

THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF "JOHANNES CLIMACUS"

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (1999)
(Religious Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Religious Philosophy of “Johannes Climacus”

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 113

Abstract

In this thesis I examine the philosophy of “Johannes Climacus”, the pseudonym under whose name Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846). I argue that these two works can only be fully understood when they are read as the works of Johannes Climacus rather than his creator, Kierkegaard. It will be shown throughout the thesis that the personality of Climacus and the philosophical positions advanced in his writings inform each other. Besides the personality of Climacus, particular attention is also given to his opposition to Hegelianism. An appreciation of Climacus’ thought will be gained through an analysis of his first work, *Philosophical Fragments*, in which he attempts to demonstrate that the essential features of Christianity, such as transcendence, sin, the incarnation, and faith, are incompatible with a Hegelian world-view.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, John C. Robertson, who has patiently guided me in the writing of this thesis. His conversations have been an invaluable resource. Ellen Badone and Peter Widdicombe have also been helpful readers and supporters of my work.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for those works by Soren Kierkegaard which are most frequently referred to in the thesis. The numbers which accompany the abbreviations in the body of the thesis are the page numbers of the Hong translations, except for the *Point of View*, which is translated by Walter Lowrie. The numbers which are given for references to *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, however, are not page numbers, but the numbers assigned to each entry by the Hongs.

CUP.....	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments</i>
JP.....	<i>Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers</i>
PC.....	<i>Practice in Christianity</i>
PF.....	<i>Philosophical Fragments</i>
PV.....	<i>The Point of View For My Work as an Author</i>
SUD.....	<i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>

Introduction

It is frequently asked whether anything still remains to be discovered about Soren Kierkegaard. A comprehensive literature already exists with his name on the title page in one or another connection, and hardly a month passes without the addition to this of new books....Have not his ideas been so often examined, reported, summarised, and criticised that there is now a danger of repetition, superfluous variations to the point of triviality on a well known theme?

Niels Thulstrup made these comments in 1955.¹ It would indeed be an understatement to say that they still apply today. For, as it is often the case in scholarship, the question of providing new insights into a “well known theme” only becomes more pressing with time. This thesis attempts to meet the challenge of relevance and freshness that continues to face Kierkegaard scholarship. I will briefly outline the methods and findings of my reading of Kierkegaard in this introduction; first, however, I will consider the current climate of Kierkegaard scholarship in order to provide some context and orientation for the present study.

In spite of the fact that an even vaster literature on Kierkegaard has grown in the four decades since Thulstrup made the above remarks, the prospect of discovering something new in Kierkegaard’s writings may be more promising today than it was in the 1950s. One could suggest several reasons for this optimistic view of the present state of Kierkegaard studies; I will limit myself to two developments that I deem to be the most important.

First, English-speaking scholars today are reading the Hong translations of Kierkegaard’s writings.² It is often observed, that how a philosopher is received is largely

determined by the quality of the translations of his works; this is especially true in the case of a philosopher like Kierkegaard, who wrote in a minor language and made use of various literary styles. The Hong translations are a much needed improvement on the earlier work of Walter Lowrie and David F. Swenson.³ In particular, these new translations are more sensitive to Kierkegaard's irony and word play, contain more notes concerning Danish vocabulary and the historical context of the works, indicate where particular themes are treated elsewhere in Kierkegaard's writings, and retain the pagination of the standard Danish edition of the collected works. Thus, besides correcting the errors of previous translations, the Hong translations have facilitated more extensive research into Kierkegaard's writings by supporting the texts with many explanatory notes.

The second important influence on Kierkegaard studies in recent years has been the passing of existentialism. Kierkegaard was still hardly known outside of Denmark when he was identified as a forerunner, if not a founder, of modern existentialist philosophy. Even into the 1970s and 80s, much of the literature on Kierkegaard interpreted his works from an existentialist perspective.⁴ With few exceptions, there has been one method and goal in existentialist readings of Kierkegaard: piece together statements on anxiety, despair, and subjectivity from his various writings until a single philosophy of existence emerges. Such studies have contributed to our appreciation of Kierkegaard; they have explicated the central themes in his works and demonstrated the consistency in his thought. But the existentialist readings of Kierkegaard also have their drawbacks. Most importantly, they commonly ignore the diversity of perspectives, personae, and literary styles that animate Kierkegaard's works.

