meno* (see 81a-e). For Climacus' purposes in *Fragments*, the chief idea is that according to the Socratic conception an individual (perhaps with the help of a philosophical midwife) can discover the truth within herself through the use of her own faculties, whereas on the Christian conception an individual has lost this capacity by having become a sinner. Climacus distinguishes more finely between Socrates and Plato with respect to recollection in the *Postscript*. See especially *CUP* 205-208 (*SKS* 7, 188-191). Cf. Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 29-31.
 - 10 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 2-4).
 - 11 In the new *SKS* critical edition, *Fragments* is 93 pages in length whereas the *Postscript* is 559 pages (= 6.01 times as large; this does not include the 5 page document signed by Kierkegaard, "A First and Last Explanation," which was attached without page numbers to the end of the *Postscript*—see *FLE* 625-630; *SKS* 7, 569-573).
 - 12 *CUP* 8 (*SKS* 7, 12, 4).
 - 13 *CUP* 17 (*SKS* 7, 26, 25-27; italics mine). In his introduction to the *Postscript*, Climacus draws the reader's attention to a remark at the end of *Fragments* (*PF* 109; *SKS* 4, 305, 7-13) that he claims might "look like the promise of a sequel" (*CUP* 9; *SKS* 7, 19, 4). The sequel is "supposed to clothe the issue in historical costume," that is, to identify Christianity as the historical phenomenon that corresponds to what was hypothetically investigated in *Fragments* (*CUP* 10; *SKS* 7, 20, 23-24).
 - 14 Frederik Beck, review of *Philosophical Fragments* (in German), *Neues Repertorium für die theologische Literatur und kirchliche Statistik* [New Review of Theological Literature and Ecclesiastical Statistics] 2 (1845); reprinted in *Kierkegaardiana* 8 (1971). This review was originally published anonymously; on Beck's being the author, see *SKS* K7, 245. Climacus' critique of Beck's review appears in a long footnote in an appendix found in the middle of the *Postscript* (*CUP* 274-277; *SKS*, 7, 249-253). We will discuss this footnote in Chapter 4, section 4.3.
 - 15 Climacus characterizes this alternative, Socratic conception of philosophy as "that simpler philosophy, which is delivered by an existing individual for existing individuals" and which "especially draws attention to the ethical" (*CUP* 121; *SKS* 7, 116, 32-33; trans.

- modified). Cf. David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29.
- 16 CUP 303 (SKS 7, 276, 20-22).
- 17 CUP 15 (SKS 7, 25, 3-4). Climacus identifies Copenhagen as his place of birth at CUP 617 (SKS 7, 560, 22-23). Kierkegaard, by comparison, was thirty-two when the *Postscript* was published. In a draft of the *Postscript* Climacus describes himself further: "the existing person...is simply a plain, ordinary human being, like me, for example, Johannes Climacus, born in Copenhagen, medium in height, with black hair and brown eyes, and now thirty years old" (*Pap.* VI B 40, 26 at 128; cited at CUP 2 49).
- 18 PF 108 (SKS 4, 304, 30); PF 91 (SKS 4, 289, 1-2). Cf. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 2. Climacus claims that "an unshakeable insistence upon the absolute and absolute distinctions is precisely what makes a good dialectician" (PF 108; SKS 4, 304, 31-32; see also CUP 490-491; SKS 7, 444-445). Cf. CA 3 (SKS 4, 310): "The age of making distinctions is past. It has been vanquished by the system. In our day, whoever loves to make distinctions is regarded as an eccentric whose soul clings to something that has long since vanished. Be that as it may, yet Socrates still is what he was, the simple wise person, because of the peculiar distinction that he expressed both in words and in life, something that the eccentric Hamann first reiterated with great admiration two thousand years later: 'For Socrates was great in "that he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand" ' ' (trans. modified). See also CUP 558 (SKS 7, 507, 7-16).
- 19 Roberts (among others) nicely compares Climacus' activity in *Fragments* to the assembling of Wittgensteinian grammatical remarks (Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 26-27). I am not at all sympathetic, however, to his view that Climacus' irony in that work typically consists of "stating (or suggesting) a truth, even a very simple one, but arriving at that truth by poor arguments" (100). I discuss Roberts' approach to *Fragments* in Chapter 4, section 4.1. See also, e.g., Stanley Cavell, "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Conant, MWS; Conant, PTTT; M. Jamie Ferreira, "The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994); John Lippitt and Daniel Huto, "Making Sense of Nonsense: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 98 (1998).
- 20 JP 6: 6449 (*Pap.* X.1 A 556). See also BA 42-43 (*Pap.* VII.2 B 235, 80-85): "When for many years a disoriented orthodoxy...and a rebellious heterodoxy...with the aid of the eighteen hundred years have joined forces to confuse everything, to give rise to one illusion more lunatic than the other...then the main task now is to be able to get the terrain cleared, to eliminate the eighteen hundred years, so that the essentially Christian occurs for us as if it occurred today....What the nothing but busy Johannes Climacus has done in this regard to ferret out every illusion, trap every paralogism, catch every deceitful locution cannot be repeated here....Climacus' exposition is *rigorous*, as the matter entails. His merit is this: with the help of the dialectic, to have imaginatively drawn (as one says of a telescope) that which is unshakably the essentially Christian so close to the eye that the

- reader is prevented from looking mistakenly at the eighteen hundred years. His merit is *with the help of dialectic* to have *procured the view*, the perspective....What is needed above all is to get the huge libraries and scribblings and the eighteen hundred years out of the way in order to gain the view” (italics mine).
- 21 CUP 621 (SKS 7, 564, 6-7).
- 22 CUP 69 (SKS 7, 70, 32-34); cf. PF 72 (SKS 4, 272, 17). The Danish term “Alvor,” which the Hongs regularly translate as “earnestness,” can also be translated as “seriousness.”
- 23 PC 133 (SVI 12, 124). Cf. Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 6.
- 24 CUP 153 (SKS 7, 142-143).
- 25 For a discussion of some of the differences between irony and humor within Kierkegaard's early writings, see K. Brian Söderquist, "Irony and Humor in Kierkegaard's Early Journals: Two Responses to an Emptied World," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).
- 26 See, e.g., CUP 617 (SKS 7, 560, 3-7): “The undersigned, Johannes Climacus, who has written this book, does not make out that he is a Christian....He is a humorist.” See Chapter 5, section 5.4.
- 27 JP 1: 656 at 301 (Pap. VIII.2 B 88 at 182, 12-13 and 19-22).
- 28 This is the same issue on a smaller scale that we discussed in Chapter 2 with respect to Kierkegaard's methodological remarks about his authorship (see section 2.1).
- 29 DO 113-172 (Pap. IV B 1, 103-150), with supplementary materials at PF 231-266 (Pap. IV B 1, 153-182). While it is difficult to date very precisely when this manuscript was composed, scholars usually point to a passage in Kierkegaard's journals from 1844-1845: “A year and a half ago I began a little essay *De omnibus dubitandum*” (JP 3: 3300; SKS 18, JJ: 288; see SKS K18, 369). For a thoughtful reading of how this work might be read to anticipate issues that arise in *Fragments*, see Jacob Howland, "Johannes Climacus, Socratic Philosopher," in *Kierkegaard and Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Jon Stewart, "Kierkegaard's Polemic with Martensen in *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*," in *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael Strawser, "Johannes Climacus' Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997); Stuart Dalton, "Johannes Climacus as Kierkegaard's Discourse on Method," *Philosophy Today* 47 (2003).
- 30 Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 9.
- 31 DO 118-119 (Pap. IV B 1, 105-106). *De Omnibus* has an unnamed narrator who recounts in the third-person the life of the young Johannes.
- 32 See, e.g., SKS K17, 488-489; Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 8-9. The surname “Climacus” is a Latinized form of the Greek term for ladder, “klimax.” The Latinized surname stems from

- the Latin term "clima," which also means "ladder." Hence in English we might call young Johannes (or Climacus himself for that matter) "John Ladder."
- 33 *DO* 118-119; 123 (*Pap.* IV B 1, 105; 109).
- 34 *Pap.* IV B 6 (this is cited at *PF* 235 and is from a draft of *DO*).
- 35 *DO* 131 (*Pap.* IV B 1, 114).
- 36 *Pap.* IV B 16 (this is cited at *PF* 234-235 and is from a draft of *DO*).
- 37 Cf. *CUP* 327 (*SKS* 7, 298-299).
- 38 *CUP* 12 (*SKS* 7, 22, 1-3); *CUP* 14 (*SKS* 7, 23, 31-32). See also *CUP* 309-310 (*SKS* 7, 281-282).
- 39 *DO* 117 (*Pap.* IV B 1, 104).
- 40 *DO* 117 (*Pap.* IV B 1, 103-104).
- 41 In the *Postscript* Climacus more than once considers a scenario remarkably similar to the one envisaged by Kierkegaard for *De Omnibus* and suggests that depicting such a scenario might provide an "indirect attack" on Hegel's philosophy through means of a kind of satire: "Let a doubting youth, but an existing doubter with youth's lovable, boundless confidence in a hero of scientific scholarship, venture to find in Hegelian positivity the truth, the truth for existence—he will write a dreadful epigram on Hegel...[T]he youth must never think of wanting to attack him; he must rather be willing to submit unconditionally to Hegel with feminine devotedness, but nevertheless with sufficient strength also to stick to his question—then he is a satirist without suspecting it. The youth is an existing doubter; continually suspended in doubt, he grasps for the truth—so that he can exist in it. Consequently, he is negative, and Hegel's philosophy is, of course, positive....The youth's admiration, his enthusiasm, and his limitless confidence in Hegel are precisely the satire on Hegel" (*CUP* 310-311; *SKS* 7, 282-283); "If speculative thought, instead of didactically discoursing on *de omnibus dubitandum* and acquiring a chorus of followers who swear by *de omnibus dubitandum*, had instead made an attempt to have such a doubter come into existence in existence-inwardness so that one could see down to the slightest detail how he goes about doing it—well, if it had done this, that is, if it had started to do this, then in turn it would have abandoned it and understood with shame that the grand slogan every parroter swears he has carried out is not only an infinitely difficult task but an impossibility for an existing person" (*CUP* 255; *SKS* 7, 231, 26-35); see also *CUP* 191 (*SKS* 7, 175-176).
- 42 *JP* 2: 1575 (*SKS* 17, DD: 203; this is the revised Hong translation that appears at *PF* 231).
- 43 Cf. Andrew J. Burgess, "Kierkegaard's Climacus as Author," *Journal of Religious Studies* 7 (1979). One possible exception is the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus (otherwise known as the "Silent Brother"—see *COR* 108). In his work " 'Guilty?'/'Not-Guilty?': A Story of Suffering" (subtitled a "Psychological Experiment"), Taciturnus follows the main text (the so-called diary of quidam: Latin for "a certain person") with a "A Letter to the Reader" (*SLW* 398-494; *SKS* 6, 369-454), in which he examines the nature of his experiment and

- what he hoped to achieve by means of it. He discusses his conception of psychological experiment further in his critique of P. L. Møller, "The Activity of a Traveling Aesthete and How He Still Happened to Pay for the Dinner" (*COR* 38-46; *SVI* 13, 423-424). We will discuss further the device of the experiment in section 3.4 and in later chapters.
- 44 The second part of the *Postscript* is divided into two sections: (1) "Something about Lessing" (*CUP* 61-125; *SKS* 7, 65-120); (2) "The Subjective Issue, or How Subjectivity Must be Constituted in Order that the Issue can be Manifest to it" (*CUP* 127-624; *SKS* 7, 121-566). The first section has two chapters; the second section has five chapters and two appendices. Climacus' account of how he became an author appears at the end of Chapters 1 and 2 of the second section, together with the appendix to Chapter 2, entitled "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature." See *CUP* 185-188 (*SKS* 7, 170-173); *CUP* 234-251 (*SKS* 7, 213-228); *CUP* 251-300 (*SKS* 7, 228-273). In a draft of Climacus' "An Understanding with the Reader," with which he concludes the *Postscript*, he asks the reader to "recall that there were two events in [his] life that made [him] decide to be an author" (*Pap.* VI B 83, 2; cited at *CUP* 2 104). He then describes the two events we are going to examine in the remainder of this section.
- 45 Plato, *Ap.* 17c. Alcibiades says of Socrates' arguments: "They're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners. He's always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words" (*Smp.* 221e). This frequently leads to the exasperation of someone like Callicles: "You keep talking of food and drink and doctors and such nonsense. That's not what I mean!...How you keep on saying the same things, Socrates!" Socrates: "Yes, Callicles, not only the same things, but also about the same subjects." Callicles: "By the gods! You simply don't let up on your continual talk of shoemakers and cleaners, cooks and doctors, as if our discussion were about them!" (*Grg.* 490d-491a)
- 46 *CUP* 185-188 (*SKS* 7, 170-173). The term "subjective" here points to "the subject and subjectivity" and so concerns the development of oneself as an (ethical and religious) subject; it has nothing to do per se with personally arbitrary standards or norms (*CUP* 129; *SKS* 7, 121, 10). See Chapter 5, section 5.3.
- 47 *CUP* 185 (*SKS* 7, 170, 24-25).
- 48 There was a "Sunday-observance law" in Copenhagen at the time (*CUP* 620; *SKS* 7, 562, 26). According to the *SKS* commentary, this law set the closing times of stores and forbade loud, noisy activities, especially during the times when Church services were being held. See *SKS* K7, 376.
- 49 *CUP* 185 (*SKS* 7, 170, 34).
- 50 *CUP* 185 (*SKS* 7, 171, 6-8; italics mine).
- 51 *CUP* 185 (*SKS* 7, 171, 9-10).

- 52 CUP 185-186 (SKS 7, 171, 11-14). Compare the constraining function of Socrates' *daimonion*: "It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything" (Plato, *Ap.* 31d).
- 53 He's twenty-six at the time!
- 54 CUP 186 (SKS 7, 171, 20-32; italics mine).
- 55 CUP 186 (SKS 7, 171-172).
- 56 CUP 186 (SKS 7, 172, 1-4).
- 57 CUP 186 (SKS 7, 172, 4-7).
- 58 CUP 187 (SKS 7, 172, 10-11). This is something that might also have been said about Socrates by some of those he refuted; consider Hippias' charge that "Socrates always creates confusion in arguments, and seems to argue unfairly" (Plato, *L.Hp.* 373b). Earlier he accuses Socrates of trying to make things difficult for him: "Oh, Socrates! You're always weaving arguments of this kind. You pick out whatever is the most difficult part of the argument, and fasten on it in minute detail, and don't dispute about the whole subject under discussion" (369b-c).
- 59 CUP 187 (SKS 7, 172, 8 and 11-16).
- 60 CUP 187 (SKS 7, 172, 17-19).
- 61 CUP 187 (SKS 7, 172, 23-28).
- 62 CUP 186 (SKS 7, 171, 29-31). Compare Socrates' discussion of those political leaders who are traditionally celebrated as having benefited Athens: "You [Callicles] sing the praises of those who threw parties for these people, and who feasted them lavishly with what they had an appetite for. And they say that *they* have made the city great! But that the city is swollen and festering, thanks to those early leaders, that they don't notice. For they filled the city with harbors and dockyards, walls, and tribute payments and such trash as that, but did so without justice and self-control. So, when that fit of sickness comes on, they'll blame their advisers of the moment and sing the praises of Themistocles and Cimon and Pericles, the ones who are to blame for their ills" (Plato, *Grg.* 518e-519a). Socrates claims that the true benefactors are those like himself whose speeches to the populace "do not aim at gratification but at what's best" (521d).
- 63 Compare Socrates' discussion of the difficulty a doctor might face when trying to convince a jury of children that he has not harmed them by means of his medical treatment: "Think about what a man like that...could say in his defense, if [a pastry chef] were to accuse him and say, 'Children, this man has worked many great evils on you, yes, on you. He destroys the youngest among you by cutting and burning them, and by slimming them down and choking them he confuses them. He gives them the bitterest potions to drink and forces hunger and thirst on them. He doesn't feast you on a great variety of sweets the way I do!' What do you think a doctor...could say? Or if he should tell them the truth and say, 'Yes, children, I was doing all those things in the interest of health,' how big an uproar do you think such 'judges' would make?" (Plato, *Grg.* 521e-522a; cf. 464d) Socrates adds, "That's

the sort of thing I know would happen to me, too, if I came into court. For I won't be able to point out any pleasures that I've provided for them, ones they [falsely] believe to be services and benefits, while I envy neither the ones who provide them nor the ones for whom they're provided. Nor will I be able to say what's true [and be understood] if someone charges that I ruin younger people by confusing them or abuse older ones by speaking bitter words against them in public or private....So presumably I'll get whatever comes my way" (522b-c). Climacus also characterizes what he is offering to his reader as "medicine," adding that its "being fit to be used" [*Tjenlighed*] by the reader depends "simply and solely on the way it is used, so that the manner of use is actually the medicine" (*CUP* 187-188; *SKS* 7, 173, 2-4; trans. modified).

- 64 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 13-14; italics mine; trans. modified). See Chapter 4, section 4.2.1. Thus while I am in agreement with John Lippitt that Climacus exhibits a "lack of urgency" throughout his philosophical endeavors and reveals himself to be someone "who is, to say the least, in no great hurry," I think it is important that we register early on that while Climacus' being a loafer may be due to his indolence, it may also be indicative of his being perfectly suited to serve as a Socratic figure in relation to those who are too busy with trivial things while they neglect what is most important. See Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 65; 62. See also Chapter 4, note 168.
- 65 *CUP* 234-251 (*SKS* 7, 213-228). The term "subjective truth" and the phrase "truth is subjectivity" pertain to what Climacus elsewhere calls "essential truth, or the truth that is related essentially to existence" (*CUP* 199; *SKS* 7, 182, 31-32). He means thereby to pick out the order of (ethical and religious) truth that pertains to the subject and the inner character of her life (the degree to which she has developed an "inwardness"): "only ethical and ethical-religious knowledge is essential knowing" (*CUP* 198; *SKS* 7, 181, 20-21).
- 66 *CUP* 234 (*SKS* 7, 213-214).
- 67 *CUP* 235 (*SKS* 7, 214, 17). The *SKS* commentary points us to Assistens Kirkegård in the Nørrebro region of Copenhagen. See *SKS* K7, 225.
- 68 *CUP* 235 (*SKS* 7, 214, 3; 16-17; 21-22).
- 69 *CUP* 235 (*SKS* 7, 214, 17 and 23-25).
- 70 *CUP* 235 (*SKS* 7, 214, 27); *CUP* 236 (*SKS* 7, 215, 9-12).
- 71 *CUP* 236 (*SKS* 7, 215, 17-20).
- 72 *CUP* 236 (*SKS* 7, 215, 21-22 and 26).
- 73 *CUP* 236-237 (*SKS* 7, 215, 26-35).
- 74 Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 23; Stephen Mulhall, *Faith and Reason* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 52. These two responses to the graveyard scene are quoted in Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 69.

- 75 In his discussion of the pseudonymous authors, Climacus remarks that “they were the ones who wanted to make the comic into a determination of earnestness, and jest into a savior from the most lamentable of all tyrannies: the tyranny of sullenness and obtuseness and rigidity” (*CUP* 282; *SKS* 7, 257, 17-19; trans. modified).
- 76 *CUP* 237 (*SKS* 7, 215-216).
- 77 *CUP* 237 (*SKS* 7, 216, 3-7).
- 78 *CUP* 237 (*SKS* 7, 216, 15-18 and 22).
- 79 *CUP* 238 (*SKS* 7, 216, 26-33).
- 80 *CUP* 238 (*SKS* 7, 217, 13-14 and 8-10).
- 81 *CUP* 238 (*SKS* 7, 217, 15-16); *CUP* 239 (*SKS* 7, 217, 19-20 and 27-30).
- 82 *CUP* 239 (*SKS* 7, 217, 31-34).
- 83 *CUP* 239 (*SKS* 7, 217-218).
- 84 *CUP* 239-240 (*SKS* 7, 218, 4-13).
- 85 *CUP* 240-241 (*SKS* 7, 219, 7-11). The Hongs regularly translate “Speculation” as “speculative thought,” whereas Swenson/Lowrie render this either as “speculation” or as “speculative philosophy.” Similarly, the Hongs regularly translate “Speculant” as “speculative thinker,” whereas Swenson/Lowrie typically translate this as “speculative philosopher” but also, somewhat misleadingly, sometimes translate this simply as “philosopher.”
- 86 *CUP* 241 (*SKS* 7, 219, 14-22). At one point the old man laments about how he and his son had been unable to discuss his loss of faith: “For what purpose, then, all his learning, so that he could not even make himself intelligible to me, so that I could not speak with him about his error because it was too elevated for me!” (*CUP* 238; *SKS* 7, 216-217)
- 87 *CUP* 241 (*SKS* 7, 219, 34-36).
- 88 *CUP* 241 (*SKS* 7, 219, 22-26).
- 89 *CUP* 239-240 (*SKS* 7, 218, 13).
- 90 Mulhall, e.g., questions the legitimacy/appropriateness of Climacus’ response. He raises “the suspicion that Climacus’ tale of eavesdropping in the graveyard may be a little too good to be true” and seems to think that his decision to try to “make intellectual sense of [speculative] philosophy’s threat to faith” is inherently suspect and but a further instance of having fallen prey to “philosophy’s seductiveness,” the very thing that corrupted the old man’s son. See Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 354.
- 91 *CUP* 241 (*SKS* 7, 219, 32-34).
- 92 *CUP* 241 (*SKS* 7, 220, 1-3).