The presupposition that he offers a single philosophy written from a single perspective has been the most pervasive influence that existentialist interpretations of Kierkegaard have had on our understanding of the Danish philosopher. That assumption has gradually waned along with existentialism itself. One of the most noticeable differences in the secondary literature today is the relatively small number of studies that attempt to provide a single, comprehensive view of Kierkegaard's thought. Once normative, these studies are now exceptional. In this decade, scholars have more frequently focused their attention on particular texts and themes in Kierkegaard's writings. The erosion of old habits, along with the new translations, has created an opportunity for scholars to re-read and re-discover Kierkegaard.

The present study belongs to this recent wave of literature that concentrates on a particular aspect of Kierkegaard's thought. This thesis focuses on "Johannes Climacus", the pseudonym under whose name Kierkegaard wrote *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846).

The title of the thesis, *The Religious Philosophy of "Johannes Climacus"*, reflects the principal argument that guides our study: that *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* can only be fully understood when they are read as the works of Johannes Climacus, rather than his creator, Soren Kierkegaard. It will be shown throughout the thesis that the personality of Climacus and the philosophical positions advanced in his writings inform each other. In attributing the authorship of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to Climacus instead of Kierkegaard, I am not suggesting

that Kierkegaard's own views are not found in these works. On the contrary, Climacus and Kierkegaard do have much in common. However, there are also some significant differences between the Climacus writings and Kierkegaard's signed works, which will be pointed out in the course of this study.

I will examine Climacus' thought as it is presented in *Philosophical Fragments*. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which elaborates on the material found in *Fragments*, will be used to supplement my reading of Climacus' first book. Occasionally, I will also refer to Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* as well as the writings of Johannes Anti-Climacus, another Kierkegaard pseudonym, when they present insightful parallels to the works of Climacus.

Our study of Climacus' view of Christianity begins in Part I, "Soren Kierkegaard and Johannes Climacus". In chapter one, I will identify the purpose of Kierkegaard's entire authorship and the place of the pseudonymous works, particularly Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in it. I will then take a closer look at Climacus himself and explain why one cannot assume that he and Kierkegaard are the same author. In Chapter Three, I will outline the essential features of the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), as Climacus frequently stakes out his own philosophical position in deliberate opposition to the varieties of Hegelianism that influenced many of his contemporaries.

In Part II, I will analyse *Philosophical Fragments*, the principal text in our study. In this witty, ironic work, Climacus discusses what he considers to be the main features of

Christianity. In Chapter Four, I will present Climacus' discussion of transcendence. Chapter Five examines the doctrine of sin and how Climacus uses it to develop his notion of individuality. In Chapter Six, I will examine Climacus' description of the incarnation as the "absolute paradox"; in particular, I will argue that this notorious concept does not indicate that Climacus views the incarnation as illogical. In the final chapter of Part II, I will consider the problem of grace and will as it pertains to Climacus' understanding of Christian faith.

Part I

Soren Kierkegaard and Johannes Climacus

Before I begin my analysis of *Philosophical Fragments* and, to a lesser extent, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, some preliminary attention will be given to Soren Kierkegaard, Johannes Climacus, and the intellectual climate of 1840s Copenhagen. Perhaps owing to an exaggerated image of Kierkegaard as ‘that individual’¹, as well as the minor role which Denmark has played in the history of European thought, non-Danish scholars do not always take notice of Copenhagen’s Golden Age culture which was in full bloom in the first half of the nineteenth century.² Kierkegaard was most definitely a part of that Golden Age, for his life was never isolated, even if it was solitary.³

The purpose of Part I of this study is to provide a context for the study of *Fragments* and *Postscript*. First, I will briefly discuss Kierkegaard’s life and, more importantly, his literary production. Particular attention is given to Kierkegaard’s contention that he is a religious author, as well as his notion of “indirect communication”. Secondly, I will introduce the pseudonym “Johannes Climacus” and explain why one cannot assume that he is the same author as his creator. Part I will then close with a discussion of the philosophy of Hegel, which exerted its strongest influence on Danish theology and culture at the time that the Climacus works were being written.

Chapter One: Soren Kierkegaard's Life and Work

Soren Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen in 1813 and, with the exception of a five month stay in Berlin to hear lectures by Friedrich Schelling, never ventured far outside the Danish capital. He died in his native city in 1855. Soren and his siblings were first generation Copenhageners. Their father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard (1756-1838), a poor shepherd boy from northwestern Jutland, was sent to Copenhagen at the age of eleven to live with more prosperous relatives. Using his natural talents as well as a favourable economic climate, Michael Pedersen became a wealthy, reputable businessman while only in his thirties. Being a prominent citizen and a deeply religious man, he often entertained in the Kierkegaard home Bishop Jakob P. Mynster, the Primate of Denmark, and N.F.S. Grundtvig, a popular theologian and spokesman for democratic politics. Thus from an early age, Soren was already personally acquainted with two of the figures who dominated Danish culture and politics in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In addition to his early contacts with leading political and Church officials, Kierkegaard would come to associate with Copenhagen's literary scene. At the centre of it was the poet Johan Ludvig Heiberg. While a university student, Kierkegaard was "on close terms" with Heiberg and his wife, apparently despite the poet's Hegelianism.⁴ But Kierkegaard eventually grew critical of Heiberg. He was also critical of Hans Christian Andersen, another

contemporary in the literary scene; among Kierkegaard's earliest writings is *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838), a severe attack on Denmark's foremost storyteller.

In 1843, with his student days behind him as well as the dramatic events of the death of his father and a broken engagement, Kierkegaard's authorship got under way with the publication of *Either/Or*. The two volumes which comprise *Either/Or* consist of documents gathered by a pseudonymous editor, Victor Eremita. They are arranged according to Kierkegaard's delineation of three spheres of existence--aesthetic, ethical, and religious--which appear in subsequent works as well. A steady stream of other "aesthetic"⁵ books would be penned under further pseudonyms, culminating in Johannes Climacus' *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"*, a sequel to that pseudonym's other work, *Philosophical Fragments*. At the same time that the pseudonymous works were appearing, Kierkegaard was releasing a number of "upbuilding discourses" on Christian themes under his own name.

A second, religious phase of Kierkegaard's authorship began with *A Literary Review* in March 1846 (*Postscript* was published the previous month). The latter half of Kierkegaard's literary career has two distinct features. First, the works from this period appeared under his own name. Secondly, their criticism of the Danish Church became more severe and direct, leading up to the "attack" on Christendom through a scattering of articles and polemics in 1854-55. One final pseudonym does appear, Johannes Anti-Climacus, as the author of *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849) and *Practice in Christianity* (1850); however, it would be a mistake to place him in the company of Kierkegaard's other fictitious authors.

“A Christian on an extraordinary level” (JP 6431), Anti-Climacus speaks from a perspective very distinct from that of the other pseudonyms.⁶

What is the purpose of such a diverse authorship? And why is it composed of pseudonymous as well as signed works? As to the first question, the works themselves, when seen as a whole, reveal the author’s intention in composing them. Fortunately, Kierkegaard confirms what the texts subtly convey, giving a direct answer himself in the *Point of View For My Work as an Author* (1848, published posthumously by Kierkegaard’s brother, Peter Christian, in 1859). Restraining the irony and humour found in his previous works, Kierkegaard explains frankly:

The contents of this little book affirm, then, what I truly am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem ‘of becoming a Christian’, with a direct or indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom, or against the illusion that in such a land as ours all are Christians of a sort. (PV 5-6).⁷

Similar statements are found throughout Kierkegaard’s *Journals*. In one entry from 1848, he writes:

Through my writings I hope to achieve the following: to leave behind so accurate a characterisation of Christianity and its relationships in the world that an enthusiastic, noble-minded young person will be able to find in it a map of relationships as accurate as any topographical maps from the most famous institutes. (JP 6283).