- 93 *CUP* 241-242 (*SKS* 7, 220, 5-11; trans. modified); *CUP* 249 (*SKS* 7, 226, 28-31; trans. modified). When Climacus speaks of “reducing faith to an element [*et Moment*],” he is employing a Hegelian notion. What is potentially objectionable about reducing faith to an “element” is that it suggests that faith is but a part of a larger world-historical process and not itself the highest. Climacus thinks there is a conflict between the Christian conception of faith and how faith is conceived by modern speculative thinkers such as Hegel. Whereas the latter conceive of faith as something “immediate” that speculative thought “goes beyond,” Climacus claims that “Christianly understood there is no going beyond faith, because faith is the highest—for an existing person” (*CUP* 291; *SKS* 7, 265-266). Without committing myself to what is the best or most appropriate way of reading Hegel, a brief (perhaps unavoidably one-sided) sketch of his conception of world-history may be in order. Hegel argues that as human societies develop and people become ever more conscious of themselves as free and rational beings, so too by this very historical process does God (or what Hegel also sometimes terms “the Absolute” or “spirit” or “the Idea”) become conscious of himself/itself and fully realize his/its essential, ideal nature in reality. Hegel thus sometimes treats human societies, the principles that characterize them, and the historically significant individuals who sometimes bring about revolutionary changes in human consciousness within those societies as elements (or what he calls “moments”) within a larger world-historical process seemingly orchestrated by a “world-spirit” (God) in order to bring about its own self-actualization; at other times, he describes things from the human agents’ points of view, they whose relationship to spirit or the Idea deepens and becomes more concrete as human society develops and further brings about the conditions in which freedom can exist. Thanks to Will Dudley and Alan White for discussing Hegel with me.
- 94 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 250, 33).
- 95 *SUD* 31 (*SVI* 11, 145; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 96 *SUD* 94 (*SVI* 11, 205; trans. modified, largely following *SUD_H* 127).
- 97 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 250, 33-35); *CUP* 283 (*SKS* 7, 258, 10-14).
- 98 *SUD* 90 (*SVI* 11, 201; trans. modified, partly following *SUD_H* 122).
- 99 *CUP* 79 (*SKS* 7, 79, 6-7).
- 100 *CUP* 264 (*SKS* 7, 240, 13). See Chapter 4, section 4.3.3. This distinction between knowing something by rote and appropriating what one knows so that one is able to make use of one’s knowledge is akin to something that Aristotle appeals to when trying to characterize *akrasia*. He notes that “the fact that men use the language that flows from knowledge proves nothing...those who have just begun to learn can string together words, but do not yet know; for it has to become part of themselves, and that takes time” (*NE* 1147^a18-22). He compares the akratic’s use of language, where she seemingly expresses with her words a knowledge that her actions don’t reflect, to the “utterance by actors on the stage” (1147^a23). I quote the W. D. Ross translation, revised by J. O. Urmson in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

- 101 While Climacus argues that abstract philosophical reflection misses the mark when it comes to the ethical and the religious, he certainly allows that there are places where it is “within its rights”: “Honor be to speculative thought, praised be everyone who is truly occupied with it” (*CUP* 76; *SKS* 7, 76, 31; *CUP* 55; *SKS* 7, 59, 28-29).
- 102 *CUP* 56 (*SKS* 7, 60, 23-24).
- 103 *CUP* 56 (*SKS* 7, 60, 2-6).
- 104 *CUP* 295 (*SKS* 7, 269, 13-14).
- 105 James Conant, “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense [KWN],” in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, eds. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 204 (italics mine).
- 106 *CUP* 320 (*SKS* 7, 291, 22); *CUP* 145 (*SKS* 7, 135, 12-15). On self-forgetfulness as a “disease of reflection” that is being targeted by Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, see Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 37-39.
- 107 *CUP* 313 (*SKS* 7, 285, 6-11); *CUP* 124 (*SKS* 7, 118, 29-32).
- 108 *CUP* 279 (*SKS* 7, 254, 27-34; italics mine); cf. *CUP* 355 (*SKS* 7, 324, 22-24).
- 109 *CUP* 264 (*SKS* 7, 240, 21); *CUP* 280 (*SKS* 7, 255, 13-14; trans. modified). The verb “at docere” means, when said of what a university professor does, “to lecture” (*ODS* 1). It can also mean “to give an educational or didactic discourse” and frequently has “magisterial” connotations, as if what is delivered were by a master from on high (*ODS* 2). The participle “docerende” is frequently used as an adjective and typically means “didactic,” as in “hans docerende Tone.” The Hongs regularly translate these terms as “didacticize” and “didactic.” Swenson and Lowrie are less reliable, sometimes translating “at docere” as “to dogmatize” and other times as “to doctrinize.” The latter is especially problematic since it obscures the distinction of the manner in which something is being taught from what is being taught. We will return to this issue in Chapter 4 when we discuss Climacus’ critique of Beck’s review of *Fragments*.
- 110 *CUP* 259 (*SKS* 7, 235, 32-34); *CUP* 242 (*SKS* 7, 220, 12-14; trans. modified).
- 111 Climacus’ use of forgetting and reminding imagery may be meant to recall Plato’s so-called theory of recollection and in particular the ethical use that Socrates makes of this in the *Meno*. There Socrates offers Meno, by way really of a kind of myth about recollection, the opportunity to redescribe his condition of disgraceful ignorance (thinking he knows what virtue is when he does not), using terms that are a bit more forgiving. Under such a description, Meno may find it easier to *acknowledge* his ignorance and so be on the way to gaining the self-awareness that Socrates seeks to instill in him (see *Meno* 81a-86c). This is not, however, the place to defend this reading of Plato’s *Meno*. Cf. Johnson, *The Concept of Existence*, 173-209 (a chapter entitled, “The Art of Reminding”); Conant, KWN, 203-204.
- 112 *CUP* 249 (*SKS* 7, 226-227); cf. *Pap.* VI B 40, 45: “If this is communicated in a direct form, then the point is missed; then the reader is led into misunderstanding—he gets

- something more to know, that to exist also has its meaning, but since he receives it as knowledge and it is communicated to him as knowledge, he keeps right on sitting in the same old thing” (this is cited at *CUP* 2 62 and is from a draft of *CUP*); see also *Pap.* VI B 40, 39 (this is cited at *CUP* 2 60 and is also from a draft of *CUP*). With respect to the reader's being reminded of something, we may only be willing to credit him with a rote knowledge of what he has purportedly forgotten.
- 113 Climacus even seems to reject the claim that we can conclude from a work's being pseudonymous that it must therefore be a work of indirect communication. He maintains, for example, that the pseudonymous *Concept of Anxiety* (by Vigilius Haufniensis) “differs essentially from the other pseudonymous works in that its form is direct and even somewhat didactic....The somewhat didactic form of the book was undoubtedly the reason it found a little favor in the eyes of the assistant professors as compared with the other pseudonymous works” (*CUP* 269-270; *SKS* 7, 245, 6-14).
- 114 Climacus raises the topic of the maieutic by claiming that God's manner of relating to human beings is analogously indirect and deceptive: “No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can. He is in the creation, everywhere in the creation, but he is not there directly, and only when the single individual turns inward into himself (consequently only in the inwardness of self-activity) does he become aware and capable of seeing God” (*CUP* 243; *SKS* 7, 221, 20-25). Climacus adds that if “not even God relates himself directly” to human beings with respect to the ethical and religious, then “even less can one human being relate himself in this way to another in truth” (*CUP* 246; *SKS* 7, 224, 14 and 18-19; I have removed Climacus' italics).
- 115 *CUP* 242 (*SKS* 7, 220, 24; 29; 18).
- 116 *CUP* 242 (*SKS* 7, 220, 24-26).
- 117 *CUP* 242 (*SKS* 7, 220, 29-31).
- 118 *CUP* 261 (*SKS* 7, 237, 2-5). See the end of section 2.4 in Chapter 2.
- 119 Versus what is actually *needed* rather than simply demanded. See the end of section 3.2.1.
- 120 *CUP* 280-281 (*SKS* 7, 255, 14-34); *CUP* 282 (*SKS* 7, 257, 10-11 and 19-22).
- 121 *CUP* 243 (*SKS* 7, 221, 4-5). See *CUP* 260 (*SKS* 7, 236, 28-30): “The most resigned a human being can be is to acknowledge the given independence in every human being and to the best of one's ability do everything in order truly to help someone retain it.”
- 122 *CUP* 249 (*SKS* 7, 226, 13-14).
- 123 *CUP* 247 (*SKS* 7, 225, 11-12 and 14-15).
- 124 *CUP* 248 (*SKS* 7, 225-226). In the process of denying that Theaetetus is beautiful, Theodorus says the following about Socrates: “If he [Theaetetus] were beautiful, I should be extremely nervous of speaking of him with enthusiasm, for fear I might be suspected of being in love with him. But as a matter of fact—if you'll excuse my saying such a thing—

- he is not beautiful at all, but is rather like you, snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out; though these features are not quite so pronounced in him" (Plato, *Tht.* 143e). See also Xenophon's *Symposium*, 5 (the "beauty contest" between Critobulus and Socrates); *CI* 212 (*SKS* 1, 256-257).
- 125 *CUP* 247-248 (*SKS* 7, 225, 16-20).
- 126 *CUP* 248 (*SKS* 7, 226, 6-10).
- 127 *CUP* 248-249 (*SKS* 7, 226, 12-13).
- 128 *CUP* 249 (*SKS* 7, 226, 15-17; italics mine). Climacus also characterizes his own activity of making things difficult for his reader, specifically Christianity, as "repelling": "The introducing [to becoming a Christian] that I take upon myself consists, by repelling, in making it difficult to become a Christian....Therefore, it introduces psychologically, not world-historically, by evoking an awareness of how much must be lived and how difficult it is to become really aware of the difficulty of the decision [to become a Christian]" (*CUP* 383; *SKS* 7, 348, 31-36).
- 129 Plato, *Smp.* 216e.
- 130 Plato, *Smp.* 217a; *CUP* 249 (*SKS* 7, 226, 17-19; italics mine).
- 131 *CUP* 251 (*SKS* 7, 228, 15; trans. modified). I prefer to translate "Stræben" as "endeavor" rather than "effort" (as both the Hongs and Swenson/Lowrie have it). According to *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (4th ed.), while "effort" implies a conscious attempt to achieve a particular end, "endeavor" suggests an earnest, sustained attempt to accomplish a particular, usually meritorious, end (454). I think the connotations of the latter better bring out the contrast between what Climacus hopes to achieve and the comical means by which "the cause [he] had resolved to take up is advancing, but not through [him]" (*CUP* 251-252; *SKS* 7, 228, 26-27). It's also worth noting that Climacus closes this appendix, having reviewed the various pseudonymous works that have preceded and come after *Fragments*, by clearly referring back to its title: "I thought I ought to pursue a certain endeavor [*Stræben*] in the pseudonymous writings, which to the very last have honestly refrained from didacticizing" (*CUP* 300; *SKS* 7, 273, 24-26). Note that in this latter passage the Hongs do translate "Stræben" as "endeavor."
- 132 *PV* 31 (*SVI* 13, 523). Kierkegaard claims that the *Postscript* poses "the issue" of the entire authorship—becoming a Christian—and then "takes cognizance of the pseudonymous writings along with the interlaced 18 discourses and shows all this as serving to illuminate the issue, yet without stating that this was the intention [*Hensigt*] of the prior writing—which could not be done, since it is a pseudonymous writer who is interpreting other pseudonymous writers, that is, a third party who could know nothing about the intention of writings that are alien [*fremmed*] to him" (*PV* 31; *SVI* 13, 523; trans. modified).
- 133 *CUP* 277 (*SKS* 7, 252, 1-2). The reader is thereby asked to consider wherein precisely the difference lies, in the present case, between *reporting* a tendency to wonder whether something could be done while concluding that it shouldn't be done and actually *doing* that very thing.

- 134 CUP 277-278 (SKS 7, 252, 2-8). See SKS K7, 246. Having earlier requested that Polus “curb [his] long style of speech” (Plato, *Grg.* 461d), Socrates later notes that he himself has not strictly adhered to this practice: “Perhaps I’ve done an absurd thing: I wouldn’t let you make long speeches, and here I’ve just composed a lengthy one myself [464b-465e]. I deserve to be forgiven, though, for when I made my statements short you didn’t understand and didn’t know how to deal with the answers I gave you, but you needed a narration” (465e-466a).
- 135 CUP 278 (SKS 7, 252, 8-11; italics mine).
- 136 CUP 278 (SKS 7, 252-253; italics mine). On the midwife’s being an “occasion” for another person see, e.g., PF 11 (SKS 4, 220, 5-6 and 25-27): “Viewed Socratically, any point of departure in time is *eo ipso* something accidental, a vanishing point, an occasion. Nor is the teacher anything more....Socrates had the courage and self-collectedness to be sufficient unto himself, but in his relations to others he also had the courage and self-collectedness to be merely an occasion even for the most obtuse person” (trans. modified).
- 137 CUP 77-78 (SKS 7, 78, 3-4 and 8-13; italics mine). Cf. CUP 69 (SKS 7, 71, 7-10), where Climacus singles out for praise Lessing’s “nimbleness...in declining partnership or, more accurately, guarding himself against it in relation to that truth in which the cardinal point is precisely to be left alone with it.”
- 138 CUP 77 (SKS 7, 78, 7-8). The term “double reflection” is often used interchangeably by Climacus with “indirect communication.” See especially his discussion at CUP 72-80 (SKS 7, 73-80). In a passage in the journals, Kierkegaard describes double reflection with respect to the ethical as follows: “Since ethically there is no direct relationship, all communication must go through a double-reflection; the first is the reflection in which the communication is made, and the second is that in which it is recaptured” (*JP* 1: 649, 21; *Pap.* VIII.2 B 81, 21). We will discuss this notion in more detail in Chapter 5, section 5.3.
- 139 CUP 249 (SKS 7, 226, 31-33).
- 140 CUP 269 (SKS 7, 244, 12-16). See also CUP 256 (SKS 7, 233, 5-7).
- 141 CUP 249 (SKS 7, 226, 34-35). Cf. *JP* 1: 390 (*Pap.* X.2 A 453): “This is the enormous illusion which actually has abolished Christianity....[People] enter into Christianity all wrong. Instead of entering as an individual, one comes along with the others. The others are Christians—ergo, I am, too....It makes me think of old Socrates. He was concerned with what it is to be human, for in his age to be a human being was comparable to what it is to be a Christian nowadays. The individual *qua* individual was not a human being—but since the others are human beings, I am also.” See also CUP 83 (SKS 7, 82-83); this is the second quotation of the epigraph to this dissertation.
- 142 CUP 251 (SKS 7, 228, 7-8); CUP 254 (SKS 7, 231, 3-4).
- 143 CUP 282-283 (SKS 7, 257, 24-27).
- 144 CUP 270 (SKS 7, 245, 20-22).
- 145 CUP 251 (SKS 7, 228, 9-17).

- 146 CUP 185 (SKS 7, 171, 8).
- 147 CUP 251 (SKS 7, 228, 20-22; italics mine).
- 148 CUP 261 (SKS 7, 237, 10-11); CUP 257 (SKS 7, 233, 13-14); CUP 251-252 (SKS 7, 228, 22-31). At one point Kierkegaard seems to have considered calling Climacus' review of the other pseudonymous works "An Attempt by a Failed Author to Be a Reader" (Pap. VI B 40, 34; cited at CUP2 56).
- 149 Interestingly, Climacus departs slightly from strict chronological order. Though *Fragments* was published on June 13, 1844, to be followed four days later by the publication of *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Prefaces* (which were published on June 17), Climacus chooses to discuss these works prior to his discussion of *Fragments*. He even presents things as if he had already read and benefited from these two works before bringing out his own book (perhaps he received advance copies from the publisher?). See CUP 268 (SKS 7, 244, 3); CUP 270 (SKS 7, 245, 20). Cf. SKS K7, 241. For what it's worth, Kierkegaard also departs from strict chronological order in the list of pseudonymous works that he gives at the end of the *Postscript*, again positioning *Fragments* after *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Prefaces*. See FLE 625 (SKS 7, 569, 5-7).
- 150 CUP 252 (SKS 7, 228-229). Climacus also adds, however, that he is "pleased that the pseudonymous authors, presumably aware of the relation of indirect communication to truth as inwardness, have themselves not said anything or misused a preface to take an official position on the production, as if in a purely legal sense an author were the best interpreter of his own words, as if it could help the reader that an author 'intended this and that' when it was not carried out; or as if it were certain that it had been carried out, since the author himself says so in the preface" (CUP 252; SKS 7, 229, 2-9). Compare our discussion in the previous chapter of Kierkegaard's tendency to conceive of himself not as the author of his different works but as the reader (see the end of section 2.5).
- 151 Climacus appeals to this diagnosis at least once during his discussion of each of the pseudonymous works. Regarding *Either/Or*, see CUP 249 (SKS 7, 226-227); *Fear and Trembling*: CUP 259 (SKS 7, 235, 32-34); *Repetition*: CUP 263 (SKS 7, 238-239); *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*: CUP 264 (SKS 7, 240, 21-22); *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Prefaces*: CUP 269 (SKS 7, 244, 17-18); *Stages on Life's Way*: CUP 287 (SKS 7, 262, 7-8) and CUP 289 (SKS 7, 263, 24-25). See also CUP 571 (SKS 519, 14-16).
- 152 CUP 269 (SKS 244, 34-36).
- 153 CUP 254 (SKS 231, 1-2); CUP 253 (SKS 230, 9-10); CUP 254 (SKS 231, 4-8; italics mine; trans. modified); CUP 258 (SKS 235, 6-7; trans. modified).
- 154 Elsewhere the Hongs translate "Scene" as "setting." See, e.g., CUP 357-358 (SKS 7, 326, 30-35): "The subjective thinker has only one setting [*Scene*]*—existence—and has nothing to do with localities and such things. The setting is not in the fairyland of the imagination, where poetry produces consummation, nor is the setting laid in England, and historical accuracy is not a concern. The setting is inwardness in existing as a human being; the concretion is the relation of the existence-categories to one another.*"

- 155 *JP* 1: 656 at 302 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 88 at 183).
- 156 *CUP* 266 (*SKS* 7, 242, 17 and 16); *CUP* 258 (*SKS* 7, 234, 20-21).
- 157 *CUP* 266 (*SKS* 7, 242, 17); *CUP* 267-268 (*SKS* 7, 243, 11-20). Climacus notes that an inability to uphold the ethical that is tied to the condition of sin is unlike the difficulty faced by Abraham (which was investigated in *Fear and Trembling*): “Abraham was not heterogeneous with the ethical. He was well able to fulfill it [so not a sinner] but was prevented from it by something higher, which...transformed the voice of duty into a temptation” (*CUP* 267; *SKS* 7, 243).
- 158 *PV* 55 (*SVI* 13, 542).
- 159 *PV* 55 (*SVI* 13, 542).
- 160 *CUP* 264 (*SKS* 7, 240, 12-13). See also, e.g., *CUP* 272-273 (*SKS* 7, 248, 1-3); *CUP* 252 (*SKS* 7, 229, 17-18).
- 161 *CUP* 280 (*SKS* 7, 255, 12); *CUP* 281 (*SKS* 7, 256). See also *CUP* 300 (*SKS* 7, 273, 24-26): “I thought that I ought to pursue a certain endeavor in the pseudonymous writings, which to the very last have honestly refrained from didacticizing.”
- 162 *CUP* 281 (*SKS* 7, 256, 11-14 and 4-6; trans. modified). Climacus claims that “this comic power is essentially humor” (*CUP* 282; *SKS* 7, 257, 5-6). As we’ll see in Chapter 5, Climacus characterizes the humorist (which he claims to be) as a highly developed existing individual, someone who falls just short of religiousness and the specifically Christian.
- 163 Compare the corresponding habits of aesthetic consumption that we discussed in the previous chapter (section 2.2). Climacus seems to be quoting here from the preface of *Fear and Trembling*, in which Johannes de silentio predicts that his book will be “totally ignored” and adds that what he dreads most, however, is the “terrible fate that some enterprising abstracter, a gobbler of paragraphs [*Paragraphsluger*]..., will cut him up into paragraphs...” (*FT* 8; *SKS* 4, 103-104). See *SKS* K7, 238.
- 164 *CUP* 264-265 (*SKS* 7, 240, 22-26; trans. modified). Thus Climacus draws attention to the “psychological” dimension of many of the topics under investigation in the pseudonymous works, concepts “that are essentially related to existing” and “just what systematic thinking ignores.” He notes, for example, that “the expression ‘anxiety’ does not lead one to think of paragraph-pomposity but rather of existence-inwardness” (*CUP* 269; *SKS* 7, 244, 24-27). Cf. *CI* 166-167 (*SKS* 1, 215, 5-10): “This is the purely personal life with which science and scholarship admittedly are not involved....Whatever the case may be, grant that science and scholarship are right in ignoring such matters; nevertheless, one who wants to understand the individual life cannot do so.” See also Chapter 4, note 254.
- 165 In an apparent effort to avoid scientific connotations, the Hongs translate the pseudonyms’ use of the term “Experiment” as “imaginary construction” and “at experimentere” as “to imaginatively construct.” See their introduction to *KW* 6, xxi-xxxi. See also Howard V. Hong, “*Tanke-Experiment* in Kierkegaard”; Robert L. Perkins, “Comment on Hong’s ‘*Tanke-Experiment* in Kierkegaard,’” in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, ed. Alastair

McKinnon (Montreal: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982). While it is certainly true that what Kierkegaard and the pseudonyms usually mean by "Experiment" is something other than what natural scientists perform in a laboratory, I am not at all convinced that Kierkegaard was worried about his readers' confusing the two. If anything, I think his choice of this term was designed to invite them to reflect on the similarities and differences between his literary/psychological experiments and scientific experiments. He certainly wasn't unwilling to draw such a comparison. For example, in the *Book on Adler* Kierkegaard (or Petrus Minor—this book remained unpublished and he never decided whether or not to make it pseudonymous) speaks approvingly of "an experimenter... who used the subject of the experiment [*den Experimenterede*] the way a physicist makes a demonstration" (BA 17; *Pap.* VII.2 B 235, 15-16; trans. modified). Since I see no need for this terminological intervention on Kierkegaard's behalf, I accordingly modify the Hongs' translations throughout this dissertation, rendering every occurrence of "imaginary construction" or "to imaginatively construct" with "experiment" or "to experiment."