In scripture, Kierkegaard reads that the follower of Christ does not belong to the world (John 15:19); yet Christianity in his age has become a vehicle for all worldliness. It is

assumed, he complains, that everybody is a Christian as a matter of course, that one becomes a Christian when the national Church issues one a baptismal certificate. Kierkegaard felt that it was necessary to reintroduce Christianity, the New Testament faith in Christ, to Christendom, to the complacent culture of modern Denmark which identified faith in Christ with ordinary civic virtue and social custom. Hence the whole authorship, as the two previous quotations state, was an attempt to redefine what Christianity is and what it means to become a Christian.

Kierkegaard did not believe that he arbitrarily chose to become an author in the service of Christianity, but that he was responding to a call from God. He even attributes the unity and singular vision of the works to “divine Governance”. In the *Point of View*, he expresses amazement at the unity of his literary output, which was only discernable to him in hindsight. Kierkegaard does not deny that he was conscious of the shape that his growing literary production was taking, but only that his understanding of it as a whole was quite limited at the time he was writing. He speaks of the course of his authorship as God’s education of him; being the teacher, God had a full view of the plan of instruction for His pupil, Kierkegaard, while he was only able to see it revealed gradually. Like his hero, Socrates, Kierkegaard does not assume that he is an authority in religious and ethical matters, but only a fellow learner. As was the case with Socrates and his *daimon*, Kierkegaard does not regard his calling from God as a conference of authority; rather, he sees it as an imperative to seek out that truth which it is essential for one to acquire if one is to live a truly human existence.

Whether or not his works were in fact written under the guidance of God, it is important

to recognise that at least Kierkegaard thought this to be the case. Reflecting on his most productive years as an author, Kierkegaard says that he could only “breathe freely” once he had completed the work which God had asked of him (PV 64).

Now that the purpose of the authorship has been identified, we need to determine what role the pseudonymous works have in it. Why does Kierkegaard use pseudonyms in order to address the problem of becoming a Christian? Why could the upbuilding discourses, explicitly Christian and penned under his own name, not accomplish what Kierkegaard hoped he might achieve by employing pseudonyms? Still speaking of the “monstrous illusion” that everybody in Christendom must be a Christian, Kierkegaard explains the power of pseudonymity:

[A]n illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect means can it be radically removed. If it is an illusion that all are Christians--and if there is to be anything done about it, it must be done indirectly, not by one who vociferously proclaims himself an extraordinary Christian, but by one who, better instructed, is ready to declare that he is not a Christian at all. That is, one must approach from behind the person who is under an illusion. Instead of wishing to have the advantage of being oneself that rare thing, a Christian, one must let the prospective captive enjoy the advantage of being the Christian, and for one's own part have resignation enough to be the one who is far behind him--otherwise one will certainly not get the man out of his illusion, a thing which is difficult enough in any case. (PV 24-5).

Through his writings Kierkegaard wants to expose Christendom as an illusion, as something which bears little resemblance to what he understands to be essential Christianity.⁸ As Kierkegaard explains above, one of his strategies is to adopt Socrates' ironic acceptance

of his dialogue partner's position. In Socrates' case, it is the Athenian who claims to be wise, while Kierkegaard takes at face value the claims of some speculative philosophers and a complacent public to be Christians. Also, rather than being expressly polemical against "the crowd" or "the assistant professor", Kierkegaard, in the pseudonymous works, occasionally disguises an issue in Christian doctrine or practice as a hypothetical inquiry into a non-Christian matter. Here too, he is following Socrates, who frequently leads an obstinate or opinionated companion into a meaningful discussion of a serious ethical topic, such as justice or virtue, indirectly by speaking on athletics or medicine, for example. (Certainly, Kierkegaard attaches more importance to such pretence and sustains it much longer than Socrates.) By presenting the issue of what it means to be a Christian indirectly through the personalities of non-Christian authors and literary styles uncharacteristic of philosophical theology, Kierkegaard believes that he can lead his contemporaries to an intellectual and spiritual state from which they could see for themselves that being a Christian is not a matter of following the social conventions of a so-called Christian country.

In order to more fully appreciate Kierkegaard's strategy for attempting to dispel the illusion that all in Christendom are Christians, we need to consider his notion of indirect communication. Readers of *Fragments* and *Postscript* will immediately see that indirect communication is not restricted to Kierkegaard's signed works; it is discussed by Johannes Climacus too. Indirect communication is one issue where there is an obvious continuity between the thought of Kierkegaard and the fictitious Climacus.

The clearest and most extensive discussion of direct and indirect communication is

given by Climacus in the first of his four “Possible and Actual Theses by Lessing” (CUP 72-80). There he distinguishes between the two forms of communication as they are reflected in the contrast between objective and subjective knowledge. Thus in order to understand the distinction between direct and indirect communication, it will be necessary to briefly summarise Climacus’ (and Kierkegaard’s) division of knowledge into objective and subjective varieties. Objective knowledge, in more familiar language, is what we generally term information; it is a datum, a “result” (CUP 73). Being a result, that is, something complete, objective knowledge can be communicated directly from one person to another. And since the knowledge being passed from one person to another is objective, its communication is unaffected by their life situations. This is because the transfer of objective knowledge takes place at the level of thought; in order to acquire the knowledge being communicated to him, the recipient only needs to grasp it intellectually.

Subjective knowledge is not so straightforward. The distinguishing feature of subjective knowledge is that it always emerges from a “double-reflection” (CUP 73). There is only one reflection necessary in the case of objective knowledge, namely, that of intellectually grasping the content of the communication. Subjective knowledge is only possible if the recipient performs a second reflection, that of relating the content of the communication to his own existence. Indeed, much of the knowledge communicated to us is only objective, or factual; we do not need to relate it to our own existence.

According to Kierkegaard, this is not true of ethics and religion, which is where he locates subjective knowledge. Since ethical and religious questions are not simply about

matters of fact, but resonate at the depths of one's being and are manifest in one's life decisions, they cannot be considered in abstraction, away from one's actual existence. Unlike the ideas of thought, existence is not a result but a process. One of Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel is that he treats ethics and religion in the realm of speculation, which is proper to abstract, or pure, being. People, he protests, are *actual*, particular beings; their ethical choices are not ideal possibilities, but the actualisation of some of those possibilities.

Essentially, Kierkegaard is saying that subjective knowledge is more of a realisation that occurs within oneself than an item of knowledge about some particular thing. Ethical-religious truth is found in inwardness and subjectivity, and thus it must be appropriated by each individual. It is for this reason that subjective knowledge, which is in many respects knowledge about oneself, cannot be communicated directly from one individual to another. Therefore, the communication of ethical-religious truths must be performed in such a way that it facilitates the individual's reception and engagement of the issues at a deeply personal level.

Kierkegaard looks especially to Socrates as a model practitioner of indirect communication. Socrates perfected the art of "maieutically" giving birth to subjective knowledge in his fellow Athenians. Acting like a midwife, Socrates is not responsible for the newborn; he merely assists his acquaintances in giving birth to their own insights.⁹ As one finds in Socratic (or Platonic) epistemology generally, the learner himself is responsible for the knowledge he has acquired. Socrates is simply the occasion for the emergence of that knowledge which was already latent in his dialogue partner.¹⁰

Since the realisation of ethical-religious truth ultimately depends on the subjective appropriation of each individual, the (indirect) communicator diminishes in importance, and even “vanishes”. Anti-Climacus, another Kierkegaard pseudonym who is intrigued by indirect communication, observes, “the art [of indirect communication] consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody, purely objective, and then continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity.” (PC 133). In the *Point of View* as well as his *Journals*, Kierkegaard expresses confidence that the aesthetic writings, because of their pseudonymity and “artistic” form, have allowed him to become a vanishing point, to withdraw himself from his readers. Standing alone with the experiments constructed by the pseudonymous authors, Kierkegaard’s readers are free to engage the works’ moral and religious issues in their own subjectivity and make their own assessments of them.