- 166 For example, in *Repetition* the pseudonym Constantin Constantius informs the reader that he has "brought into being" the young man who appears in his book (R 228; SKS 4, 93, 35). He describes his relationship to the young man as follows: "I am a vanishing person, just like a woman in confinement due to pregnancy [*en Barselkone*] in relation to the child she gives birth to. And that is indeed the case, for I have, so to speak, given birth to [the young man]" (R 130; SKS 4, 96, 4-6; trans. modified). Similarly, the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus (author of the third part of *Stages on Life's Way*) maintains that the central character in his work, quidam, exists only within the experiment and was created by him for purposes of observation: "My dear reader, if you in any way are of my profession, you will immediately perceive that the character conjured up here is a demonic [*dæmonisk*] character in the direction of the religious—that is, tending toward it... Since he is standing on a dialectical pinnacle, one must be able to calculate with infinitely small numbers if one wants to observe [*iagttagte*] him... Fortunately my hero does not exist outside of my thought-experiment [*Tankeexperiment*]... my task cannot be that of having to argue with him or dialecticize him out of his dialectical difficulty... Therefore it is by no means my intention to convince him with what I write here, but rather to become aware of something true in him and in much of what he says" (SLW 398; SKS 6, 369, 4-16; SLW 403; SKS 6, 374, 17-32).
- 167 David J. Gouwens, "Understanding, Imagination, and Irony in Kierkegaard's *Repetition*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 284. Andrew Burgess draws a similar distinction between "the observer and the participant," though I think he too readily assumes that it follows from someone's being designated an observer within the pseudonymous writings that the character of his observations must therefore be "detached." See Andrew J. Burgess, "The Relation of Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way* to *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Stages on Life's Way*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 284. See also Kresten Nordentoft, "Kierkegaard as Psychologist," in *Kierkegaard's*

Psychology, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978); Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 56-61.

- 168 Of course, in the philosophical midwife's relation to her interlocutor it is not obvious that she in fact is existentially lower than the one she engages. The maieutic manner of proceeding requires her to concede that she is lower and put up with appearing so, but the end result (ideally) will be that the one who thought she knew more than she did (or was living a life that she wasn't) will have this illusion removed and so perhaps come to recognize an existential equality between herself and her maieutic teacher.
- 169 *SLW* 185 (*SKS* 6, 173); *CUP* 290-291 (*SKS* 7, 265, 5-6 and 9-14; trans. modified).
- 170 *COR* 39 (*SVI* 13, 423).
- 171 *SLW* 445 (*SKS* 6, 411, 21-23). It's also worth noting that in the *Postscript* Climacus claims that Frater Taciturnus is "essentially a humorist" and thereby marks him as the pseudonym whose existential position is most akin to his own (*CUP* 291; *SKS* 7, 265, 21-22).
- 172 *COR* 43 (*SVI* 13, 428); *COR* 42 (*SVI* 13, 426); *COR* 44 (*SVI* 13, 429; trans. modified). Compare Climacus' so-called "revocation" of the *Postscript* (*CUP* 619; *SKS* 7, 562, 14-17). We will discuss this further in Chapter 5, section 5.4.
- 173 *EUD* 59-60 (*SKS* 5, 69, 25-30).
- 174 *CUP* 52 (*SKS* 7, 56, 27-28; trans. modified); *CUP* 52 (*SKS* 7, 57, 3-4); *CUP* 52-53 (*SKS* 7, 57, 8-17). See also *CUP* 57 (*SKS* 7, 60, 28-29): "Christianity cannot be observed objectively, precisely because it wants to lead the subject to the ultimate point of his subjectivity." Climacus wants to distinguish between the contemplative attitude that the speculative philosopher illicitly brings to bear on Christianity and a more generic sense of observation (which includes several species that concern the subjective realm). In the *Postscript* he partly tries to mark this terminologically by reserving the terms "Betragter" and "Betragtning" (which concern "looking, viewing, contemplating") for those situations when he wants to characterize the speculative philosopher's activity, while employing the terms "Iagttager" and "Iagttagelse" more generically (which connote "watching, observing"). Unfortunately, in their edition of the *Postscript*, the Hongs frequently translate both "Betragter" and "Iagttager" as "observer" and both "Betragtning" and "Iagttagelse" as "observation." This can lead to some very confusing results, seeming to suggest, e.g., that sometimes Climacus says he is opposed to the use of observation in relation to the ethical while, at other times, he seems to allow it. See, e.g., *CUP* 135 (*SKS* 7, 126, 24-26): "Perhaps the reason our age is dissatisfied when it is going to act is that it has been coddled by observing [*betragte*]"; *CUP* 142 (*SKS* 7, 132, 18-19): "The more complicated the externality is in which the ethical internality is to reflect itself, the more difficult the observing [*Iagttagelsen*] becomes"; *CUP* 320 (*SKS* 7, 292, 6-9): "The ethical grips the single individual and requires of him that he abstain from all observing [*Betragten*], especially of the world and humankind, because the ethical as the internal cannot be observed [*betragte*] by anyone standing outside." Note, however, that this isn't always clear cut. In the passage I quoted from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (see the

- previous note), Kierkegaard is quite happy there to use “Betragtning” and “Betragtede” to mean “observation” and “observer” (the context makes clear that he is not speaking more narrowly of contemplation).
- 175 *CUP 52 (SKS 7, 56-57)*. See also *PF 49-54 (SKS 4, 253-257)*. Cf. *CUP 599 (SKS 7, 544, 7-8)*, where Climacus calls the humorist an “unhappy-happy lover of recollection” (trans. modified).
- 176 *CUP 293 (SKS 7, 267, 7-19; italics mine)*. The Danish term “Daarskab” more literally means “folly.” See 1 Cor. 1:22-23: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block [*skandalon*] to Jews and folly [*môrian*] to Gentiles” (I quote the RSV of the New Testament); cf. *SKS K7, 216*. What is translated here as “a stumbling block” can also mean an “offense” or a “scandal” (*LSJ, I, 1*); cf. Matt. 11:6: “Blessed is he who takes no offense [*skandalisthêi*] in me.” Elsewhere Climacus treats these passionate responses as two species of offense: “The paradox, which requires faith against the understanding, promptly makes offense manifest, whether this is, more closely defined, the offense that suffers or the offense that derides the paradox as foolishness” (*CUP 585; SKS 7, 532, 6-9*).
- 177 *CUP 215-216 (SKS 7, 197, 21-23; trans. modified)*. Given Climacus’ affinity to Socrates and ancient Greek philosophy, he appears to be a prime example of someone whose relationship to Christianity (regardless of the precise nature of this relationship) involves a “passion...of thought” that he thinks the speculative philosopher entirely lacks (*CUP 293; SKS 7, 267, 18-19*). Thus I see no reason to follow James Conant when he claims that Climacus “is an author who, by his own lights, cannot ‘know anything about’ the matter which his work is ostensibly devoted to illuminating” (PTTT, 289). Conant contends that Climacus is someone “whose relation to Christianity is purely theoretical (who ‘is completely taken up with’ *thinking* about it) and who has failed to develop any practical relation to it (either positively or negatively).” As we’ll see in Chapters 4 and 5, while this portrait may describe the speculatively-inclined reader, it does not at all describe the philosophical midwife who seeks to treat this particular malady.
- 178 *CUP 263 (SKS 7, 239, 23); CUP 264 (SKS 7, 240, 10-11)*.
- 179 *R 125 (SKS 4, 7; trans. modified); CUP 263 (SKS 7, 239, 24-27)*. On the significance of the pseudonym Constantin Constantius’ use of the experimental form in *Repetition*, see Chenxi Tang, “*Repetition* and Nineteenth-Century Experimental Psychology,” in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002).
- 180 *CUP 263-264 (SKS 7, 239, 29-30); CUP 264 (SKS 7, 240, 3-5 and 13-15)*.
- 181 See, e.g., *CUP 361 (SKS 7, 329, 8-9)*: “The reader of the fragment of philosophy in *Fragments* will recollect that the pamphlet was not didactic but was experimental” (trans. modified); see also *Pap. VI B 54, 31* (this is cited at *CUP 279* and is from a draft of *CUP*): “The pamphlet (*Fragments*) was not didactic, nor is what is written here [in the *Postscript*].” As we’ll see in Chapter 4, Climacus creates a character in *Fragments*, an

- unnamed interlocutor, who is the subject of that book's experiment. In Chapter 5 we will consider how Climacus changes tactics in the *Postscript* and makes himself the principal subject of an experiment, "using [himself]," as he puts it, "in an experimental way" (*CUP* 15; *SKS* 7, 25, 2-3; trans. modified).
- 182 *CUP* 283 (*SKS* 7, 257, 31-33).
- 183 *CUP* 283 (*SKS* 7, 257, 34). See, e.g., *SLW* 191 (*SKS* 6, 179, 15-19): "As far as reviewers are concerned, I would ask that my request be understood simply and altogether literally as my honest intention and that the result might be according to the petition of the request: that the book would not be subjected to any critical mention, be it in the form of acknowledgement or approval or disapproval"; see also *SLW* 441 (*SKS* 6, 408, 3-6).
- 184 *CUP* 283 (*SKS* 7, 257-258; trans. modified). On the term "contrast-form" see Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.
- 185 *CUP* 274 (*SKS* 7, 249, 14-15). On the other hand, Kierkegaard was quite critical of Rasmus Nielsen's book *Mag. S. Kierkegaards "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensens "Christlige Dogmatik"* (published in 1849), accusing Nielsen of "wanting 'also' to be like the pseudonym" (*JP* 6: 6574 at 276; *Pap.* X.6 B 121 at 158): "I had something else in mind that Prof. N. could have done, something simpler and commoner than what he has done—but it is just the simple and the common that is great....Prof. N. might have said in an altogether *direct* little explanation: These writings [by Climacus] have convinced me: what the author's views are, whether he is attacking or defending Christianity, I am unable to determine—just that is their artistry [cf. *PC* 133-134; *SVI* 12, 124-125]. Here there is and must not be any question of imitating that artistry, for that would still be something halfway; it is impossible for anyone to do this more than half as well as he, the first. Now, whether the author gets angry about it or not, I will *convert everything into direct communication* and myself into a serviceable interpreter. This intensive dialectical tension and coyness yield only to assault, but over against an assault it is defenseless, for its own point is simply: to have no position....This would have been the qualitative *metabasis eis allo genos* [shifting from one genus to another] of "the second," whereby he himself again would become a first. If he had done that, had had the resignation and character for that, he would have been greater than the pseudonym. Prof. N. did something else" (italics mine).
- 186 See note 14.

- 1 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 2-3).
- 2 Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 2; 41; 3.
- 3 Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 100. See also Anthony Rudd, "The Moment and the Teacher: Problems in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," *Kierkegaardiana* 21 (2000), 97.
- 4 Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 92.
- 5 Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 92; 99.
- 6 Stephen Mulhall, "God's Plagiarist: The *Philosophical Fragments* of Johannes Climacus," *Philosophical Investigations* 22 (1999); reprinted in *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, revised version, under the title "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 352 (italics mine). Mulhall ties his approach to *Fragments* to the approach that James Conant takes to reading the *Postscript*: "It was [Conant's] work that led me to speculate on the possibility of developing a parallel reading of the *Fragments*" (327). I discuss Conant's work below in sections 4.2.1, 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and in Chapter 5.
- 7 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 346; 352.
- 8 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 352.
- 9 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 352.
- 10 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 351. The text I quote here is raised by Mulhall in the form of a question, where he asks why Climacus would do such a thing.
- 11 C. Stephen Evans, "The Role of Irony in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, Jon Stewart, and Christian Fink Tolstrup (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). Evans singles out Conant in particular for criticism, charging that his " 'ironical' reading flattens Kierkegaard's text" (78; see also 65). But in doing so Evans devotes less than two pages to what is clearly a much more nuanced view than he seems to allow.
- 12 Evans, "Irony in *Fragments*," 67.
- 13 Evans, "Irony in *Fragments*," 67 (italics mine). Evans here quotes from Kierkegaard's dissertation, where these two types of irony are distinguished. Kierkegaard calls the latter "more rare" (*CI* 248; *SKS* 1, 287, 10-12). In support of Evans' basic point is the footnote that immediately follows, in which Kierkegaard claims that this second type of irony (where something that is meant in earnest is said in the form of jest) is frequently employed by humorists (which, recall, Climacus claims to be): "This most frequently happens in connection with a certain despair and thus is often found in humorists, for example, when Heine waggishly ponders which is worse, a toothache or a bad conscience, and declares himself for the first" (31-34).
- 14 Evans, "Irony in *Fragments*," 67.

- 15 Evans, "Irony in *Fragments*," 72.
- 16 Evans, "Irony in *Fragments*," 73.
- 17 Compare the pseudonym Anti-Climacus' discussion of what he calls the chief "contradiction which occupies irony": "[W]hen a person stands and *says* the right thing, and consequently has understood it, and then when he *acts* he does the wrong thing, and thus shows that he has not understood it—yes, this is exceedingly comic" (*SUD* 90-91; *SVI* 11, 202; italics mine; trans. modified). The Hong translation is missing a crucial sentence (from which my initial quote is taken).
- 18 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 169.
- 19 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 185.
- 20 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 185 (italics mine).
- 21 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 190 (italics mine).
- 22 As Climacus puts it: "We shall take our time....By going slowly, one sometimes does indeed fail to reach the goal, but by going too fast, one sometimes passes it"; "We shall not be in a hurry with the answer, for someone who because of prolonged pondering never comes up with an answer is not the only one who fails to answer—so too the one who admittedly manifests a marvelous quickness in answering but not the desirable slowness in considering the difficulty before explaining it" (*PF* 16; *SKS* 4, 224, 30-32; *PF* 20; *SKS* 4, 228, 14-18).
- 23 Recall that Kierkegaard does seem alive to the possibility of there being readers who become unduly attached to his use of indirection, those who acquire "an infatuation with mystification in and for itself" (*PV* 34; *SVI* 13, 525). See the end of section 2.6 in Chapter 2.
- 24 *CUP* 5 (*SKS* 7, 9, 6); *CUP* 6 (*SKS* 7, 10, 23-24). Recall that Kierkegaard thinks that publishing a book that causes a sensation, such as *Either/Or*, can be a good way for a religious author to begin his authorship (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). Climacus' desire to avoid a sensation seems to indicate that in his view such an event at the point at which he is writing would potentially interfere with his authorial aims.
- 25 *PF* 5-8 (*SKS* 4, 215-217); *PF* 111 (*SKS* 4, 306); Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33-34.
- 26 On the pseudonyms' use of the device of the experiment, see the previous chapter, section 3.4. We'll examine Climacus' experiment in *Fragments* below in section 4.4.
- 27 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 2-4); *CUP* 8 (*SKS* 7, 12, 4).
- 28 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 15-16 and 12-13).
- 29 See Chapter 3, section 3.2.1.
- 30 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 13-16). LSJ, I, 1: "freedom from politics, love of a quiet life." In his dissertation, Kierkegaard claims that Socrates was in effect found guilty of *apragmosynê*:

- "The judges declared [Socrates] guilty, and if, more or less disregarding the points of the complaint, we were to describe his crime in one word, we could call it *apragmosynê* or indifferentism. Admittedly he was not idle, and admittedly he was not indifferent to everything, but in his relation to the state he was indifferent precisely by way of his private practice" (*CI* 193; *SKS* 1, 239-240).
- 31 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 12). Lewis and Short define "ignavia" as: "I. inactivity, laziness, idleness, sloth, listlessness, cowardice, worthlessness." The Hongs identify the noble Roman in question as Sallust: "Sallust writes that it was from justifiable motives rather than from indolence that he would record events instead of engaging in politics" (*PF* 275; cf. *SKS* K4, 199). The passage is from Sallust's *Jugurthine War* (IV, 4): "Among other employments which are pursued by the intellect, the recording of past events is of pre-eminent utility; but of its merits I may, I think, be silent, since many have spoken of them, and since, if I were to praise my own occupation, I might be considered as presumptuously praising myself. I believe, too, that there will be some, who, because I have resolved to live unconnected with political affairs, will apply to my arduous and useful labors the name of idleness; especially those who think it an important pursuit to court the people, and gain popularity by entertainments. But if such persons will consider at what periods I obtained office, what sort of men were then unable to obtain it, and what description of persons have subsequently entered the senate, they will think, assuredly, that I have altered my sentiments rather from prudence than from indolence, and that more good will arise to the state from my retirement, than from the busy efforts of others" (I quote the John Selby Watson edition, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>).
- 32 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 13-14; trans. modified). Recall that Climacus credits the power of his indolence for leading him to discover his particular philosophical calling (see Chapter 3, section 3.2.1).
- 33 See, e.g., Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 5: "The author, Johannes Climacus of Copenhagen, admits to being 'a loafer out of indolence'..."; C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 24: "[Climacus] writes for personal reasons, modestly and perhaps humoristically describing himself as a 'loafer,' who has no great justification for his idleness"; Michael Lotti, "Who is Johannes Climacus?: Kierkegaard's Portrait of the Philosophical Enterprise" (M. Phil. Thesis, University of Wales, Swansea, 1999), 52. For an exception, see Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 35.
- 34 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 17-22). The Danish expression "passe sig selv" can also mean "keep (oneself) to oneself" (Vinterberg and Bodelsen, 4B). Given Climacus' aim of trying to remind his readers of what they've purportedly forgotten (how to exist and what inwardness is), it may be that he is hereby signaling that attending to himself and his own business is just what is needed if he is to help his readers to become reacquainted with a corresponding self-attention to themselves. Hence in the *Postscript* when he presents the issue under investigation in the first person ("How can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness that Christianity promises?") and so presents it as if "it pertains to [him] alone," he adds that he does this in part "because, if properly presented, it will pertain to everyone in the same way" (*CUP* 17; *SKS* 7, 26, 12-15). See Chapter 5, section 5.2.

- 35 CUP 187 (SKS 7, 172, 23-24). See Chapter 3, section 3.2.1.
- 36 PF 5 (SKS 4, 215, 22-25). The words that Archimedes is reported here to have spoken to the Roman are close to those recounted by Valerius Maximus in his *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, book 8, chapter 7: “*noli, obsecro, istum disturbare* [I entreat you, don't disturb this].” See SKS K4, 200.
- 37 Robert C. Roberts, e.g., thinks that Climacus “seems to exult in the fact that his social utility approximates that of Archimedes, who sat ‘undisturbed, contemplating his circles while Syracuse was being occupied’ ” (Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 5). Jacob Howland also claims that “the circumstances of Archimedes’ death suggest that the Syracusan mathematician is absurdly detached from the emergency that confronts his community—so much so that his ignorance of the ‘facts on the ground’ causes him to lose his footing in the real world” (Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 36). Later he contrasts Archimedes with Socrates, claiming that the former’s activity is politically suspect: “Unlike Archimedes, Socrates is not guilty of *apragmosynē*” (77). Daniel Conway treats Archimedes as akin to Diogenes, claiming that they both exhibit an “apolitical, aesthetic existence” (Daniel W. Conway, “The Drama of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*,” in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, Jon Stewart, and Christian Fink Tolstrup (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 149; see also 158).
- 38 PF 5 (SKS 4, 215, 21-22).
- 39 This reading works even better with Archimedes’ last words as reported by Valerius Maximus, since Archimedes doesn’t specify what he does not want the Roman to disturb, but merely says, “Don’t disturb this” (see note 36). Cf. BA 87 (*Pap.* VIII.2 B 7, 10 at 30-31), where Kierkegaard/Petrus Minor notes that Archimedes might have “sat and [drawn] his circles in order to help the besieged city” or might have drawn them “for the sake of the production itself.”
- 40 PF 6 (SKS 4, 215, 26).
- 41 PF 6 (SKS 4, 215-216). The Hongs direct readers to Lucian’s essay, “How to Write History.” See K. Kilburn, *Lucian*, Vol. 6 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 5; see also SKS K4, 200-201.
- 42 PF 6 (SKS 4, 216, 8-10). Cf. Aristotle, *Soph. Ref.* 165^a21-23: “The art of the sophist is the semblance of wisdom without the reality, and the sophist is one who makes money from an apparent but unreal wisdom.” See SKS K4, 201-202.
- 43 PF 6 (SKS 4, 216, 10-12).
- 44 PF 6 (SKS 4, 216, 12-16; trans. modified). In one of J. L. Heiberg’s plays (*Kong Salomon og Jørgen Hattemayer*, published in 1825), a case of mistaken identity takes place. A rich Baron Goldkalb from Frankfurt is expected at any time to arrive in the town of Korsør (on his way to Copenhagen). The inhabitants are busy preparing a huge reception in his honor (with the expectation that he will return the favor and provide further entertainment and feasting). When the poor Jewish merchant Salomon Goldkalb turns up (himself bankrupt and wearing stolen finery), he is mistaken for the Baron and given a huge and decadent

- reception by the townspeople, who themselves are unaware that he will in no way be able to return their hospitality. See *SKS* K4, 202.
- 45 *PF* 7 (*SKS* 4, 216, 32-34; trans. modified).
- 46 Kierkegaard self-financed the publication of his authorship and frequently lost money. At one point he remarks on how well he has been remunerated for his work as follows: "I do not find it unsettling that I cannot quite be said to have achieved anything, or, what is of less importance, attained anything in the outer world. I find it ironically in order that the honorarium, at least, in virtue of the production and my equivocal authorship, has been rather Socratic" (*FLE* 628; *SKS* 7, 572, 9-12). Compare Socrates' discussion of his poverty: "That I am the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the city you might realize from the fact that it does not seem like human nature for me to have neglected all my own affairs and to have tolerated this neglect now for so many years while I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you...to persuade you to care for virtue. Now if I profited from this by charging a fee for my advice, there would be some sense to it, but you can see for yourselves that, for all their shameless accusations, my accusers have not been able in their impudence to bring forward a witness to say that I have ever received a fee or ever asked for one. I, on the other hand, have a convincing witness that I speak the truth, my poverty" (Plato, *Ap.* 31a-c; cf. 19e).
- 47 In the *Postscript*, Climacus compares the situation being faced by his society not to a looming war but to being on the verge of a major epidemic; he takes the appearance of the figure of the speculative philosopher to be a warning sign of more dire things to come: "Prior to an outbreak of cholera there usually appears a kind of fly not otherwise seen; in like manner might not these fabulous pure thinkers be a sign that a calamity is in store for humankind—for example, the loss of the ethical and the religious?" (*CUP* 306-307; *SKS* 7, 279, 15-19).
- 48 In the preface to *Fragments*, Climacus claims that his first book is written "*proprio Marte, propriis auspiciis, proprio stipendio* [by one's own hand, on one's own behalf, at one's own expense]" (*PF* 5; *SKS* 4, 215, 2-3). This Latin phrase reappears in the preface to the *Postscript*, though Climacus changes the order from ABC to ACB, thereby laying the final stress on its having been written "on one's own behalf"—see *CUP* 8 (*SKS* 7, 12, 4-5). Yet he also clearly conceives of his books as having been written for the benefit of his readers. Consider his reflections in the *Postscript* about whether or not *Fragments* was successful in engaging its reader: "Whether I was successful with this little pamphlet in placing Christianity indirectly into relation to what it means to exist, in bringing it through an indirect form into relation to a knowing reader, whose trouble perhaps is precisely that he is one who knows—this I shall not decide....If it was successful, so much the better. If it did not succeed, well, the mishap is not too serious. I can write such a pamphlet quickly, and if it were to become clear to me that I cannot benefit some of my contemporaries in some way even by making something difficult, this depressing consciousness also exempts me from the trouble of writing" (*CUP* 274-275; *SKS* 7, 249-250).
- 49 *PF* 6 (*SKS* 4, 216, 13-14). See also *CUP* 8 (*SKS* 7, 12, 7-11), where Climacus expresses his hope that fate will look kindly on his second book and "above all ward off the tragic-comic eventuality that some seer in deep earnestness or a rogue in jest will proceed to make the

present age fancy that [the *Postscript*] is something and then run away and leave the author stuck with it like the pawned farm boy." In a comedy by Ludvig Holberg (*Den pantsatte Bonde-Dreng*, published in 1731), a simple farm boy travels to Copenhagen to pay a bill. He is deceived by one Leerbeutel, who himself is broke and who convinces the farm boy to dress up as a count and sets him up in a local inn. Townspeople flock to see the count, bringing clothes and precious jewels to sell him. The next day Leerbeutel vanishes, taking all the goods with him, and leaving the farm boy in the lurch. See *SKS* K7, 101.

- 50 See, e.g., Plato, *Prt.* 314c-e. Socrates and the young Hippocrates pay a visit to Callias so they can speak with one of his guests, the world-renowned sophist Protagoras. The house is filled with sophists and their many admirers and students, and Callias' doorman mistakenly assumes that Socrates is also a sophist (Socrates is narrating): "When we got to the doorway we stood there discussing some point which had come up along the road and which we didn't want to leave unsettled before we went in. So we were standing there in the doorway discussing it until we reached an agreement, and I think the doorman, a eunuch, overheard us. He must have been annoyed with all the traffic of sophists in and out of the house, because when we knocked he opened the door, *took one look at us* and said, 'Ha! More sophists! He's busy.' Then he slammed the door in our faces with both hands as hard as he could. We knocked again, and he answered through the locked door, 'Didn't you hear me say he's busy?' 'My good man,' I said, 'we haven't come to see Callias, and we are not sophists. Calm down. We want to see Protagoras. That's why we've come. So please announce us.' Eventually he opened the door for us" (italics mine). Cf. Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 152.
- 51 Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 34.
- 52 Conant, *PTTT*, 283; *KWN*, 205; *PTTT*, 257 (italics mine). This approach to Climacus' texts is also shared by Stephen Mulhall (discussed above in section 4.1) and Michael Weston. See Stephen Mulhall, *Faith and Reason* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 23-52; Michael Weston, "Evading the Issue: The Strategy of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*," *Philosophical Investigations* 22 (1999). As Alastair Hannay rightly notes, its lineage includes Henry E. Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense," *Review of Metaphysics* 20 (1967); see Alastair Hannay, "Kierkegaard and What We Mean By 'Philosophy'," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8 (2000); reprinted in *Kierkegaard and Philosophy*, revised version, under the title "Climacus Among the Philosophers" (London: Routledge, 2003), 9-10. Conant notes his indebtedness to Allison and Stanley Cavell in *MWS*, 270-271 (note 3). For critical responses to Conant et al. see especially John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000); and, more recently, Genia Schönbaumsfeld, "No New Kierkegaard," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004). See also Lotti, "Who is Johannes Climacus?"; John Lippitt, "On Authority and Revocation: Climacus as Humorist," in *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Anthony Rudd, "On Straight and Crooked Readings: Why the *Postscript* Does Not Self-Destruct," in *Anthropology and Authority*; Kristy Viperman, "Climacus the (Multi-Dimensional) Humorist: Interpreting 'An Understanding with the Reader'," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999).

- 53 Conant, KWN, 203 (italics mine).
- 54 *PF* 6 (*SKS* 4, 216, 13-14).
- 55 Conant might, e.g., argue that Climacus' repeated denials that his manner of doing philosophy is akin to speculative philosophy are themselves *suspect*. Perhaps, like Queen Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Climacus "doth protest too much" (III, ii, 239).
- 56 Climacus later characterizes *Fragments* as "a godly project" (*PF* 107; *SKS* 4, 303, 13-14). See also Plato, *Ap.* 30d-31b.
- 57 *PF* 7 (*SKS* 4, 217, 8-12; Climacus' ellipsis). Compare the epigraph to *Fragments*: "Better well hanged than ill wed" (*PF* 3; *SKS* 4, 214; cf. *CUP* 5; *SKS* 7, 9, 6-11). On Climacus' attitude to opinions see also *CUP* 45 (*SKS* 7, 51, 1-2); *CUP* 619 (*SKS* 7, 561-562); *Pap.* VI B 87 (this is cited at *CUP* 2 105 and is from a draft of *CUP*).
- 58 Compare how Wittgenstein describes his philosophical enterprise: "On all questions we discuss I have no opinion; and if I had, and it disagreed with one of your opinions, I would at once give it up for the sake of argument because it would be of no importance for our discussion. We constantly move in a realm where we all have the same opinions. All I can give you is a method; I cannot teach you any new truths"; "One of the greatest difficulties I find in explaining what I mean is this: You are inclined to put our difference in one way, as a difference of *opinion*. But I am not trying to persuade you to change your opinion. I am only trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation. If there is an opinion involved, my only opinion is that this sort of investigation is immensely important, and very much *against the grain* of some of you. If in these lectures I express any other opinion, I am making a fool of myself." See Alice Ambrose, ed., *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1932-1935* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 97; Cora Diamond, ed., *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge, 1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976); reprinted (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 103.
- 59 *PF* 7 (*SKS* 4, 217, 14-19).
- 60 If this is so, it also suggests that there is potentially something quite wrongheaded about all of the debates and hand-wringing that take place in the secondary literature over whether the views and opinions expressed in the pseudonymous works are also shared by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard maintains in "A First and Last Explanation" that any importance that the pseudonyms and their works may have "unconditionally does not consist in making any new proposal, some unheard-of discovery, or in founding a new party and wanting to go further, but precisely in the opposite, in wanting to have no importance, in wanting, at a remove that is the distance of double-reflection, once again to read through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers" (*FLE* 629-630; *SKS* 7, 572-573; cf. *WA* 165; *SVI* 12, 267).
- 61 *PF* 7-8 (*SKS* 4, 217, 22-26). Any opinions of the reader with respect to the ethical and the religious should be opinions she has made her own (and so be grounded within herself), as opposed to "embracing [an] opinion *because* it is" held by Climacus (italics mine). Hence

- Climacus' claim at the end of the *Postscript* that his "book is superfluous. Therefore, let no one bother to appeal to it, because one who *appeals* to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it" (*CUP* 618; *SKS* 7, 561, 23-25; italics mine).
- 62 *CUP* 88-89 (*SKS* 7, 88, 2-23).
- 63 *CUP* 69 (*SKS* 7, 71, 7-10). Elsewhere in *Fragments* Climacus ties this ability to "decline all partnership" to the use of indirect communication and the ability of a philosophical midwife to throw her interlocutor back on herself. See *PF* 102 (*SKS* 4, 299, 18-19).
- 64 *PF* 8 (*SKS* 4, 217, 33-34).
- 65 Thulstrup notes in his commentary on *Fragments* that in an earlier draft, Climacus ends his preface with the words: "Let no one invite me, for in this sense [*i den Betydning*] I do not dance" (*Pap.* V B 29; quoted at Niels Thulstrup, "Introduction and Commentary to *Philosophical Fragments*," in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 161).
- 66 Compare Climacus' discussion of the "Socratic coloring" that frequently characterizes Lessing's manner of speaking (*CUP* 102; *SKS* 7, 100, 14-18). He notes that not long before he died, Lessing lamented his inability to join Jacobi in his celebrated leap into faith. He said that he was more than willing, to be sure, but faith "takes a leap, which [he could] no longer expect from [his] old legs and [his] heavy head" (as though all that he really needed to become a believer was an especially good fitness trainer!; later Climacus quips, "it goes without saying that whoever has young legs and a light head can easily leap"). See *CUP* 103 (*SKS* 7, 100, 35-36). Climacus claims that this last phrase "has a thoroughly Socratic coloring—speaking of food and drink, doctors, pack asses, and the like, *item* [also] of his old legs and his heavy head." See also Plato, *Ap.* 39a-b. Having been sentenced to death, Socrates still retained sufficient composure to jest ironically about how puzzling he found it that he who was so "slow and elderly" had nevertheless somehow managed to elude what his more youthful and vigorous accusers had not: "It is not difficult to avoid death, gentlemen of the jury, it is much more difficult to avoid wickedness, for it runs faster than death. Slow and elderly as I am, I have been caught by the slower pursuer, whereas my accusers, being clever and sharp, have been caught by the quicker, wickedness."
- 67 Cf. Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 40.
- 68 *PF* 8 (*SKS* 4, 217, 27-31). This is not a direct quote from Plato's *Cratylus*. At the beginning of this dialogue, Socrates claims that he remains ignorant about the true nature of names because he has not attended the sophist Prodicus' more extensive course on this topic: "To be sure, if I'd attended Prodicus' fifty-drachma lecture course, which he himself advertises as an exhaustive treatment of the topic, there'd be nothing to prevent you [Hermogenes] from learning the precise truth about the correctness of names straightaway. But as I've heard only the one-drachma course, I don't know the truth about it" (384b-c). In an earlier draft of his preface to *Fragments*, Climacus alludes more directly to the *Cratylus* passage as follows: "My renunciation of learning is not deceitful, and even if it pains me to have to do it, it comforts me in turn that those who want to be learned, just as those who want to be rich, will fall into all kinds of snares and spiritual trials, something I

- can easily visualize, for if the 'one-drachma' course I have taken has already ensnared me in many ways—to what spiritual trials, then, will not the person be exposed who takes the 'big fifty-drachma course'?" (*Pap.* V B 24; cited at *PF* 184-185)
- 69 28d-29a.
- 70 *PF* 8 (*SKS* 4, 217, 31-33). See also *CUP* 165-170 (*SKS* 7, 153-158).
- 71 *PF* 111 (*SKS* 4, 306); *PF* 26 (*SKS* 4, 233, 21).
- 72 *PF* 111 (*SKS* 4, 306, 5). On the Hegelian origins of this phrase "to go beyond," see *SKS* K4, 257-258.
- 73 *PF* 111 (*SKS* 4, 306, 6-10). Climacus addresses to some extent what he here calls an "altogether different question" in the first part of the *Postscript* (*CUP* 19-57; *SKS* 7, 27-61). He calls this the "objective issue" and contrasts this with the "subjective issue," where the former concerns "the truth of Christianity" while the latter concerns "the individual's relation to Christianity" (*CUP* 17; *SKS* 7, 26, 10-11). See Chapter 5, section 5.2. On faith as a "new organ," compare the pseudonym Johannes de silentio's claim in *Fear and Trembling* that Abraham cannot be comprehended using ethical categories alone (for then he becomes a potential murderer); there is a need for a "new category" (the religious). See *FT* 60 (*SKS* 4, 153, 24-25).
- 74 As opposed, say, to certain Hegelian representations of Christianity that Climacus thinks remain fundamentally pagan and so are at best equivalent to the Socratic outlook and often fall short of it.
- 75 *PF* 111 (*SKS* 4, 306, 10-13; trans. modified).
- 76 Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 40.
- 77 *PF* 24 (*SKS* 4, 231, 24-31). See Plato, *Smp.* 215e; *CI* 48 (*SKS* 1, 109, 1-3). Cf. *Smp.* 218c-219a (Alcibiades is describing an exchange he had with Socrates): "I think," I said, "you're the only worthy lover I have ever had—and yet, look how shy you are with me! Well, here's how I look at it. It would be really stupid not to give you anything you want: you can have me, my belongings, anything my friends might have. Nothing is more important to me than becoming the best man I can be, and no one can help me more than you to reach that aim..." He heard me out, and then he said in that absolutely inimitable ironic manner of his: "Dear Alcibiades, if you are right in what you say about me, you are already more accomplished than you think. If I really have in me the power to make you a better man, then you can see in me a beauty that is really beyond description and makes your own remarkable good looks pale in comparison. But, then, is this a fair exchange that you propose? You seem to me to want more than your proper share: you offer me the merest appearance of beauty, and in return you want the thing itself, 'gold in exchange for bronze.' Still, my dear boy, you should think twice, because you could be wrong, and I may be of no use to you."
- 78 *PF* 111 (*SKS* 4, 306, 13-15). At one point in the *Postscript* Climacus quips: "I have heard people so obtuse that they have nothing between the ears, say that one cannot stop with Socratic ignorance" (*CUP* 255; *SKS* 7, 232, 6-9).

- 79 CUP 204 (SKS 7, 187, 17-18; trans. modified).
- 80 Cf. PF 19 (SKS 4, 228, 6-7), where Climacus speaks of how it frequently occurs that "in our failure to understand ourselves we *suppose* we have gone beyond that simple wise person" (italics mine; trans. modified). See also Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 184.
- 81 Climacus imagines someone whose position may be in essence a Socratic position, but who still falls short of Socrates, someone "who, if he does not go about things as Socrates did, is not even a Socrates" (PF 58; SKS 4, 261, 13-14).
- 82 On Kierkegaard's target largely being Danish Hegelianism rather than Hegel himself, see Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 83 Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 29.
- 84 Cf. Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 30.
- 85 Cf. CUP 210 (SKS 7, 193, 5-9).
- 86 While Climacus typically treats Socrates as an ethical figure, he also draws attention to his religious capacities. He develops this most explicitly in the *Postscript*. See, e.g., CUP 204-213 (SKS 7, 187-195); see also PF 37-39 (SKS 4, 242-245); PF 44-54 (SKS 4, 249-257).
- 87 CUP 308 (SKS 7, 280-281); CUP 279 (SKS 7, 254, 9-14); CUP 587 (SKS 7, 533, 21-24).
- 88 Cf. SUD 92 (SVI 11, 203): "Instead of going beyond Socrates, it is extremely urgent that we *come back to* this Socratic principle...as the ethical conception of everyday life" (italics mine). The principle in question is that "to understand and to understand are two things," by which Anti-Climacus means that there is a qualitative difference between declaring that one has understood an ethical or religious matter (which may even include an ability "to expound...in a certain sense quite correctly" what one claims to understand) and truly understanding it (where a person's life "would have expressed it also"; she "would have done what [she] had understood"). See SUD 90 (SVI 11, 201).
- 89 Recall that Kierkegaard claims that the "entire pseudonymous production and [his] life in relation to it was in the Greek mode" (JP 5: 5942; SKS 20, NB: 45, 12-13; trans. modified). See Chapter 2, section 2.5.
- 90 PF 10 (SKS 4, 219, 4-10); PF 55 (SKS 4, 258, 7-9).
- 91 What Kierkegaard refers to as "the single individual." See Chapter 2, note 122.
- 92 PF 11 (SKS 4, 220, 25-27; trans. modified); PF 24 (SKS 4, 231, 19-21).
- 93 PF 24 (SKS 4, 231-232).
- 94 PF 101 (SKS 4, 298, 32-33).
- 95 PF 65-66 (SKS 4, 267, 12-16; trans. modified); cf. CUP 573 (SKS 7, 521, 2-3). Thus I do not agree with Stephen Mulhall's view that we should be suspicious of Climacus' "presentation of the non-Socratic hypothesis" in *Fragments* because Climacus' "perspective on his material is Socratic through and through." Mulhall maintains that "despite its overtly anti-Socratic thrust, [Climacus'] presentation of the non-Socratic

hypothesis [i.e., the Christian outlook] will manifest every weakness and incoherence of which his anti-Socratic critique accuses its opponents" (Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 344). I think the comparison is supposed to reveal something that the two outlooks may legitimately have in common (and which sets them both apart from the speculative manner of doing philosophy that the reader is accustomed to employing), namely a Socratically conceived way of doing philosophy. While it is true that the Christian outlook may have resources that allows it to find the Socratic outlook incomplete or existentially less developed, I don't think the point of Climacus' exercise is to provide the reader with an occasion to discover flaws in his manner of presenting the Christian outlook. Rather, it is to remind her of the Socratic manner of doing philosophy (whether this is employed with respect to the Socratic outlook or the Christian outlook), together with helping her to remember some of what she's been neglecting about herself with respect to Christianity. Cf. Arne Grøn, "Sokrates og *Smulerne* [Socrates and *Fragments*]," *Filosofiske Studier* 15 (1995), 100-101.

96 See Chapter 2, section 2.4; Chapter 3, section 3.3.

97 CUP 5 (SKS 7, 9, 2-6).

98 CUP 5-6 (SKS 7, 9-10).

99 CUP 274 (SKS 7, 249, 21; trans. modified).

100 Frederik Beck, review of *Philosophical Fragments* (in German), *Neues Repertorium für die theologische Literatur und kirchliche Statistik* [New Review of Theological Literature and Ecclesiastical Statistics] 2 (1845); reprinted in *Kierkegaardiana* 8 (1971). On Beck's being the author of this review, see SKS K7, 245. Before reviewing *Fragments*, Beck had earlier served as one of Kierkegaard's *ex auditorio* opponents at his dissertation defense and had written the first substantial review of *The Concept of Irony*, to which Kierkegaard published a reply. See Frederik Beck, review of *The Concept of Irony*, *Fædrelandet* [The Fatherland] 3, no. 890 and 897 (1842). For Kierkegaard's reply to Beck's review of his dissertation, see COR 9-12 (SVI 13, 404-406). See also SKS K1, 144; Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Socrates in the Fast Lane: Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* on the University's Velocifère (Documents, Context, Commentary, and Interpretation)," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Irony*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 77-80. For another contemporary response, see Johan Frederik Hagen, review of *Philosophical Fragments*, *Theologisk Tidsskrift* 4, New Series (1846).

101 Climacus' critique of Beck's review of *Fragments* appears in a long footnote at CUP 274-277 (SKS, 7, 249-253). James Conant first drew my attention to this footnote and impressed upon me its significance. He maintains that "Climacus' remarks here on his own earlier work are clearly intended to apply to the *Postscript* as well" (KWN 205). In particular he maintains that "one has not attained an accurate impression of this work [the *Postscript*] until one has recognized the presence of 'the parody on speculative philosophy involved in the entire plan of the work.'" While I agree with Conant that there is much to be gained from Climacus' critique that may also help us in our attempts to understand the *Postscript*, I think he too readily assumes that the specific elements that Climacus accuses

Beck of neglecting in *Fragments* must also be present in the *Postscript*. Thus when Climacus speaks of the "complete parody of speculative thought" in the "design" of *Fragments*, it doesn't immediately follow that he engages in further parody in the *Postscript* (CUP 275; SKS 7, 250, 25-26; trans. modified). That requires independent argument; furthermore, given the interpretive difficulties we discussed above, we should be very careful about going looking for a parody in the *Postscript*, since the conviction that there *must* be such a parody may wind up radically skewing how we read the text. It's true that Climacus says that the bulk of the *Postscript* is "a renewed attempt in the same vein" as *Fragments*, but he also characterizes his efforts in his second book as a "new approach" to the same topic and it may turn out that this new approach makes little or no use of parody or, for that matter, any of the other specific elements that Climacus accuses Beck of neglecting (CUP 17; SKS 7, 26, 25-27; cf. Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 56). Similarly, when Climacus characterizes the specific method that he employs in *Fragments* as an art of "taking away," I see no reason whatsoever to think that he is using the same method in the *Postscript* (CUP 275; SKS 7, 251, 11). We'll return to this topic in Chapter 5. Conant addresses Climacus' footnote on Beck most extensively in KWN, 204-207. See also PTTT, 288-289; MWS, 280 (notes 35 and 38); Louis Mackey, "Almost in Earnest: The Philosophy of Johannes Climacus," in *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 166-167; Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 16; Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 325-327; Paul Muench, "The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of 'Taking Away'," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, eds. Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003).

102 CUP 275 (SKS 7, 251, 11).

103 Beck, "Review of *Fragments*," 212 (I cite the reprint that appears in *Kierkegaardiana*; unpublished trans. Jon Stewart). The German term "eigentümlich" and its Danish counterpart "ejendommelig" usually mean either "peculiar" (to) or "characteristic" (of), but can also mean, at least in Danish, "distinctive." Throughout their translation of Climacus' reply, the Hongs regularly translate both the German and Danish forms of these words as "distinctive(ness)." Swenson/Lowrie have "peculiar(ity)."

104 Beck, "Review of *Fragments*," 212. Climacus does not own up to the fact that the hypothesis he's been investigating has only one historical counterpart, namely Christianity, until the very end of the book. See *PF* 109 (SKS 4, 305, 14-26).

105 Beck, "Review of *Fragments*," 212.

106 CUP 274 (SKS 7, 250, 11).

107 CUP 274-275 (SKS 7, 250, 14-19; italics mine; trans. modified).

108 I read these claims about Beck's review non-ironically. I take it that despite the review's significant shortcomings, Climacus could also have found it wanting if it didn't accurately represent what was in the book or if it made serious conceptual and dialectical blunders. But that is not where he locates his criticism. Not everyone, however, will read this non-ironically. This is another place in Climacus' texts where we should proceed slowly and be alert lest we miss the irony or find irony where there is none.