In light of contemporary research in hermeneutics and studies of the author--reader relationship, Kierkegaard’s claim to remove himself so completely from his audience sounds highly optimistic and, taken at face value, is rather unconvincing. Nevertheless, I think that we can appreciate Kierkegaard’s point, in spite of his optimism, if we recognise the basis of his contention. As we have already seen, Kierkegaard aspires to be a Socratic communicator; that is, he intends for his indirect method to maieutically assist others in developing a clear understanding of Christian belief. Also like Socrates, Kierkegaard does not take credit for any insight that his readers may gain as a result of their encounter with the aesthetic works, for he does not believe that they offer any new knowledge but only a *clarification* of Christianity’s essential doctrines. In Kierkegaardian terms, the clarification of those

doctrines is the occasion for one's first reflection (intellectual understanding); the second reflection of personal appropriation, ideally, takes place independent of the indirect communicator. This is what Anti-Climacus has in mind, when he says that the indirect communicator becomes "purely objective"; the communicator strives to present the issue "in such a way that no one can directly say whether [he] is attacking or defending, so that the most zealous supporter of the cause and its most vicious foe can both seem to see in [him] an ally" (PC 133). Whether Kierkegaard ever achieved such objectivity is debatable. We can say with certainty, however, that he went to extraordinary lengths in his attempt in the aesthetic works not to influence his readers' decision to accept or reject Christianity. Like Socrates, he only asks that his fellow learners recognise the importance of clarifying an issue of such importance before any life decisions are made.¹¹

In summary, the purpose of this chapter was to identify the specifically Christian motivation that Kierkegaard contends was present throughout his authorship. While that motivation is easily recognised in his signed works, such as the Christian discourses, it is not so obvious in the pseudonymously published aesthetic writings. In the autobiographical *Point of View* as well as his *Journals*, Kierkegaard explains that these aesthetic productions were given a key role in his plan to awaken his contemporaries to the illusion of Christendom and re-introduce modern Denmark to the New Testament's radical call to Christian discipleship. Kierkegaard calls these works his "indirect communications" for two reasons. First, they have been written under the guise of fictitious *personae*. Secondly, they communicate subjective knowledge; that is, they are designed to encourage the reader to subjectively

reflect on the questions raised by the pseudonyms and answer them in relation to his or her own life.

Chapter Two: Johannes Climacus: An “Imaginatively Constructing Humourist”

In the next few pages, we will turn our attention to some of Kierkegaard’s most important indirect communications, i.e. those attributed to the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus. Many Kierkegaard commentators, even if they do take the pseudonyms seriously, seldom bother to consider who these fictitious authors are. This is unfortunate, and occasionally leads to some misunderstandings about the pseudonymous works, as the character traits of the pseudonyms are substantially reflected in what they have written.¹²

The name Johannes Climacus is taken from a monk (c. 570-649) who lived at the monastery of St. Catharine of Alexandria on Mt. Sinai. The historical Johannes Climacus is known to us through his *Scala Paradisi (Ladder of Divine Ascent)*, a devotional work. The similarity between the monk and the pseudonym does not seem to extend any further than their common “climbing” of the ladder of spiritual perfection.¹³

Our knowledge of Kierkegaard’s Climacus is rather scant, as he deliberately refrains from saying much about himself. Climacus wants his readers to focus on the “thought-projects” which he has set up, and not his personality and opinions. In the preface to *Fragments*, he writes, “But what is my opinion?...Do not ask me about that. Next to the question of whether or not I have an opinion, nothing could be of less interest to somebody else than what my opinion is.” (PF 7). He makes the same point again, this time more insistently, in the appendix to *Postscript*, titled “An Understanding with the Reader”.

...I have no opinion except that it must be the most difficult of all to become a Christian. As an opinion, it is no opinion, and neither does it have any of the qualities that ordinarily characterise an “opinion”. It does not flatter me, since I do not make out that I am a 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. (CUP 619).

As we saw in the previous section, Climacus shares Kierkegaard’s interest in indirect communication. In light of that discussion, these persistent claims to have no opinion are recognisable as attempts by Climacus to step back from his audience so that they can subjectively reflect on the issues raised in his books. Not only is Kierkegaard removing himself from his audience when he writes under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, but Climacus too is careful not to allow his person to impede his readers’ reflection. Kierkegaard communicates indirectly through pseudonymity; Climacus communicates indirectly through his “thought-projects”, also called “imaginary constructions”. Climacus explains below why he composes his works in this manner.

By taking place in the form of an imaginary construction, the communication creates for itself an opposition, and the imaginary construction establishes a chasmic gap between reader and author and fixes the separation of inwardness between them, so that a direct understanding is made impossible.