- 109 *CUP 275* (*SKS 7*, 250, 19-21; italics mine; trans. modified). On translating "docerende" as "didactic" see Chapter 3, note 109.
- 110 See Chapter 3, sections 3.3 and 3.4.
- 111 *CUP 275* (*SKS 7*, 250, 18-19; trans. modified); *CUP 276* (*SKS 7*, 252, 30).
- 112 *CUP 275* (*SKS 7*, 250, 21-22).
- 113 Conant, PTTT, 289.
- 114 Conant, PTTT, 284 (italics mine); KWN, 207 (italics mine).
- 115 Cf. Weston, "The Strategy of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*," 39: "The communication...requires...the untying of the knot formed by the contrast of form with (apparent) content"; see also 54; 64.
- 116 Conant, PTTT, 262-263.
- 117 Conant, PTTT, 263. See Chapter 2, section 2.2.
- 118 *CUP 242* (*SKS 7*, 220-221). The Hongs sometimes translate this as "form of contrast," sometimes as "contrastive form." Swenson/Lowrie opt to translate this as "contrast of form," making Climacus' terminology appear more uniform than it is.
- 119 *CUP 262* (*SKS 7*, 238, 15-16). Cf. *CUP 283* (*SKS 7*, 257-258): "It has never been puzzling to me why the pseudonyms have again and again requested that there be no reviews. Since the contrast-form of presentation makes it impossible to give a report, because a report takes away precisely what is most important and falsely changes it into a didactic discourse, the authors have a perfect right to prefer to be satisfied with a few actual readers rather than to be misunderstood by the many who pick up in a report something to talk about" (trans. modified).
- 120 *CUP 242-243* (*SKS 7*, 220-221; trans. modified).
- 121 *CUP 260* (*SKS 7*, 236, 15-17; trans. modified). See also *CUP 262* (*SKS 7*, 238, 16-20).
- 122 *CUP 242* (*SKS 7*, 220, 33-35; trans. modified); *CUP 260* (*SKS 7*, 236, 23-24).
- 123 *CUP 275* (*SKS 7*, 250, 22-29; trans. modified).
- 124 *CUP 361* (*SKS 7*, 329, 8-9; trans. modified).
- 125 *Pap. VI B 41*, 8 (quoted at *CUP 2* 65; trans. modified). The term "primitive" (*primitiv*) is an honorific in Kierkegaard's corpus and has connotations of a naiveté or simplicity that is grounded in the self rather than in what we derive from others. For Kierkegaard, cultural and intellectual sophistication of various sorts can serve to undercut an individual's primitivity, and maintaining it in the face of such things can be a strenuous, lifelong task. See, e.g., *JP 1*: 654 at 292 (*Pap. VIII.2 B 86*): "The history of the generation runs its course, it is true, but every single individual should still have his primitive impression of existence—in order to be a human being. And as it is with every human being, so also with every thinker—in order to be a thinker"; *JP 1*: 657 at 306 (*Pap. VIII.2 B 89*): "It is the basic misfortune of the modern age that it lacks primitivity; from which it naturally follows that the genuinely primitive questions never arise. And herein lies what I would call the

- dishonesty of the modern age. It is undeniably the safest and most comfortable thing to join up thoroughly with tradition, to do as the others, to believe, think, and talk as the others and prefer to go out after finite goals. But providence never intended it to be this way. Every human existence ought to have primitivity. But the primitive existence always contains a reexamination of the fundamental....Completely to lack primitivity and consequently reexamination, to accept everything automatically as common practice and let it suffice that it is common practice, consequently to evade responsibility for doing likewise—this is dishonesty” (I have removed Kierkegaard’s italics). See also *CUP* 344 (*SKS* 7, 314-315); *JP* 3: 3560 (*Pap.* XI.1 A 62).
- 126 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 250, 22; italics mine; trans. modified). For Conant, Climacus must not literally mean “content” here, but rather something more like “apparent content.”
- 127 See the previous two chapters, sections 2.6, 3.1, and 3.3.
- 128 *JP* 5: 5827 (*SKS* 18, JJ: 362; trans. modified). Later in this passage it becomes clear that Kierkegaard is speaking in his own voice when he refers to Climacus in the third person: “To make Christianity seem to be an invention of Johannes Climacus is a biting satire on philosophy’s insolent attitude toward it.”
- 129 For a nice discussion of Climacus’ use of satire in the *Postscript*, see John Lippitt, "Illusion and Satire in Kierkegaard’s *Postscript*," *Continental Philosophy Review* 32 (1999); reprinted in *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, revised version, under the title "Illusion and Satire: Climacus as Satirist" (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).
- 130 *JP* 5: 5827 (*SKS* 18, JJ: 362).
- 131 When Conant quotes the catalogue of features that Beck has purportedly neglected, he does so selectively and always omits (5). See KWN, 204; MWS, 280 (note 35).
- 132 Conant, PTTT, 289; *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 250, 27-28).
- 133 *Pap.* VI B 41, 8 (quoted at *CUP* 2 64). See *CUP* 241 (*SKS* 7, 220, 1-3) and Chapter 3, section 3.2.2.
- 134 *Pap.* VI B 41, 8 (quoted at *CUP* 2 64-65).
- 135 *JP* 5: 5827 (*SKS* 18, JJ: 362).
- 136 Beck, "Review of *Fragments*," 215-216 (quoted at *CUP* 276; *SKS* 7, 252, 28-30).
- 137 *CUP* 276 (*SKS* 7, 253, 17).
- 138 *CUP* 276-277 (*SKS* 7, 253, 19 and 23-24).
- 139 *CUP* 277 (*SKS* 7, 253, 29-31).
- 140 *CUP* 277 (*SKS* 7, 253, 31-33; trans. modified).
- 141 *CUP* 276 (*SKS* 7, 252, 30-33; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 142 Beck, "Review of *Fragments*," 212.
- 143 *CUP* 276 (*SKS* 7, 252-253; trans. modified).
- 144 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 250, 30; trans. modified).

- 145 On indirect communication, see Chapter 2, section 2.3 (especially notes 77 and 116).
- 146 See *CUP 277* (*SKS 7*, 250-251).
- 147 *PV 54* (*SVI 13*, 541).
- 148 *CUP 275* (*SKS 7*, 250, 29-33; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 149 Cf. *CUP 274* (*SKS 7*, 249, 6), where Climacus characterizes his potential reader as "a knowing reader, whose trouble perhaps is precisely that he is one who knows."
- 150 *CUP 242* (*SKS 7*, 220, 9-11). See Chapter 3, section 3.3.
- 151 *CUP 275* (*SKS 7*, 251, 17-18; trans. modified).
- 152 *CUP 264* (*SKS 7*, 240, 13). See Chapter 3, section 3.3.
- 153 This doesn't mean that such a work cannot be assessed; that is what we are doing here to a certain extent. What Climacus presumably objects to most is that Beck's review obscures the fact that the principal function of *Fragments* is therapeutic in nature.
- 154 *CUP 327* (*SKS 7*, 298-299).
- 155 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 326.
- 156 See, e.g., Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 16; 42; 54-57; 73-74; 143; Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 326 and *passim*; Conway, "The Drama of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," *passim*; Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*, 129; 134; 151.
- 157 At one point in *Fragments*, Climacus openly addresses his "dear reader" and seems to reveal that he does conceive of his reader as someone who has "fully understood and accepted the most recent philosophy" (*PF 73*; *SKS 4*, 273, 8-9). Cf. H. A. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1983), 2; 194.
- 158 In particular, Kierkegaard claims that the assistant professor (*Privat-Docenten*) of philosophy emerges in the *Postscript* as a "comic type" (*JP 6*: 6596; *Pap. X.6 B 128*). I am indebted to Michelle Kosch for pressing me to specify further the precise nature of Climacus' reader.
- 159 Plato, *Ap.* 33c. Socrates admits that "this is not unpleasant." On modern philosophers' alleged scorn for the category of the single individual, see *CUP 15-16* (*SKS 7*, 25); *CUP 279* (*SKS 7*, 254, 27-34). I discuss the latter passage in Chapter 3, section 3.3. See also Chapter 5, section 5.2.
- 160 *CUP 296* (*SKS 7*, 270, 3-5); *CUP 297* (*SKS 7*, 271, 13-14).
- 161 Glaucon, e.g., admits that listening to Thrasymachus and others like him has made him "deaf" and morally "perplexed" (see Plato, *Rep.* 358c). Though he might not put things as I have put them, I am indebted to John McDowell for this way of conceiving Socrates' relationship to Thrasymachus and related figures such as Callicles in the *Gorgias*. See John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert B. Brandom (London: Blackwell, 2000), 113: "I think the moral, in both dialogues [the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*] must be meant to be something on these lines: people who raise

- such questions [opponents of ethical orthodoxy] are dangerous, and should be forced into silence, or acquiescence, by whatever means are available; people whose character is in good order will have confidence in right answers to the questions, a confidence that should not be threatened by the fact that questioners such as Callicles and Thrasymachus cannot be won over by persuasive argument."
- 162 CUP 241 (SKS 7, 219, 8-10).
- 163 CUP 275 (SKS 7, 250, 33-35). On the significance of the term "primitive" see note 125.
- 164 CUP 276 (SKS 7, 251-252; italics mine); CUP 279 (SKS 7, 254, 14-17).
- 165 Conant, KWN, 207. See also KWN 206: "The problem with speculative philosophy, in Climacus' view, is that it stubbornly holds fast to the idea that the question of what it is to lead either an ethical or a Christian life is one that requires a certain degree of essential preliminary clarification...."
- 166 Cf. Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 350. See, e.g., PF 16 (SKS 4, 224, 30-32): "We shall take our time—after all there is no great need to hurry. By going slowly, one sometimes does indeed fail to reach the goal, but by going too fast, one sometimes passes it"; PF 25 (SKS 4, 232-233): "We shall not be in a hurry, and even though some may think that we are wasting time instead of arriving at a decision, our consolation is that it still does not therefore follow that our efforts are wasted"; see also PF 20 (SKS 4, 228, 14-18); PF 40 (SKS 4, 245, 27-34); PF 47 (SKS 4, 252, 10-13). Climacus also speaks of taking his time in the *Postscript*. See, e.g., CUP 207 (SKS 7, 189, 10): "Let us not be in a hurry"; CUP 602 (SKS 7, 547, 19-20): "the humorist always has ample time, because he has eternity's amplitude of time behind him"; CUP 76 (SKS 7, 77, 15-16): "We do have plenty of time, because what I write is not the awaited final paragraph that will complete the system." Compare Socrates' discussion of the difference between a philosopher (who has "plenty of time") and "the man of the law courts" (who is "always in a hurry"), someone who "has to speak with one eye on the clock" and whose working conditions "make him keen and highly strung, skilled in flattering the master and working his way into favor; but cause his soul to be small and warped" (Plato, *Tht.* 172e-173a).
- 167 See, e.g., Conant, KWN, 206: "the [speculative] philosopher interprets the task of becoming a Christian to require the cultivation and application of his understanding, *postponing* the claim that the Christian teaching makes upon his life, *deferring* the insight that what is required is the engagement of the will—the achievement of resolution" (italics mine); PTTT, 311 (note 35): "The attack in Kierkegaard is on a *form of reflection* which subserves a *strategy of evasion*—a form of reflection that offers the promise of enlightening us as to the nature of the ethical or the religious life but in fact *prevents* us from ever arriving at a *decisive action* and hence from properly embarking on such a life....What is under indictment therefore is a specific mode of thought, one that *pretends* to address itself to the ethical and religious life while answering our desire to *evade* such a life. It is part of the genius of this mode of reflection (i.e. speculative philosophy), as Kierkegaard sees it, to succeed in offering the reflecting individual the *semblance* of progress where no genuine movement has been made..." (italics mine).

- 168 *PF* 5 (*SKS* 4, 215, 13). See Chapter 3, section 3.2.1 and section 4.2.1 above. Lippitt rightly draws attention to Climacus' being a person who is "in no great hurry," and while he nicely ties Climacus' "lack of urgency" to "the *Postscript's* rhetorical and pedagogical strategy," I don't think he attaches enough significance to the fact that Climacus' "relaxed approach to life" is in part a response to his readers' misplaced sense of urgency and their being in a hurry to do more Hegelian-style philosophy (Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 62; 65; 163). Loafing is fundamentally an activity that is defined in contrast to whatever other activities happen to be taken to be serious and urgent. The loafer seems to waste time and will appear frivolous to such a "serious" person. Climacus' activity takes on the character of loafing in part "for good reasons" (see section 4.2.1); that is, because loafing stands in opposition to the serious, systematic philosophy to which his reader is accustomed.
- 169 Hence Climacus' goal of "mak[ing] something more difficult" (*CUP* 186; *SKS* 7, 172, 1), specifically the task of becoming a Christian: "When culture and the like have managed to make it so very easy to be a Christian, it is certainly in order that a single individual, according to his poor abilities, seeks to make it difficult, provided, however, that he does not make it more difficult than it is" (*CUP* 383; *SKS* 7, 349, 16-19); "The present work has made it difficult to become a Christian, so difficult that the number of Christians among the cultured in Christendom will perhaps not even be very great..." (*CUP* 587; *SKS* 7, 533, 18-20). See Chapter 3, section 3.2.1.
- 170 Climacus warns that "to finish too quickly is the greatest danger of all" (*CUP* 164; *SKS* 7, 152, 17-18). See Chapter 5, section 5.3.
- 171 Climacus notes that "if one is unaware of the work of inwardness, then the urge to go further is easily explained" (*CUP* 606; *SKS* 7, 550, 5-6).
- 172 *CUP* 381 (*SKS* 7, 347, 19). Climacus says that he will try to make Christianity as "difficult as possible" for his reader, "yet without making it more difficult than it is" (347, 20).
- 173 *CUP* 279 (*SKS* 7, 254, 16-17).
- 174 *CUP* 296 (*SKS* 7, 270, 3-4).
- 175 *CUP* 365-366 (*SKS* 7, 333, 1-15; italics mine; trans. modified, largely following *CUP_{SL}* 327); *CUP* 381 (*SKS* 7, 347, 21-25; trans. modified).
- 176 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 251, 18; trans. modified).
- 177 *CUP* 256 (*SKS* 7, 232, 25-28). As poetically satisfying as this claim may be, it is apparently not accurate. The Hongs note that "the great library in Alexandria, Egypt, with approximately 700,000 rolls of papyrus in many languages, was burned accidentally in 47 B.C. when the Romans, under Julius Caesar, occupied the city. Climacus apparently conflates that event with the story of a later burning (A.D. 642) by order of the Mohammedan caliph Omar I" (*CUP* 233; cf. *SKS* K7, 233).
- 178 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 250-251; trans. modified). On the significance of the term "primitive" see note 125.
- 179 *CUP* 275 (*SKS* 7, 251, 11-13).
- 180 *CUP* 187 (*SKS* 7, 172, 23-26). See Chapter 3, section 3.2.1.

- 181 *CUP 275* (SKS 7, 251, 13-21; trans. modified).
- 182 The pseudonym Anti-Climacus suggests that what is needed is a special Socratic diet and a Socrates to administer things: "In a time like this, which is running wild in its profusion of empty, pompous, and fruitless knowledge, . . . now, just as in Socrates' time, only even more so, it is necessary that people be *Socratically starved* a little. . . . It is said that the world needs a republic, and it is said to need a new social order and a new religion, but it occurs to no one that what this world really needs, confused as it is by too much knowledge [*megen Viden*], is a Socrates" (*SUD 90*; *SVI 11*, 201; *SUD 92*; *SVI 11*, 203; italics mine; both trans. modified).
- 183 Cf. Plato, *Sph.* 230c-d: "Doctors who work on the body think it can't benefit from any food that's offered to it until what's interfering with it from inside is removed. The people who cleanse the soul. . . likewise think the soul, too, won't get any advantage from any learning that's offered to it until someone shames it by refuting it, *removes the opinions that interfere with learning*, and exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more" (italics mine).
- 184 Cf. Conant, PTTT, 284.
- 185 *PV 54* (*SVI 13*, 541; trans. modified). See Chapter 2, section 2.3.
- 186 Plato, *Tht.* 151c. See Chapter 2, section 2.4; see also *WL 277* (SKS 9, 275, 2-5).
- 187 Cf. Conant, KWN, 206.
- 188 *CUP 276* (SKS 7, 251, 29-30).
- 189 *CUP 275* (SKS 7, 251, 21-25; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 190 See *Pap.* VI B 52: "With regard to communicating, it is also of importance to be able to take away when the recipient is possibly in the state of knowing too much. One clothes it in an altogether strange way so that he does not recognize it and at the same moment *for a short time* takes away from him what he knows, because now he does not know it" (this is cited at *CUP2 65* and is from a draft of *CUP*; italics mine).
- 191 *CUP 264* (SKS 7, 240, 13-15).
- 192 *CUP 275-276* (SKS 7, 251, 25-28). Cf. *CA 139-140* (SKS 4, 440, 17-19): "He knows everything, like the man who can prove a mathematical proposition when the letters are ABC, but not when the letters are DEF."
- 193 *CUP 68* (SKS 7, 70, 4-5). Cf. Plato, *Ap.* 18a: "Pay no attention to my manner of speech—be it better or worse—but. . . concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not."
- 194 *CUP 276* (SKS 7, 252, 18-22; italics mine; trans. modified). See section 4.3.1.
- 195 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 169. See section 4.1.
- 196 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 185 (italics mine).
- 197 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 190.
- 198 See especially Evans, *Passionate Reason*; Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*.

- 199 CUP 275 (SKS 7, 250, 27-28; trans. modified); Evans, "Irony in *Fragments*," 72.
- 200 CUP 276 (SKS 7, 252, 30).
- 201 CUP 276 (SKS 7, 252, 22). On Climacus' task of making Christianity more difficult, see note 172.
- 202 JP 5: 5827 (SKS 18, JJ: 362); CUP 279 (SKS 7, 254, 17).
- 203 PF 52 (SKS 4, 255, 32); PF 59 (SKS 4, 261, 23). On the distinction between "offense" and "faith," see Chapter 3, section 3.4 (especially note 176); see also PF 49 (SKS 4, 253); CUP 293 (SKS 7, 267, 7-19).
- 204 CUP 279 (SKS 7, 254, 12-14). Cf. note 87 and the passages cited there.
- 205 PF 9 (SKS 4, 218, 1-3; trans. modified). Cf. M 342 (SVI 14, 353); see Chapter 1, section 1.3.
- 206 This is not addressed in Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*; Evans, *Passionate Reason*; or Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates*.
- 207 Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is*, 5 (italics mine).
- 208 PF 9 (SKS 4, 218, 7-9). Here "the truth" in question is ethical and religious truth, that which concerns the individual *qua* existing person. One might also tie the *propositio* to the questions that appear on the title page of *Fragments*: "Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness? How can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest? Can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?" (PF 1; SKS 4, 213; I have added question marks to the first two questions, removing Climacus' semi-colons).
- 209 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 344.
- 210 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 344.
- 211 Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 344.
- 212 Unless perhaps one wanted to take the position that it was the work's listed editor, "S. Kierkegaard" who is responsible for the *propositio*. But this seems a bit of a reach. There is certainly no textual evidence to back up such a claim (nothing, e.g., that designates it as an editorial insertion).
- 213 CUP 275 (SKS 7, 250, 26-28; trans. modified).
- 214 *Pap.* V B 3, 1; 40, 6 (cited at PF 185; 186); *Pap.* V B 10 (cited at PF 186; italics mine; trans. modified). See the Hongs' introduction, KW 7, xvii.
- 215 This distinction, however, need not lead Mulhall to give up his claim that we should be suspicious of Climacus' activity in the body of *Fragments*. Elsewhere, while discussing the *Postscript*, he allows that Climacus may be fully aware of what he is doing when he (allegedly) sets about enacting the errors to which he thinks his reader is prone: "It seems...that Climacus is someone who is intellectually clear-sighted enough to be well aware of the erroneous nature of every mistake he makes, but who persists in making them"; "Climacus offers us all of the indirect evidence we need to judge for ourselves that

- the persona he presents to the reader embodies not the truth but a further version of the misapprehension to which he is opposed, in the hope that we can recognize ourselves in him and so go beyond the perspective he pretends to occupy" (Mulhall, *Faith and Reason*, 48; 52).
- 216 On the maieutic significance of the use of an incognito, see Chapter 2, section 2.4.
- 217 David J. Gouwens, "Understanding, Imagination, and Irony in Kierkegaard's *Repetition*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 286. Gouwens' focus in this paper is on "Constantin-as-character." In a letter to the reader at the end of *Repetition*, Constantius claims both to be the creator of the young man with whom he interacts in the body of the work ("I thought that for me it might be well worth the trouble to bring someone like that into being") and to "have put [himself] into" his experiment, serving as "a ministering spirit" for the young man (*R* 228; *SKS* 4, 93, 33-34; *R* 228; *SKS* 4, 94, 3-5). He claims that "the interest focuses on the young man," calling himself but "a vanishing person, just like a woman in confinement due to pregnancy [*en Barselkone*] in relation to the child she gives birth to"; he says that he has "so to speak, given birth to [the young man]" (*R* 230; *SKS* 4, 96, 3-6; trans. modified—the Hongs misleadingly translate "Barselkone" as "midwife").
- 218 *CUP* 290 (*SKS* 7, 264, 25-27). See Chapter 3, section 3.4.
- 219 See *PF* 21-22 (*SKS* 4, 229-230); *PF* 35-36 (*SKS* 4, 241-242); *PF* 46-48 (*SKS* 4, 251-252); *PF* 53-54 (*SKS* 4, 257); *PF* 66-71 (*SKS* 4, 267-271); *PF* 89-90 (*SKS* 4, 287-288); *PF* 105-110 (*SKS* 4, 301-306). Climacus also openly addresses his "dear reader" at *PF* 72-73 (*SKS* 4, 272-273).
- 220 For exceptions, see note 156. Daniel Conway's recent paper is in my view a model example of how judgments about Climacus' philosophical activity can completely misfire. While Conway is attentive to what he calls "the maturation and growth of [Climacus'] unnamed critic," claiming that "the unnamed critic likens Johannes to Socrates and himself to one of Socrates' interlocutors," he also somewhat surprisingly maintains that Climacus' exchanges with his interlocutor serve to "chronicle and enact nothing less than the spiritual growth of Johannes Climacus. Over the course of these exchanges, Johannes matures from a detached, self-absorbed 'loafer' into an aspiring initiate" (Conway, "The Drama of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," 141; 151, note 47). Yet, when Conway reads the preface to the *Postscript*, Climacus strikes him as "back where he started, smugly cocooned in a self-contained, aesthetic existence" (142). Conway laments that the "embedded drama of [Climacus'] growth and maturation" that he thought was on display in *Fragments* has turned out to be just "another fraud" (159). Since I personally do not see any signs in *Fragments* of Climacus' having changed or allegedly undergone a process of "growth," I do not share Conway's disappointment but I also reject the idea that Climacus' being a loafer is a degenerate state that he is (or even ought to be) seeking to overcome. That is to miss the point entirely of Climacus' being a loafer.
- 221 *PF* 21 (*SKS* 4, 229, 22); *PF* 35 (*SKS* 4, 241, 2); *PF* 46 (*SKS* 4, 251, 1; trans. modified). The one time that an exchange takes place somewhere other than at the end of a section of

- Fragments* is also the one time that Climacus departs from his practice of speaking of "someone," instead referring to his interlocutor as his "dear reader" (PF 89; SKS 4, 287, 3).
- 222 The pseudonym Anti-Climacus uses this device several times in the fifth chapter of part three of *Practice in Christianity*. See, e.g., PC 219 (SVI 12, 201).
- 223 See Chapter 1, note 19.
- 224 The first chapter of *Fragments* is entitled "Thought-Project" and consists of Climacus' initial sketch of the conceptual differences between the Socratic outlook and the Christian outlook. The second chapter is subtitled "A Poetical Venture" and develops an extended analogy between "a king who loved a maiden of lowly station in life" and the god's love for the individual human being (exploring whether or how these differences are compatible with a relationship between equals—PF 26; SKS 4, 233, 19). I borrow the term "register" from Stephen Mulhall. In describing the differences between the first two chapters of *Fragments*, he writes: "If the first register or dimension of [Climacus'] philosophical voice was that of logic, within which the conceptual skeleton of a thought-project could unfold, the second is that of poetry, within which an imaginary erotic tale is told" (Mulhall, "Reading *Philosophical Fragments*," 332). Mulhall treats the third chapter, not as I am doing as a return to the register of logic, but as a third, "metaphysical register" of "Climacus' philosophical voice" that "draws upon both its logical and its poetic possibilities" (338). Be that as it may, for my purposes the chief thing to notice is how Climacus regularly alternates between more philosophically demanding prose and further installments of "the poem" he is composing (a poem that seems so reminiscent of the life of Christ as represented in the Gospels). On Climacus' calling this a "poem," see, e.g., PF 55 (SKS 4, 258, 3); PF 86 (SKS 4, 285, 10).
- 225 PF 21 (SKS 4, 229, 22-29); PF 35 (SKS 4, 241, 2-4).
- 226 PF 22 (SKS 4, 230, 19-22).
- 227 PF 22 (SKS 4, 230, 10-11; trans. modified). The Hongs normally translate "besynderlig" as "curious" and occasionally as "odd." I have uniformly changed their translation to "strange," in part to bring out how Climacus' use of "besynderlig" throughout *Fragments* may line up with his claim in the *Postscript* that the art of taking away involves communicating what a person knows "in a form that makes it strange [*fremmed*] to him" (CUP 275; SKS 7, 251, 23).
- 228 PF 36 (SKS 4, 241, 33).
- 229 PF 36 (SKS 4, 241-242; trans. modified).
- 230 PF 46 (SKS 4, 251, 1-6; trans. modified).
- 231 See note 203.
- 232 PF 52 (SKS 4, 255, 32-33).
- 233 PF 53 (SKS 4, 257, 1-6).
- 234 PF 53 (SKS 4, 257, 15-16).
- 235 PF 59 (SKS 4, 261, 16); CUP 214 (SKS 7, 196, 9-11).

- 236 *PF* 68 (*SKS* 4, 269, 10-15).
- 237 Climacus frequently marks out the hypothetical character of his investigations in both *Fragments* and the *Postscript* by his use of the term "suppose" (*sæt*). See, e.g., *CUP* 77 (*SKS* 7, 77, 29-33): "I say only 'suppose,' and in this form I have permission to present what is most certain and most unreasonable, for even the most certain is not posited as the most certain but is posited as what is assumed for the purpose of shedding light on the matter; and even the most unreasonable is not posited essentially but only provisionally, for the purpose of illustrating the relation of ground and consequent." Cf. Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Kierkegaard's Socrates: A Venture in Evolutionary Theory," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001), 443.
- 238 *PF* 38 (*SKS* 4, 243, 23-24).
- 239 *PF* 109 (*SKS* 4, 305, 14-26; italics mine).
- 240 In an earlier draft of *Fragments* this connection between the opening *propositio* and Climacus' intentional act of forgetting was more clearly established. What now appear as some of Climacus' final words, in which he steps out of character to a certain extent, originally appeared immediately after the *propositio* at the beginning of the first chapter: "As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that...has wanted to be the individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than merely historically....However, we shall forget this, and have forgotten it, as if Christianity had never existed; on the other hand, availing ourselves of the unlimited discretion of a hypothesis, we shall assume that this question was a whimsical idea that had occurred to us and that we now in turn do not wish to abandon before finding the answer" (*Pap.* V B 3, 2; cited at *PF* 186; trans. modified).
- 241 *PF* 30 (*SKS* 4, 237, 5-6); *PF* 32 (*SKS* 4, 238, 19).
- 242 *PF* 109 (*SKS* 4, 305, 1-4; italics mine).
- 243 *PF* 105 (*SKS* 4, 301, 25-30).
- 244 *PF* 105 (*SKS* 4, 301, 31-34).
- 245 In the *Postscript*, Climacus makes clear that he conceives of the argument developed over the final two chapters of *Fragments* as something that is written in opposition to Lessing, "insofar as he has stipulated the advantage of contemporaneity" (*CUP* 97; *SKS* 7, 96, 26).
- 246 *PF* 26 (*SKS* 4, 233, 19-24). See Chapter 3, note 45.
- 247 *CUP* 283 (*SKS* 7, 258, 9-21; italics mine); cf. *CUP* 363 (*SKS* 7, 330-331). See Chapter 3, section 3.3.
- 248 *PF* 13 (*SKS* 4, 222, 19-20). Cf. *CUP* 208 (*SKS* 7, 191, 8-11).
- 249 *PF* 20-21 (*SKS* 4, 229, 5-11).
- 250 A Socratic trope, which stems from the *Gorgias* (see 490e), that Climacus repeatedly invokes in the *Postscript*. See especially *CUP* 285 (*SKS* 7, 260, 4) and Chapter 5, section 5.1.

- 251 *PF 72-73 (SKS 4, 273, 1-12; trans. modified).*
- 252 I therefore do not agree with Daniel Conway, who thinks that in this passage Climacus "beseeches his unnamed critic *not* to interpret his prolixity as conveying an intended insult" (Conway, "The Drama of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," 150; italics mine).
- 253 *PF 93 (SKS 4, 291, 11-15). Cf. PV 50 (SVI 13, 537-538).*
- 254 *PF 94 (SKS 4, 291, 24). Cf. JFY 201 (SVI 12, 468):* "A Christianity in which the psychical conditions that Christianity presupposes are, as one says of a disease, identifiable, characteristically identifiable, the struggle of an anguished conscience, fear and trembling, furthermore, the deep and perilous collision of the essentially Christian, that the essentially Christian is an offense to the Jews and a foolishness to the Greeks—certainly this kind of Christianity is scarcely or at least only rarely to be found in our day....It is scarcely to be found, and how could it be in our day when our entire way of life is calculated to prevent the mind from gaining the interiority that would enable such psychical conditions to become characteristic." See also Chapter 3, note 164.
- 255 Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 80; 82; cf. 117. See also, e.g., Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History*, 67-68; 78-79; Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is*, 95. Cf. Grøn, "Sokrates og Smulerne," 104.
- 256 *CUP 215 (SKS 7, 197, 2-5). See also CUP 229 (SKS 7, 1):* "It would indeed also be strange if an insignificant person like me were to succeed in what not even Christianity has succeeded—bringing the speculative thinker into passion. And if that should happen, well, then my fragment of philosophy would suddenly take on a significance of which I had scarcely ever dreamed. But the person who is neither cold nor hot is an abomination...."

- 1 In the English translation (*CUP*); *SKS* 7 is 573 pages.
- 2 See, e.g., *CUP* 618-619 (*SKS* 7, 561-562): “Consequently, the book is superfluous. Therefore, let no one bother to appeal to it, because one who appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it....Just as in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds a note at the back of the book that notifies the reader that everything is to be understood in accordance with the teachings of the holy universal mother Church, so also what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only a conclusion but a revocation to boot” (trans. modified).
- 3 For the full title, see Chapter 3, note 3.
- 4 When Kierkegaard typically refers to the *Postscript* in shortened form, he calls it *Concluding Postscript*.
- 5 See, e.g., *JP* 5: 5887 (*SKS* 20, NB: 7); *JP* 6: 6660 (*Pap.* X.3 A 318; cited at *CUP* 2 167). Cf. Niels Thulstrup, *Søren Kierkegaard: Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift udgivet med Indledning og Kommentar*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962); reprinted *Commentary on Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Robert J. Widenmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 152.
- 6 At the end of *Fragments*, Climacus raises the possibility not of writing a new book but of writing “the next section of this pamphlet” (*PF* 109; *SKS* 4, 305, 4-5).
- 7 In the introduction to the *Postscript*, Climacus draws his reader's attention to a remark he made near the end of *Fragments*, which he claims might have looked “like the promise of a sequel” (*CUP* 9; *SKS* 7, 19, 4-5). See *PF* 109 (*SKS* 4, 305, 4-13).
- 8 *CUP* 17 (*SKS* 7, 26, 11 and 25-27). The second part of the *Postscript* constitutes over 85 percent of the book (*CUP* 59-623; *SKS* 7, 63-566) and is entitled, “The Subjective Issue, the Relation of the Subject to the Truth of Christianity, or Becoming a Christian” (*CUP* 59; *SKS* 7, 63; trans. modified).
- 9 *PF* 109 (*SKS* 4, 305, 4-7). In the introduction to the *Postscript*, Climacus draws attention to the conditional, casual manner in which he raised the possibility of a sequel (“as far as possible from a solemn pledge”), noting that while, as a result, he has “not felt bound by that promise,” it has always been “[his] intent to fulfill it” (*CUP* 9; *SKS* 7, 19, 6-8). Climacus maintains that what interests people most in his day is the spectacle involved with the making of a promise, while whether someone actually fulfills it is ignored. The emphasis is on showy talk, not resolute action. The making of “a promise satisfies the demands of the times,” both because such an act “causes an enormous sensation” and because “two years later the person making the promise still enjoys the honor of having fulfilled it” (despite never having done so). If someone, on the other hand, *actually* were “to fulfill it, he would merely harm himself, because fulfilling it is of no interest” to people (*CUP* 10; *SKS* 7, 20, 7-11). Climacus thus aims to set himself against this societal trend, avoiding what is demanded (the promise) while delivering on what is neglected (the fulfilling of the promise).
- 10 *PF* 109 (*SKS* 4, 305, 13-17).

- 11 *PV* 31 (*SVI* 13, 523). See Chapter 2, section 2.3.
- 12 See Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.
- 13 *Pap.* V B 10 (cited at *PF* 186; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 14 *PV* 43 (*SVI* 13, 531). See Chapter 2, section 2.6. Cf. *JP* 1: 388 (*SKS* 22, NB13: 26): “The illusion that all are Christians has reached its peak...therefore examination in Christianity is required; through a presentation of Christianity a test must be made of what is really meant by saying that all are Christians. This is analogous to Socratic questioning. Just as [Socrates] began with the Sophists...and...emptied them by questioning, so we begin here with the claims of those who say they are Christians. And just as he was the ignorant one, so the examiner here must be someone who says that he is not himself a Christian. And just as the fruit of Socratic questioning was a sharper definition of knowledge, the fruit here is a sharper definition of what it is to be a Christian”; *JP* 6: 6237 (*SKS* 21, NB6: 73 at 54, 22-29): “One may...present Christianity..., and then, lest one seem to be judging others, judge oneself as being so far behind that one can scarcely claim the name of Christian, yet deeply desires to become a Christian and strives to be that. This is the right way. In due time it may have a resemblance to the relation of Socratic ignorance to the glut of human knowledge.”
- 15 *MWA* 8 (*SVI* 13, 496; trans. modified). Cf. C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 52.
- 16 See Chapter 4, section 4.2.2.
- 17 See Chapter 4, sections 4.3.2, 4.3.3, and 4.4.
- 18 Cf. Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 641-647.
- 19 *JP* 2: 1450 (*Pap.* XI.2 A 170; trans. modified).
- 20 See, e.g., *JP* 4: 4285 (*Pap.* X.4 A 333): “[Socrates’] life is a hypothetical experiment, and the heroic character of it is this enduring to the end, his becoming a martyr for it, but again in character, without pathos, etc.—thus one gets the impression: it could be a unique experience to be condemned to death”; cf. *CI* 230 (*SKS* 1, 272, 20-28).
- 21 If Climacus is of the view that “in Greece a thinker was...himself...an existing work of art” then we might see his performances in his two books as the literary analogues of such a life (*CUP* 303; *SKS* 7, 276, 20-22).
- 22 *CUP* 77 (*SKS* 7, 78, 6-8). See Chapter 3, section 3.4.
- 23 Cf. *CUP* 462 (*SKS* 7, 420, 14-15): “[I]t holds true without exception that the more competently a person exists, the more he will discover the comic”; *CUP* 304 (*SKS* 7, 277, 14-18): “By essentially existing *qua* human being, one also gains a responsiveness to the comic. I am not saying that everyone who actually exists as a human being is therefore able to be a comic poet or a comic actor, but he has a responsiveness to it.”

- 24 CUP 284 (SKS 7, 258, 28-30). Johannes the Seducer (the narrator of “The Seducer’s Diary”) and Victor Eremita (*Either/Or*’s editor) both appear in the first part of *Stages* (along with Constantin Constantius from *Repetition*), while Judge William is the pseudonymous author of the second part of *Stages*. On the latter claim, see SLW 85 (SKS 6, 83, 34-35); SLW 82 (SKS 6, 81, 1-2).
- 25 CUP 284 (SKS 7, 258-259).
- 26 CUP 285 (SKS 7, 260, 3-4). See Plato, *Grg.* 490e.
- 27 CUP 285 (SKS 7, 260, 15-18). See also Chapter 2, note 111.
- 28 CUP 285 (SKS 7, 259, 9-13). Cf. CUP 259-260 (SKS 7, 236, 5-12): “But inwardness does not have the kind of range that arouses the amazement of the sensate. For example, inwardness in erotic love does not mean to get married seven times to Danish girls, and then to go for the French, the Italian, etc., but to love one and the same and yet be continually renewed in the same erotic love, so that it continually flowers anew in mood and exuberance—which, when applied to communication, is the inexhaustible renewal and fertility of expression.”
- 29 CUP 285 (SKS 7, 259-260); CUP 286 (SKS 7, 261, 10-20). Climacus claims that “it is undoubtedly with regard to such an inquisitive reader that the first third of [*Stages on Life’s Way*] has these words by Lichtenberg as its epigraph: “*Solche Werke sind Spiegel: wenn ein Affe hinein guckt, kann kein Apostel heraus sehen* [Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out]” (CUP 285-286; SKS 7, 260, 33-35).
- 30 CUP 68 (SKS 7, 69-70). Compare the story that Climacus tells (and then retells) about “the traveler who under oath had identified an innocent person as the robber because he merely recognized the robber’s wig and did not recognize his robber” (CUP 69; SKS 7, 70, 17-19). Climacus retells this story at the very end of the conclusion of the *Postscript* (CUP 615-616; SKS 7, 559, 10-26), adding: “If my memory does not fail me, I have already told this story once before in this book; yet I wish to end the whole book with it. I do not think that anyone will in truth be able to accuse me ironically of having varied it in such a way that it has not remained the same” (CUP 616; SKS 7, 559, 27-30). Given that Climacus’ aim is to help remind his reader of what she has forgotten, his suggestion that his memory might have failed him is a nice Socratic touch and is also reminiscent of the strategy of intentional forgetting that he used in *Fragments* (see Chapter 4, section 4.4.3). Compare Socrates’ ironic discussion of his poor memory in Plato’s *Protagoras*: “Protagoras, I tend to be a forgetful sort of person, and if someone speaks to me at length I tend to forget the subject of the speech. Now, if I happened to be hard of hearing and you were going to converse with me, you would think you had better speak louder to me than to others. In the same way, now that you have fallen in with a forgetful person, you will have to cut your answers short if I am going to follow you” (334d). Alcibiades later returns to this topic, adding: “If Protagoras admits that he is Socrates’ inferior in dialectic, that should be enough for Socrates. But if he contests the point, let him engage in a question-and-answer dialogue and not spin out a long speech every time he answers, fending off the issues because he doesn’t want to be accountable, and going on and on until most of the listeners

- have forgotten what the question was about, although I guarantee you Socrates won't forget, no matter how he jokes about his memory" (336c-d).
- 31 Cf. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 22; 106-107. On the pseudonyms' use of the device of the experiment, see Chapter 3, section 3.4; on Climacus' experiment in *Fragments*, see Chapter 4, section 4.4.
- 32 *CUP* 15 (*SKS* 7, 24, 34-35). The Danish term that the Hongs translate as "issue" is "Problem," which might more naturally be translated as "problem." Though Climacus seems to deny that he has addressed the former matter (concerning the truth of Christianity) in *Fragments* (see *PF* 111; *SKS* 4, 306, 6-8), he does raise issues in Chapters 4 and 5 that he will discuss in greater detail in the first part of the *Postscript* (entitled, "The objective issue of the truth of Christianity"—*CUP* 19-57; *SKS* 7, 27-61). See, e.g., *PF* 59-60 (*SKS* 4, 261-262); *PF* 92-93 (*SKS* 4, 289-291); *PF* 99-100 (*SKS* 4, 296-297). See also Robert Merrihew Adams, "Kierkegaard's Arguments Against Objective Reasoning in Religion," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 33 *CUP* 17 (*SKS* 7, 26, 10-11). On aesthetic vs. ethical/religious capacities, see Chapter 2, section 2.2 and Chapter 3, section 3.4.
- 34 *CUP* 15 (*SKS* 7, 24-25; italics mine).
- 35 *CUP* 15-16 (*SKS* 7, 25, 2-8; italics mine; trans. modified); *CUP* 17 (*SKS* 7, 26, 10-13). The experimental character of this passage is obscured by Swenson/Lowrie, who translate "jeg eksperimenterende skal bruge mig selv" as "using myself by way of illustration" (*CUP_{SL}* 19). There is nothing problematic about Climacus' here calling Christianity a "doctrine." It is true that he sometimes claims the opposite, saying of Christianity that it is "not a doctrine [*en Lære*]," but "an existence-communication" (*CUP* 379-380; *SKS* 7, 345-346). It is important to appreciate, however, that he does not object per se to calling the Christian teaching a doctrine, but instead seeks to counteract what he takes to be a tendency in his day to confuse "a doctrine that is to be comprehended and speculatively understood" and "a doctrine that is to be actualized in existence" (*CUP* 379; *SKS* 7, 345, 23-24; trans. modified); the latter type of doctrine clearly has a practical, action-generating purpose that Climacus seems to think will be undercut by approaching such a doctrine in a more theoretical, speculative frame of mind. Climacus claims that "if there is to be any question of understanding with regard to this latter doctrine, then this understanding must be: to understand that it is to be existed in, to understand the difficulty of existing in it, what a prodigious existence-task this doctrine assigns to the learner" (24-28). He also adds that "with regard to such a doctrine...it is a misunderstanding to want to speculate on it. Christianity is a doctrine of this kind" (*CUP* 380; *SKS* 7, 345, 33-35). It is for this reason that he sometimes refrains from calling Christianity a doctrine: "When...it is the case that the nineteenth century is so frightfully speculative, it is to be feared that the word 'doctrine' is immediately understood as a philosophical doctrine that is to be and ought to be comprehended. To avoid this mistake, I have chosen to call Christianity an existence-communication in order to designate very definitely how it is different from speculative thought" (*CUP* 380; *SKS* 7, 346, 28-34; trans. modified).

- 36 See Chapter 4, section 4.4.3 (especially note 237).
- 37 Climacus identifies this as the overarching question at *CUP* 617 (*SKS* 7, 560, 26).
- 38 The pseudonym Anti-Climacus, for example, provides a portrait of an author who remains personally elusive while employing indirect communication that is strikingly reminiscent of the *Postscript*: "Here is an example of indirect communication....One presents faith in the eminent sense and represents it in such a way that the most orthodox sees it as a defense of faith and the atheist sees it as an attack, while the communicator is a zero, a nonperson, an objective something—yet perhaps he is an ingenious spy who with the aid of this communication finds out which is which, who is the believer, who the atheist; because this is disclosed when they form a judgment about what is presented, which is neither attack nor defense" (*PC* 133-134; *SVI* 12, 124-125; trans. modified); cf. *CUP* 64 (*SKS* 7, 66, 15-18). See also Chapter 3, note 185.
- 39 Stephen Mulhall, *Faith and Reason* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 51.
- 40 Henry E. Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense," *Review of Metaphysics* 20 (1967). See Chapter 4, note 52.
- 41 Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense," 432-433.
- 42 Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense," 433 (italics mine).
- 43 For references see Chapter 4, note 52. We discussed Conant (sections 4.2.1, 4.3.1 and 4.3.2) and Mulhall (sections 4.1 and 4.4.1) in the previous chapter.
- 44 Michael Weston, "Evading the Issue: The Strategy of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*," *Philosophical Investigations* 22 (1999), 43.
- 45 Weston, "The Strategy of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*," 64; 40.
- 46 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 190. See Chapter 4, section 4.1.
- 47 Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 185 (italics mine).
- 48 Conant, KWN, 201: "The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* begins as a work that aspires to clarify the question: how does one become a Christian?...[Climacus] insists that he, Johannes Climacus, in preoccupying himself with the guiding question of the work, 'how does one become a Christian?,' is himself far from being a Christian"; KWN, 205: "The task of becoming a Christian, in the philosopher's hands, becomes the problem of formulating a set of philosophical categories which are appropriate to the task of answering the question: 'How does one become a Christian?' "; see also PTTT, 262.
- 49 See, e.g., *CUP* 501 (*SKS* 7, 454, 12-13): "I am not a religious person but simply and solely a humorist"; *CUP* 483 (*SKS* 7, 438, 3-5): "I...am neither a religious speaker nor a religious person, but just a humorous, experimenting psychologist" (trans. modified); *CUP* 466 (*SKS* 7, 424, 1-2): "I...do not even pretend to be a Christian"; see also *CUP* 617 (*SKS* 7, 560, 3-7). It's worth noting, however, that Climacus also claims that religious individuals sometimes cloak themselves in humor, using the outward appearance of a humorist as a kind of disguise or "incognito" (see, e.g., *CUP* 500-501; *SKS* 7, 453-54; *CUP* 505-509;

- SKS 7, 458-62; cf. John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 91-96). What is at issue here, however, is not the character of Climacus' inner life (which arguably remains hidden from the reader), but the fact that he consistently denies in everything that he says that he is a religious individual (thanks to John Lippitt for pressing me to be clearer about this point). For more on whether Climacus consistently denies that he is religious, see note 125 below. We will return to the topic of what it is to be a humorist in section 5.4.
- 50 Conant, PTTT, 262; see also PTTT, 289. I see no evidence in the *Postscript* that Climacus “insist[s] upon his own detachment and disinterestedness”; it is striking that he never says anything quite on the order of its being his wish “to pursue the answer in a ‘disinterested’ fashion” and never characterizes his own interest as “of a purely objective and impersonal nature.” We will discuss further Climacus' own existential stance *qua* humorist in section 5.4.
- 51 Conant, PTTT, 257; cf. PTTT 263. See also Chapter 2, section 2.2.
- 52 Conant, PTTT, 257.
- 53 Cf. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 282: “What Climacus does is to view every aspect of human existence from the first-person-present perspective—the perspective of an exister”; see also Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994), 9; 136; Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 13; 16; 18; 41.
- 54 CUP 16 (SKS 7, 25, 24-25).
- 55 CUP 355 (SKS 7, 324, 20-28).
- 56 CUP 16 (SKS 7, 25, 8-12; trans. modified).
- 57 CUP 16 (SKS 7, 25, 12-13); cf. CUP 12 (SKS 7, 23, 32). Climacus also deflects some of this imagined scorn as follows: “It is not I who of my own accord have become so audacious; it is Christianity itself that compels me. It attaches an entirely different sort of importance to my own little self and to every ever-so-little self....Although an outsider, I have at least understood this much, that the only unforgivable high treason against Christianity is the single individual's taking his relation to it for granted” (CUP 16; SKS 7, 25, 14-27).
- 58 CUP 617-618 (SKS 7, 560, 21-28; trans. modified following CUP_{SL} 545). The Hongs translate “Jeg har spurgt derom” as “I have asked about it,” which is a more literal translation but which is perhaps overly literal and so potentially misleading. Based on this translation Michael Lotti, for example, tries to argue that Climacus “affirms that he has not asked the question [“How do I become a Christian?”], but he has only asked *about* it” (Michael Lotti, “Who is Johannes Climacus?: Kierkegaard's Portrait of the Philosophical Enterprise” (M. Phil. Thesis, University of Wales, Swansea, 1999), 139). For Lotti's purposes, this creates a gap between someone who personally asks this question and someone who contemplatively investigates the matter without any personal interest. I think this is strained, however, and ignores the clear context. Climacus has just finished saying that he “spørger” (asks) this question “solely for his own sake” (that is, “in the isolation of the experiment, the whole book is about [himself]”). First he says that this is what he is

“doing” and then he qualifies this by noting that it is more accurate to say that this is what he *has* done. Sometimes in Danish the verb “at spørge” absorbs the preposition “om,” so that it simply means “to ask.” If that were the case here, then Climacus might simply be saying that he has asked this (question). Climacus is not trying to attribute to himself a contemplative stance in relation to the material, but to underscore that within the experiment he has raised this question as it should be raised; now that the experiment is over and he is no longer in character as one who is interested in becoming a Christian, he then proceeds to describe in the past tense what he has done over the course of the book. Thanks to Richard Purkarthofer and Brian Söderquist for discussing this passage with me.

- 59 *CUP 17 (SKS 7, 26, 15-16; italics mine)*. See Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.
- 60 *CUP 373-374 (SKS 7, 340, 3-24)*.
- 61 *CUP 17 (SKS 7, 26, 19)*.
- 62 *CUP 17 (SKS 7, 26, 13-15)*.
- 63 See Chapter 2, section 2.6.
- 64 *CUP 313 (SKS 7, 285, 7-9; italics mine)*.
- 65 For example, Climacus argues that “a Hegelian cannot possibly understand himself with the aid of his philosophy; he can understand only what is past, is finished, but a person who is still living is not dead and gone” (*CUP 307; SKS 7, 280, 27-29*).
- 66 *CUP 99 (SKS 7, 97, 35-36)*. See Chapter 4, section 4.2.1. Climacus claims that “to recall Lessing is an act of desperation” that may not be understood by the modern speculative philosophers being targeted in the *Postscript*. He thinks that Lessing belongs “to the distant past, a receding little station on the systematic world-historical railroad” and that to “resort to him is to pass judgment upon oneself and to justify every contemporary in the objective opinion that one is incapable of keeping up with the age that travels by railroad” (*CUP 68; SKS 7, 69, 20-21; CUP 67; SKS 7, 69, 15-19*). Lessing in effect serves as a modern bridge back to Socrates and “the beautiful Greek way of philosophizing” he represents, in which “to philosophize was an act” and “the one philosophizing was an existing person” (*CUP 99; SKS 7, 97, 34-35; CUP 331; SKS 7, 302, 16-17*).
- 67 On Climacus’ reader, see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.
- 68 On being a proper thinker in ancient Greece and in Christendom, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.2.
- 69 *CUP 121 (SKS 7, 116, 24-33; trans. modified)*.
- 70 Climacus equates the two terms at *CUP 353 (SKS 7, 323, 15-16)*. For Climacus’ use of the term “subjective thinker” see especially *CUP 72-93 (SKS 7, 73-92); CUP 349-360 (SKS 7, 320-328)*. For his use of the term “simple wise person” see *CUP 227-228 (SKS 7, 207-208)*. Earlier, Climacus refers to the simple wise person as “the wise person.” See *CUP 159-160 (SKS 7, 148-149); CUP 181 (SKS 7, 167, 1-4); CUP 182 (SKS 7, 168, 9-12)*; see also *CUP 179 (SKS 7, 165, 28-29); CUP 623 (SKS 7, 565, 22-29)*. Climacus refers to Socrates as “that simple wise person” at *PF 19 (SKS 4, 228, 7)*; for Kierkegaard’s use of this term, see Chapter 2, note 145.

- 71 Compare our earlier discussion in section 5.2 of the objective and subjective issues pertaining to Christianity. See also Robert C. Roberts, "Thinking Subjectively," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11 (1980); Robert Merrihew Adams, "Truth and Subjectivity," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 72 CUP 192 (SKS 7, 176, 11-15). Later Climacus adds: "The way to the objective truth goes away from the subject, and...the subject and subjectivity become indifferent...The way of objective reflection now leads to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subjective individual, whose existence or nonexistence becomes, from an objective point of view, altogether properly, infinitely indifferent" (CUP 193; SKS 7, 177, 24-31).
- 73 CUP 131 (SKS 7, 123, 7-8); CUP 163 (SKS 7, 151, 21-22).
- 74 CUP 131 (SKS 7, 123, 4-6).
- 75 See especially Chapter 2, section 2.4 and Chapter 3, section 3.3.
- 76 CUP 74 (SKS 7, 74, 20-21).
- 77 CUP 79 (SKS 7, 79, 7-9).
- 78 CUP 73 (SKS 7, 73-74). Kierkegaard characterizes the endeavor of his different pseudonyms (up to and including Climacus) as involving "double reflection" (FLE 629; SKS 7, 573).
- 79 CUP 72-73 (SKS 7, 73, 23-27).
- 80 CUP 73 (SKS 7, 74, 1-3); cf. CUP 83 (SKS 7, 82, 26).
- 81 CUP 76 (SKS 7, 77, 10-14).
- 82 JP 1: 649, 21 (Pap. VIII.2 B 81, 21). Cf. PC 133-134 (SVI 12, 124-125).
- 83 CUP 80 (SKS 7, 80, 20-21); CUP 87 (SKS 7, 87, 3-9); cf. CUP 292 (SKS 7, 266, 7-10).
- 84 CUP 80 (SKS 7, 80, 25-26). See Chapter 3, section 3.1.
- 85 CUP 351 (SKS 7, 321, 9-10); compare Climacus' use of "uvidenskabelig" (unscientific/unscholarly) in the title of the *Postscript*. See also, e.g., Sylvia Walsh, "The Art of Existing," in *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
- 86 CUP 351 (SKS 7, 321, 13-28); CUP 356 (SKS 7, 325, 16-18). Cf. SLW 483-484 (SKS 6, 445, 22-36): "A thinking person must...know his relationship to human existence....He must indeed know how far it is ethically and religiously defensible to close himself up metaphysically, to be unwilling to respect the claim life has...upon his human *you*, whether life calls him to pleasure and happiness and enjoyment or to terror and trembling, because thoughtlessly to remain unaware of that is just as dubious. And if he is able thoughtlessly to disregard this, then try an experiment with that kind of a thinker: place him in Greece—and he will be laughed to scorn in that chosen land,...first and last so fortunate in its thinkers, who sought and struggled to understand themselves and to

- understand themselves in existence before they tried to explain all existence" (trans. modified).
- 87 *CUP 352 (SKS 7, 322, 14; I have removed Climacus' italics).*
- 88 *CUP 352 (SKS 7, 322, 16-24).* Climacus suggests that by doing his experiment he, too, may be regarded as a "lunatic" by those who already assume as a matter of course that they are Christians. See *CUP 17 (SKS 7, 26, 19).*
- 89 *CUP 353 (SKS 7, 323, 12-14; I have removed Climacus' italics; trans. modified).* Climacus expands on this thought as follows: "The difficulty is greater than for the Greek, because even greater contrasts are placed together, because existence is accentuated paradoxically as sin, and eternity paradoxically as the god in time. The difficulty is to exist in them, not abstractly to think oneself out of them and abstractly to think about, for example, an eternal divine becoming and other such things that appear when one removes the difficulty. Therefore, the existence of the believer is even more passionate than that of the Greek philosopher..., because existence yields passion, but existence accentuated paradoxically yields the maximum of passion" (*CUP 353-354; SKS 7, 323, 19-28*). See Chapter 4, section 4.2.2.
- 90 *CUP 168 (SKS 7, 156, 11); see also CUP 350-352 (SKS 7, 320-322).*
- 91 *CUP 255 (SKS 7, 232, 3-6); CUP 164 (SKS 7, 152, 7-10).*
- 92 See *CUP 165-170 (SKS 7, 153-158); CUP 171-177 (SKS 7, 158-163).* Other examples of simple, existence-issues that Climacus discusses include what it means "to pray" (*CUP 162-163; SKS 7, 150-151*); "what does it mean that I should thank God for the good that he gives me?" (*CUP 177-179; SKS 7, 163-166*); "what does it mean to marry?" (*CUP 179-181; SKS 7, 166-167*). In addition to these examples, he also directs the reader to issues pertaining to "the religious in the strictest sense," in which the task is "becoming aware of the paradox and holding on to the paradox at every moment, and most of all fearing an explanation that would remove the paradox" (*CUP 182; SKS 7, 167-168*). See, e.g., Climacus' discussion of "the paradox of forgiveness of sins" and the contrast he draws between how the simple wise person treats this paradox (upholding an equality between himself and the simple person) and how the speculative philosopher "explains the paradox in such a way that he cancels it" and so ends up maintaining that there is "an essential difference between the speculative thinker and the simple person" (*CUP 227; SKS 7, 207, 18-19 and 22-23; see CUP 224-228; SKS 7, 204-208*).
- 93 While Climacus notes the general value of drawing a distinction between thinking and acting, or between reflection and the ethical-religious, he also suggests that there may be some thoughts that are inherently motivating: "If there is to be a distinction at all between thinking and acting, this can be maintained only by assigning possibility, disinterestedness, and objectivity to thinking, and action to subjectivity. But now a *confinium* is readily apparent. For example, when I think that I will do this and that, this thinking is certainly not yet an act and is forevermore qualitatively different from it, but it is a *possibility* in which the *interest* of actuality and action is *already reflected*. Therefore, disinterestedness and objectivity are about to be disturbed, because actuality and responsibility want to have a firm grip on them. (Thus there is a sin in thought.)" (*CUP 339; SKS 7, 309-310; italics*

- mine); “[T]his possibility is not aesthetically and intellectually disinterested but is a thought-actuality that is related to my own personal actuality—namely, that I am able to carry it out” (*CUP* 322-323; *SKS* 7, 294, 16-18). So, e.g., with respect to thinking about death, Climacus maintains that “for the subject it is an act to think his death....[I]f the task is to become subjective, then for the individual subject to think death is not at all some such thing in general but is an act, because the development of subjectivity consists precisely in this, that he, acting, works through himself in his thinking about his own existence, consequently that he actually thinks what is thought by actualizing it” (*CUP* 169; *SKS* 7, 156, 27-36).
- 94 *CUP* 161 (*SKS* 7, 149-150). Cf. *CUP* 83 (*SKS* 7, 82-83); *FT* 100 (*SKS* 4, 190, 29-34). See also, e.g., Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 4.80: “A certain Zopyrus claimed that he could discern a person’s nature from his physiognomy. This man gave out a list of Socrates’ faults in the midst of a gathering and was laughed at by all the rest, for they were aware that Socrates did not exhibit those faults. Socrates himself, however, supported Zopyrus, saying that they were indeed inborn in him, but that he had cast them out by reason” (I quote the Margaret Graver translation). See Margaret Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions, Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 95 At the end of the third part of *Stages on Life’s Way*, the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus imagines someone speaking who is sympathetic to the present age (and so quite unsympathetic to Taciturnus’ endeavor). The criticism this champion of the age raises against Taciturnus could equally be raised against Climacus: “Do not listen to him, for what he wants...is to seduce you in a period of ferment to sit still in the undivided estate of quietism in the futile thought that everyone is supposed to attend to himself....But you who are alive and children of the age, are you not aware that life is quaking? Do you not hear the martial music that is signaling, do you not sense the urgency of the moment....From whence this frothing unless it is boiling in the depths; from whence these terrible labor pains if the age is not pregnant! Therefore, do not believe him, do not listen to him, for in his mocking and drawn-out way, which is supposed to be Socratic, he probably would say that from the labor pains one cannot directly deduce the outcome of birth since labor pains are like nausea, which is worst when one has an empty stomach. Nor does it follow that everyone who has a distended stomach is about to give birth—it could also be flatulence” (*SLW* 493; *SKS* 6, 453-454).
- 96 *CUP* 160-161 (*SKS* 7, 149, 15-17).
- 97 *CUP* 227 (*SKS* 7, 207, 27-32).
- 98 *CUP* 227-228 (*SKS* 7, 207-208). See the imagined exchange between the simple person and the simple wise person about wherein lies the difference between their respective understandings of “the forgiveness of sins” (*CUP* 228; *SKS* 7, 208, 5-22).
- 99 *CUP* 170 (*SKS* 7, 158, 24-26); *CUP* 182 (*SKS* 7, 168, 19-21). See also *CUP* 181 (*SKS* 7, 167, 4-7).
- 100 *CUP* 182 (*SKS* 7, 168, 22); *CUP* 181 (*SKS* 7, 167, 1-4). Cf. *CUP* 623 (*SKS* 7, 565, 22-29).

- 101 *CUP* 165 (*SKS* 7, 153, 12-13); cf. *CUP* 86 (*SKS* 7, 85, 24-25): “one continually feels an urge to have something finished, but this urge is of evil and must be renounced.”
- 102 *CUP* 164 (*SKS* 7, 152, 22-33). Cf. *CUP* 405-406 (*SKS* 7, 369, 5-27).
- 103 *CUP* 164 (*SKS* 7, 153, 1-2; trans. modified).
- 104 *CUP* 165 (*SKS* 7, 153, 2-4).
- 105 *CUP* 181 (*SKS* 7, 167, 31).
- 106 *CUP* 170 (*SKS* 7, 157, 14 and 28-34; trans. modified); cf. *CUP* 255 (*SKS* 7, 232, 11-14); *CUP* 354 (*SKS* 7, 323, 33-34).
- 107 Compare the contrast that the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus draws in his “Concluding Word” to the reader between his own tendency not to “move from the spot” and his reader’s impatient desire to gallop off on “his swift steed”: “My dear reader—but to whom am I speaking? Perhaps no one at all is left. Probably the same thing has happened to me in reverse as happened to that noble king whom a sorrowful message taught to hurry, whose precipitous ride to his dying beloved has been made unforgettable by the unforgettable ballad in its celebration of the hundred young men who accompanied him from Skanderborg, the fifteen who rode with him over Randbøl Heath, but when he crossed the bridge at the Ribe the noble lord was alone. The same, in reverse, to be sure, and for opposite reasons, has happened to me, who, captivated by one idea, did not move from the spot—all have ridden away from me. In the beginning, no doubt, the favorably disposed reader reined in his swift steed and thought I was riding a pacer, but when I did not move from the spot, the horse (that is, the reader) or, if you please, the rider, became impatient, and I was left behind alone: a nonequestrian or a Sunday rider whom everybody outrides” (*SLW* 485; *SKS* 6, 446, 21-33).
- 108 *CUP* 165 (*SKS* 7, 153, 12-13 and 17-18). In response to those who are dubious of this claim, Climacus invites them to back this up with a simple test: “If one is unwilling to believe that to understand oneself, thinking, in existence involves difficulties, then I am more than willing to venture a test. Let one of our systematians take it upon himself to explain to me just one of the simplest existence-issues. I am very willing to admit that in the systematic bookkeeping I am not worthy to be counted even as zero if I am to be compared with the likes of them. I am willing to admit that the tasks of systematic thinking are much greater and that such thinkers stand far above a subjective thinker; but if this is truly the case, then they must also easily be able to explain what is simpler.”
- 109 See *CUP* 619 (*SKS* 7, 562, 15-17); *CUP* 621 (*SKS* 7, 563, 32-35). The Danish terms that are frequently translated “revocation” and “to revoke” are “Tilbagekaldelse” and “at tilbagekalde,” which more literally mean a “calling back” and “to call back” or “to recall” (as in to call back an ambassador or to recall a defective product). Other senses can include “taking back” (as in taking back what you said); “to withdraw” (as in to withdraw one’s support); “to retract” or “to recant”; “to cancel” or “to annul.”
- 110 See especially Conant, *KWN*, 202-203.

- 111 Conant, KWN, 197; see also KWN, 215-216. With respect to the *Tractatus*, Conant specifically has in mind 6.54: "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly." See Chapter 2, note 98.
- 112 Conant, PTTT, 291.
- 113 Conant, PTTT, 298.
- 114 Conant, KWN, 224 (note 86; italics mine); see also MWS, 252.
- 115 See Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.
- 116 For a helpful discussion of Conant's account of revocation, see Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 50-56.
- 117 *CUP* 617-618 (*SKS* 7, 560, 21-28). See note 58 above.
- 118 At one point Climacus notes that "the experiment is the communication's conscious, teasing revocation" (*CUP* 263; *SKS* 7, 239, 28; trans. modified). Thus while I am sympathetic to John Lippitt's view that Climacus is what he calls a "positive exemplar" (and so not someone who "himself exemplifies a particular kind of confusion: that he makes the same mistakes as those he condemns"), I think Lippitt moves too quickly when he maintains that Climacus "is an ethical-religiously concerned individual" who "serves as arguably Kierkegaard's most memorable exemplar of what Evans calls 'passionate reason' " (Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 69; 46; 69; 71; italics mine). To be fair, it is not entirely clear what Lippitt means here by "concerned" (in the present context he opposes Climacus' "concern" with the condition of being "disinterested," suggesting that he means that Climacus is an ethical-religiously *interested* individual, but elsewhere he rightly notes that the humorist is someone who, with respect to the religious, "lacks the appropriate inwardness" and who does not have a "full commitment," 94). While I join him in rejecting Conant's conception of Climacus as someone who approaches ethical and religious matters in a disinterested manner, I don't think we can conclude from this straightaway that he therefore must approach things in an interested manner. This is to ignore the experimental nature of his endeavors and to assign no significance to the fact that much of the time he is "in character" or playing a role he has assumed that he thinks is suited to the particular condition of his reader.
- 119 *CUP* 617 (*SKS* 7, 560, 3-13); cf. *SLW* 487 (*SKS* 6, 17-22). While Climacus arguably exhibits humor throughout the *Postscript*, he does not characterize himself as a humorist until nearly three quarters of the way into the book at *CUP* 451 (*SKS* 7, 410, 17-25): "In our day, people have frequently enough been inclined to mistake the humorous for the religious, even for the Christian-religious....No one can know this better than I, who am myself essentially a humorist and, having my life in immanence, am [experimentally] seeking the Christian-religious."
- 120 David Cain, "Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Johannes Climacus on Humor and Faith," in *Liber Academiae Kierkegaardiana, Vol. 7: Irony and Humor in Søren Kierkegaard*, eds.

- Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1988), 91. See also Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 203-204; Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 59-60.
- 121 *CUP* 291 (*SKS* 7, 265, 21-22). On Kierkegaard's early discussions of humor, see K. Brian Söderquist, "Irony and Humor in Kierkegaard's Early Journals: Two Responses to an Emptied World," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and Jon Stewart (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). See also, e.g., *CI* 329 (*SKS* 1, 357, 25-34); *FT* 51 (*SKS* 4, 145, 8-20).
- 122 See Chapter 2, section 2.2. Compare this draft of the epigraph to *The Concept of Anxiety*, in which the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis designates Hamann as the world's "greatest" humorist: "Is it not remarkable that the greatest master of irony and the greatest humorist, separated by 2,000 years, may join together in doing and admiring what we should suppose everyone had done, if this fact did not testify to the contrary. Hamann says of Socrates: 'He was great because he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand' " (*Pap.* V B 44; cited at *CA* 177).
- 123 *CUP* 501-502 (*SKS* 7, 455, 1-3; trans. modified). See also *CUP* 531-532 (*SKS* 7, 483, 24-29).
- 124 *CUP* 271 (*SKS* 7, 246, 25). On how "the different existence-stages rank," see *CUP* 520-522 (*SKS* 7, 472-474); *CUP* 571-573 (*SKS* 7, 519-520); *Pap.* VI B 98, 77 (this is cited at *CUP* 294 and is from a draft of *CUP*). Cf. Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 89.
- 125 *CUP* 291 (*SKS* 7, 265, 32-33); *CUP* 292 (*SKS* 7, 266, 19-22). Early in the *Postscript*, Climacus therefore claims that humor is "the last *terminus a quo* [point from which] in defining Christianity" (*CUP* 272; *SKS* 7, 246-247; see also *CUP* 291; *SKS* 7, 265, 24-25). Later, however, he further differentiates between a form of religiousness that only has "universal human nature as its presupposition" (what he calls "Religiousness A") and Christian religiousness (what he calls "Religiousness B"), which also presupposes the individual's relationship to "something historical" (namely "the god in time," who becomes a human being in the form of Christ). See *CUP* 559 (*SKS* 7, 508, 19); *CUP* 581 (*SKS* 7, 529, 10-11); *CUP* 584 (*SKS* 7, 531, 20). This might make it appear as though Climacus has contradicted his initial claim that "humor is the last stage...before faith." I actually don't think, however, that this is a problem. The easiest way to make sense of this is to take Climacus' early remarks to be provisional (where he distinguishes between humor and an abstract Christian faith that has not yet been specified), which he then later refines as his discussion requires. The main point is simply that humor falls short of the religious (whether Religiousness A or B). There is one passage, however, that scholars sometimes cite as evidence that Climacus is not unequivocal in his denials that he is a religious person, and so also perhaps not entirely consistent in his insistence that humor and religiousness are importantly distinct: "In my opinion, Religiousness A (within the boundaries of which I have my existence) is so strenuous for a human being that there is always a sufficient task in it" (*CUP* 557; *SKS* 7, 506, 31-33). Anthony Rudd, e.g., nicely illustrates what I have in mind: "Climacus refers quite explicitly to Religiousness A as that 'within the boundaries of which I have my existence' " (Anthony Rudd, "On Straight and Crooked Readings: Why the *Postscript* Does Not Self-Destruct," in *Anthropology and*

Authority, eds. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 120). John Lippitt also cites this passage (69) and later claims that “Climacus locates his own existential position ‘within the boundaries of’ Religiousness A” (Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 93). In general, however, Lippitt rightly recognizes that Climacus draws a sharp distinction between the humorist and the religious individual (see, e.g., 86; 88). Since he believes, however, that he needs to accommodate this passage, he winds up positing what he terms “the person of full-blown Religiousness A” (as opposed to the less than full-blown form of Religiousness A that he thinks must be assigned to the humorist). See also, e.g., Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 202; Lotti, “Who is Johannes Climacus?” 210. T. F. Morris objects to Evans’ interpretation of this passage but does not offer a satisfactory alternative (T. F. Morris, “‘Humour’ in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*,” *Heythrop Journal* 29 (1988), 310, note 16). What is objectionable about this line of interpretation is the suggestion that we should understand Climacus to be claiming in this passage that he falls *within* the scope of Religiousness A (as if Religiousness A were a country and he had declared himself to be someone who resides within its borders, who makes his home so to speak on religious ground). That reading is understandable in the light of how the passage has been translated (the passage is essentially identical in *CUP_{SL}* 495), but the translation is incorrect and misleading as a result. The Danish passage reads: “min Mening er, at Religieusiteten A (i hvis Confinium jeg har min Existents) er...” Note that the Latin term “confinium” in this passage is singular (nominative plural = *confinia*), giving us “in the boundary of which I have my existence” or perhaps better: “in whose boundary/border territory I have my existence.” On this rendering of the Danish, Climacus is merely reasserting here what he maintained earlier in his discussion of the spheres of existence: “There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. To these correspond two *confinia* [border territories]: irony is the *confinium* between the aesthetic and the ethical; humor is the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious” (*CUP* 501-502; *SKS* 7, 455, 1-3; trans. modified); “humor is not yet religiousness, but its *confinium*” (*CUP* 500; *SKS* 7, 453, 7-8; trans. modified). As a humorist, Climacus does not dwell *within* Religiousness A but rather on the border or boundary (however thin this may turn out to be) that *separates* the ethical and the religious; hence this passage perfectly squares with his claims elsewhere that he is not a religious person.

- 126 *CUP* 500 (*SKS* 7, 453, 4); *CUP* 506 (*SKS* 7, 459, 6-8). Similarly, Climacus claims that irony can serve as an incognito for an ethical person. He claims that “in this sense Socrates was an ethicist, but, please note, bordering on the religious” (*CUP* 503; *SKS* 7, 456, 11-12). Since the humorist occupies the border between the ethical and the religious and Socrates is characterized as an ethicist who is “bordering on the religious,” one might reasonably begin to wonder wherein lies the difference between Socrates and Climacus. It’s also worth noting that Climacus compares the humorist’s relationship to the divine to the relationship that Socrates has with the god: “When eternity’s essential decisiveness is to be reached backward in recollection, then quite consistently the highest spiritual relationship with God is that the god dissuades, restrains, because [contra Christianity] existence in time can never become commensurate with an eternal decision. Socrates’

- [daimonion], as is well known, was only dissuasive, and this is how the humorist, too, must understand his God-relationship" (*CUP* 271; *SKS* 7, 246, 25-30; trans. modified).
- 127 *CUP* 501 (*SKS* 7, 454, 8-9); *CUP* 508 (*SKS* 7, 461, 5). Of course, the fact that a religious person can use humor as an incognito raises the possibility that Climacus isn't really a humorist. This could just be an incognito he has assumed; an incognito that, on my reading, would in turn itself be hidden through most of the *Postscript* behind the further incognito of one who asks "How do I become a Christian?" See note 49 above.
- 128 *CUP* 501 (*SKS* 7, 454, 3-6). Concerning the existential prerequisites for being an observer of the ethical and the religious, see Chapter 3, section 3.4. The competent observer will presumably be able to distinguish between someone who is less developed than the humorist and someone who is at least a humorist (and possibly a religious person). Compare Climacus' discussion of the competent observer's ability to distinguish between a person who utters the occasional ironic remark and someone who is (at least) an existing ironist (and possibly an ethicist): "the observer is assumed to be a tried and tested man who knows all about tricking and unsettling the speaker in order to see if what he says is something learned by rote or has a bountifully ironic value such as an existing ironist will always have" (*CUP* 502; *SKS* 7, 455, 9-12; cf. *CUP* 614-615; *SKS* 7, 558-559).
- 129 *CUP* 266 (*SKS* 7, 242, 17; 16); *CUP* 258 (*SKS* 7, 234, 20-21). See Chapter 3, section 3.4.
- 130 *CUP* 266 (*SKS* 7, 242, 17). Religiously, the individual gives expression to his awareness of this powerlessness through resignation, suffering, and guilt; Climacus discusses these three moments of religiousness at *CUP* 387-555 (*SKS* 7, 352-504). So, for example, he claims that it is "because the individual is unable to transform himself" that "the highest action in the inner world is to suffer" (*CUP* 433; *SKS* 7, 394, 14-16). See David R. Law, "Resignation, Suffering, and Guilt in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997). On the humorist's being conscious of this religious condition and the emotions that characterize it, see, e.g., *CUP* 520 (*SKS* 7, 473, 6-8): "That whereby humor is legitimized is its tragic side, that it reconciles itself with the pain from which despair wants to withdraw"; *CUP* 553 (*SKS* 7, 502, 5-6): "Because there is always a hidden pain in humor, there is also a sympathy"; *CUP* 602 (*SKS* 7, 547, 3-4): "The sadness in legitimate humor...."
- 131 *CUP* 520 (*SKS* 7, 473, 7).
- 132 *CUP* 483 (*SKS* 7, 438, 7-8; trans. modified). Climacus claims to be armed with "a more than ordinary sense of the comic and a certain capacity for making ludicrous what is ludicrous" (*CUP* 622; *SKS* 7, 564, 20-22). He notes, however, that his powers have limits: "Strangely enough, I am unable to make ludicrous what is not ludicrous—that presumably requires other capacities" (22-24).
- 133 *CUP* 304 (*SKS* 7, 277, 14-16); *CUP* 462 (*SKS* 7, 420, 14-15).
- 134 *CUP* 513-514 (*SKS* 7, 465, 32-34). See especially Climacus' lengthy footnote about the comic at *CUP* 514-519 (*SKS* 7, 466-472). Cf. *SUD* 91 (*SVI* 11, 202): "When a person

- stands and *says* the right thing, and consequently has understood it, and then when he acts he *does* the wrong thing, and thus shows that he has not understood it—yes, this is exceedingly comic” (italics mine; trans. modified).
- 135 *CUP* 462 (*SKS* 7, 420, 8-10).
- 136 *CUP* 292 (*SKS* 7, 266, 8-9). Cf. *CUP* 89 (*SKS* 7, 88, 24-26): “The relative difference between the comic and the tragic within immediacy vanishes in double-reflection, where the difference becomes infinite and identity is thereby posited.”
- 137 *CUP* 483 (*SKS* 7, 438, 11-13).
- 138 *SLW* 445 (*SKS* 6, 411, 23-27). See also *SLW* 422 (*SKS* 6, 391, 3-6): “Paganism culminates in the mental fortitude to see the comic and the tragic simultaneously in the same thing. In the higher passion, which chooses the tragic part of this unity, religiousness begins.”
- 139 *SLW* 463 (*SKS* 6, 427, 14-15; italics mine; trans. modified).
- 140 *SLW* 486 (*SKS* 6, 448, 7-8; trans. modified); *SLW* 422 (*SKS* 6, 391, 3-4).
- 141 *SLW* 487 (*SKS* 6, 448, 9-11; italics mine). Taciturnus says of Socrates that he was able to “stick to one thought” and “to see the intrinsic duplexity of this one thought...to see the most profound earnestness and the greatest jest, the deepest tragedy and the highest comedy” (*SLW* 415; *SKS* 6, 385, 12-19; cf. *CUP* 87-88; *SKS* 7, 87, 10-15). Earlier, in his dissertation, Kierkegaard also ties Socrates to what Taciturnus is here calling “the infinite concern about oneself in the Greek sense.” This comes up in the context of his discussion of the ending of Plato’s *Symposium*, where Socrates “was trying to prove to [Agathon, the tragedian, and Aristophanes, the comic poet] that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skillful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet” (223d). Kierkegaard notes that “Baur makes the beautiful observation that at the end of the *Symposium* Agathon and Aristophanes (the discursive elements) finally become drunk and Socrates alone keeps himself sober as the unity of the comic and the tragic” (*CI* 52; *SKS* 1, 113, 1-5).
- 142 *JP* 5: 5942 (*SKS* 20, NB: 45). See Chapter 2, section 2.5.
- 143 Climacus argues, e.g., that while the aesthete conceives of suffering as standing in an “accidental relation to existence,” as something that “may be, but may end” (e.g., you stub your toe and now you are suffering; after a while the pain ceases and now you are no longer suffering), the humorist shares with the religious person “an essential conception” of suffering, in which suffering is conceived of as “essential for the religious life....[W]ith the end of suffering, the religious life ends” (*CUP* 447; *SKS* 7, 407).
- 144 *CUP* 505 (*SKS* 7, 458, 21-24). Similarly, Climacus argues that the ironist shares with the ethicist a certain conceptual competence with respect to ethical matters without herself being an ethical person: “the irony emerges by continually joining the particulars of the finite with the ethical infinite requirement and allowing the contradiction to come into existence....the ironist levels everything on the basis of abstract humanity; the humorist on the basis of an abstract God-relationship” (*CUP* 502; *SKS* 7, 455, 14-16; *CUP* 448; *SKS* 7, 408, 31-33; trans. modified).

- 145 M. O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79. Similarly, the ironist (at least as she is portrayed in the *Postscript*) might say, "I am not an ethical person but I cannot help seeing every problem from an ethical point of view." See, e.g., *CUP* 502-505 (*SKS* 7, 455-458).
- 146 Of course, it is a separate matter whether Climacus consistently proceeds throughout the *Postscript* in a manner that entirely squares with his claim to be a humorist. It might turn out that he sometimes is too dogmatic or that he gives indications that he is more attached to existence than he maintains. This could be because Climacus falls short in some respects of realizing the life of the humorist, or it could be because Kierkegaard, who notes that "in a legal and in a literary sense" he is responsible for the pseudonymous works, has not been successful in conjuring forth a literary character who remains true to his type (*FLE* 627; *SKS* 7, 570-71). Thanks to Brian Söderquist for pressing me on this point.
- 147 See note 143.
- 148 *CUP* 505 (*SKS* 7, 458, 29-30 and 24-25).
- 149 *CUP* 447 (*SKS* 7, 407, 9-10; italics mine). See also, e.g., *CUP* 451 (*SKS* 7, 410, 33-35): "Humor comprehends suffering together with existence but revokes the essential meaning of suffering for the existing person"; *CUP* 552 (*SKS* 7, 501, 3-4): "...the jest in humor lies in the revocation (an incipient profundity that is revoked)...." Cf. Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 78-85, esp. 82ff.
- 150 *CUP* 483 (*SKS* 7, 438, 14-16; italics mine).
- 151 *CUP* 553 (*SKS* 7, 503, 4-5). Elsewhere Climacus ties impatience to the irreligious condition of despair: "despair is always the infinite, the eternal, the total in the moment of impatience, and all despair is a kind of ill temper" (*CUP* 554; *SKS* 7, 504, 6-8).
- 152 *Pap.* VI B 98, 77 (cited at *CUP* 2 94).
- 153 *CUP* 510 (*SKS* 7, 463, 9-10). Climacus characterizes the human unwillingness to acknowledge how truly dependent the individual is on God as a kind of "pride," an "irritability" that is "defiant and impatient" (*CUP* 496; *SKS* 7, 449, 30-33).
- 154 It's worth keeping in mind, however, that Climacus also claims that religious individuals sometimes cloak themselves in humor, using the outward appearance of a humorist as an incognito. So it's possible that a given speech act of revocation might be performed merely in order to maintain such a disguise rather than because of a genuine character flaw. Properly speaking, revocation is not, in the first instance, a public event but rather concerns an individual's unwillingness to allow religious concepts to transform the character of her inner life. Thus a religious individual (who has therefore allowed religious concepts to shape her life) might, as a part of maintaining her incognito as a humorist, present herself as someone who revokes the religious while remaining someone who does not in fact genuinely revoke what constitutes the center of her life. See note 49 above.
- 155 See, e.g., Conant, *PTTT*, 307 (note 27): "That the reader is confronted with a work of this sort is repeatedly hinted at"; KWN, 205: "Here in a footnote to an appendix to the

- Postscript*, Climacus allows himself to be quite explicit on a matter concerning which otherwise, throughout the main body of his work, he simply offers hints (hints, for example, about how he is really a 'humorist' and hence neither a philosopher nor a Christian)."
- 156 *SLW* 487 (*SKS* 6, 448, 10); *SLW* 463 (*SKS* 6, 427, 15).
- 157 Cf. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 203-204.
- 158 *CUP* 602 (*SKS* 7, 547, 2-3); *CUP* 270 (*SKS* 7, 245-246).
- 159 *CUP* 272 (*SKS* 7, 246, 12-13).
- 160 *CUP* 602-603 (*SKS* 7, 547, 20-22).
- 161 On the distinction between "offense" and "faith," see Chapter 3, section 3.4 (especially note 176). See also Chapter 4, sections 4.4, 4.4.2 and 4.4.4.
- 162 Compare Climacus' discussion of how Socrates "was occupied solely with himself"; "he minded his own business—and then Governance comes and adds a world-historical significance to his ironic self-satisfaction" (*CUP* 147; *SKS* 7, 137-138). See also Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.
- 163 Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 59-60. While I am in general agreement with Lippitt and find his account to be in keeping with the Socratic manner of doing philosophy that I want to attribute to Climacus, I also think Lippitt's account remains incomplete since it doesn't seem to register the important sense in which Climacus' revocation arguably marks him as someone with a flawed character. Lippitt calls the humorist's revocation "an existential shrug of the shoulders" but does not seem to treat this "shrug" as indicative of a character flaw (Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 84; 85).
- 164 *CUP* 617 (*SKS* 7, 560); *CUP* 618-619 (*SKS* 7, 561, 25-28; both trans. modified). Both the Hongs and Swenson/Lowrie exclude in their translation the definite article in the title of the appendix, rendering "Forstaaelsen" as either "An Understanding" or "For an Understanding." I include it since I think this clearly anticipates Climacus' later claim that "the understanding" between author and reader "is the revocation of the book" (*CUP* 621; *SKS* 7, 563, 32-33).
- 165 *CUP* 618 (*SKS* 7, 561, 24-25).
- 166 *CUP* 619 (*SKS* 7, 561, 30-32); cf. *CUP* 6 (*SKS* 7, 10, 23-24); *PF* 6 (*SKS* 4, 216, 12-16 and 30-31).
- 167 *CUP* 619 (*SKS* 7, 561-562).
- 168 *CUP* 619 (*SKS* 7, 562, 1-11).
- 169 In a draft of the appendix, Climacus makes clear that he ties revocation to his desire to keep others from seeking their opinions from him: "It is extremely impossible that I could become a martyr and be executed for an opinion, I who simply have no opinion and who continually revoke on page three what was said on the previous two pages *insofar as* anyone would think that it was my opinion" (*Pap.* VI B 87; cited at *CUP* 2 105; italics mine).

- 170 *CUP* 619 (*SKS* 7, 562, 11-17; trans. modified).
- 171 *CUP* 621 (*SKS* 7, 563, 19).
- 172 *CUP* 621 (*SKS* 7, 563, 28-32).
- 173 *CUP* 621 (*SKS* 7, 563, 32-36; trans. modified).
- 174 See Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.
- 175 *COR* 44 (*SVI* 13, 429; trans. modified).
- 176 *CUP* 621 (*SKS* 7, 564, 4-7).
- 177 *CUP* 622 (*SKS* 7, 564, 18-20); cf. *CUP* 16 (*SKS* 7, 25, 11-12).
- 178 *CUP* 622 (*SKS* 7, 564-565). Recall that Kierkegaard prefers to conceive of himself as a reader (rather than the author) of his various books and compares this to being a fellow learner. See Chapter 2, section 2.5.
- 179 *CUP* 622-623 (*SKS* 7, 565, 10-15; italics mine).
- 180 *CUP* 623 (*SKS* 7, 565, 21-25).
- 181 *CUP* 623 (*SKS* 7, 565, 25-29). Compare the difference between the subjective thinker/simple wise person and the simple person. See section 5.3.
- 182 *CUP* 623 (*SKS* 7, 565, 30-32; trans. modified).

- 1 *CUP 275 (SKS 7, 250, 28).*
- 2 *CUP 373 (SKS 7, 340, 7-8); cf. CUP 17 (SKS 7, 26, 15-16). See PV 43 (SVI 13, 531); MWA 8 (SVI 13, 496).*
- 3 *JP 6: 6231 (SKS 21, NB6: 66, 25).*
- 4 *JP 6: 6231 (SKS 21, NB6: 66, 26-31).*
- 5 *JP 5: 5942 (SKS 20, NB: 45, 12-15; trans. modified). See Chapter 2, section 2.5.*
- 6 *JP 6: 6783 (Pap. X.4 A 395; italics mine); JP 2: 1957 (SKS 21, NB6: 68, 15-22; trans. modified). The pseudonym Anti-Climacus is even less committal in his assessment of the maieutic in relation to Christianity. See PC 143 (SVI 12, 133): “With respect to the maieutic I do not decide to what extent, Christianly speaking, it is to be approved”; see also PC 131 (SVI 12, 122-123).*
- 7 *MWA 7 (SVI 13, 495); cf. JP 6: 6786 (Pap. X.6 B 145).*
- 8 *PV 31 (SVI 13, 523; trans. modified); CUP 554 (SKS 7, 504, 3). Cf. PC 214ff. (SVI 12, 196ff.); PC 253 (SVI 12, 231).*
- 9 *CUP 561 (SKS 7, 510, 11-12 and 17-18; italics mine). Cf. CUP 324 (SKS 7, 18-22); CUP 580 (SKS 7, 527, 33-34). This has led Merold Westphal to suggest that Kierkegaard’s later religious writings (including the two works by the pseudonym Anti-Climacus) are involved in the project of articulating what he calls “Religiousness C.” See Merold Westphal, “Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B,” in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, eds. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992); “Kierkegaard's Religiousness C: A Defense,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004). On Religiousness A and B, see Chapter 5, note 125.*
- 10 *JFY 188 (SVI 12, 456); PC 217 (SVI 12, 200). On the significance of the imitation of Christ, see especially PC 233-257 (SVI 12, 213-235).*
- 11 *PC 106 (SVI 12, 101); PC 115 (SVI 12, 109).*
- 12 *JP 6: 6783 (Pap. X.4 A 395; trans. modified).*
- 13 *JP 2: 1962 (Pap. X.4 A 553). This is reprinted in COR 261-263.*
- 14 *JP 2: 1962 at 386 (Pap. X.4 A 553 at 370).*
- 15 *JP 2: 1962 at 386 (Pap. X.4 A 553 at 370). At one point Kierkegaard describes the *Postscript* as a deliberation that he undertook to help him to determine whether or not to become a Christian in the strictest sense: “Dialectically Johannes Climacus [i.e., the *Postscript*] is in fact so radical a defense of Christianity that to many it may seem like an attack. This book makes one feel that it is Christendom that has betrayed Christianity....“Johannes Climacus” [i.e., the *Postscript*] was actually a deliberative piece, for when I wrote it there was within my soul a possibility of not letting myself be taken*

over by Christianity, even if it was my most honest intention to devote my whole life and daily diligence to the cause of Christianity, to do everything, to do nothing else but to expound and interpret it, even though I were to become like, be like the legendary Wandering Jew—myself not a Christian in the final and most decisive sense of the word and yet leading others to Christianity” (*JP* 6: 6523; *SKS* 22, NB13: 92; trans. modified; cf. *SKS* K22, 417-418).

- 16 *JP* 2: 1962 at 386-387 (*Pap.* X.4 A 553 at 370-371).
- 17 *JP* 2: 1962 at 387 (*Pap.* X.4 A 553 at 371).
- 18 *JP* 2: 1962 at 388 (*Pap.* X.4 A 553 at 372; trans. modified).
- 19 *JP* 2: 1962 at 388 (*Pap.* X.4 A 553 at 372).
- 20 *M* 341 (*SVI* 14, 352). The pseudonym Johannes de silentio proposes that we treat as Socrates’ final words his response to the jury’s verdict: “the verdict of death is announced to him, and in that same moment he dies, in that same moment he triumphs over death and consummates himself in the celebrated response that he is surprised to have been condemned” by so few votes. “He could not have bantered more ironically with the idle talk in the marketplace or with the foolish comment of an idiot than with the death sentence that condemns him to death” (*FT* 117; *SKS* 4, 205, 25-30). While I think the main point still holds, it’s worth noting that there is a small error here in that Socrates’ “celebrated response” follows the verdict of guilt rather than death. See Plato, *Ap.* 35e-36b; 40c-d; *CI* 194 (*SKS* 1, 241, 1-16).
- 21 *JP* 5: 5987 (*SKS* 20, NB: 154).

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