...If what is said is earnestness to the writer, he keeps the earnestness to himself....The *being-in-between* of the imaginary construction encourages the inwardness of the two

away from each other in inwardness. (CUP 263-4).

An obvious example of an imaginary construction is *Philosophical Fragments* itself, in which Climacus attempts to show what is unique about Christianity, not through an explicit argument concerning its central doctrines, but by pretending to ‘invent’ it. I will begin analysing *Fragments* in Part II.

But what kind of an author, one may ask, has “no opinion”? What would motivate such an author to write at all? Climacus explains in one of the most memorable sections of the *Postscript* how he became an author. Sitting in Copenhagen’s Frederiksberg Gardens, Climacus, a self-described “loafer”, resolves finally to put an end to the “splendid inactivity” which has characterised his life thus far. The geniuses and innovators in the modern age, he notes, have earned their renown by making everything easier for their fellow human beings. This is not only true of the advances in science and technology, but also in philosophy, where the Hegelians “by virtue of thought systematically make spiritual existence easier and easier”. (CUP 186). Realising that there is nothing remaining in the modern world which he could make easier, Climacus decides to leave his mark on history by creating difficulties. He says to himself:

...You must do something, but since with your limited capabilities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others have, take it upon yourself to make something more difficult....[W]hen all join together to make everything easier in every way, there remains only one possible danger, namely, the danger that the easiness would become so great that it would become all too easy. So only one lack remains, even though not yet felt, the lack of

difficulty. Out of love of humankind, out of despair over my awkward predicament of having achieved nothing and of being unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, out of genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I comprehended that it was my task: to make difficulties everywhere. It was also especially striking to me that I might actually have my indolence to thank that this task became mine. Far from having found it, like an Aladdin, by a stroke of good luck, I must instead assume that my indolence, by preventing me from opportunely proceeding to make things easy, has forced me into doing the only thing that remained. (CUP 186-7).

In particular, Climacus wants to make it more difficult to become a Christian, but not more difficult than it actually is. He does not think that he is in fact ‘making’ Christian belief more difficult, but that he is revealing Christian belief as it really is--which he discovers to be “the most difficult of all” (CUP 619). It is not at all as easy as his neighbours and the Hegelians in the theological faculty make it out to be.

Climacus’ ironic explanation of how he resolved to become an author underscores his detachment from his subject matter, Christianity, and the aloofness in his claim to have no essential opinion on the issues he raises. Climacus stresses that he is neither an apologist nor an opponent of Christianity; for him, writing books is “an innocent pastime and amusement” (CUP 619).

Climacus also tells us that he is a humourist. The *Postscript*, in particular, is one of those rare works of philosophy which effectively combines humour with rational arguments. (The humour is already at work on the title page, for only a humourist would write a postscript which is six times as long as the work which it is supposed to be concluding.)

Humour, in Climacus' usage, is not simply about something being funny or lighthearted. The key to understanding humour, or the comic, terms Climacus generally takes to designate the same thing, are the contradictions which appear in many life situations. Climacus reminds his readers that tragedy too, relies on the juxtaposition of contradictions. "The tragic and the comic are the same inasmuch as both are contradiction, but *the tragic is suffering contradiction, and the comic is painless contradiction.*" (CUP 514). A "painless contradiction" is one where the contradiction does not result in any serious harm to those who are caught in the misrelation or misunderstanding. Climacus offers a number of examples illustrating the comical situations created by contradiction. In one scenario, a young woman applies for a permit to go into business as a prostitute. The situation is comical if she is denied the permit because, while it is usual for business people to be denied a permit to become something respectable, it is a contradiction to be refused to become something contemptible. On the other hand, if she is awarded the permit, there is still a comical situation. For in this case, the authorities would be exercising their powers to grant permission for something which (at least morally) is not permissible (CUP 515n).

I understand a humourist, such as Climacus, to have two distinguishing qualities. First, he or she is somebody who is especially adept at perceiving the contradictions which permeate human existence. In particular, Climacus often refers to the contradiction of human beings' striving towards the infinite and the finite reality of existence (e.g. CUP 92). Striving for meaning in life, human beings infuse every moment with eternal significance, yet "everyone advances equally far *am Ende* (in the end)." (CUP 450). And secondly, the

humourist not only takes notice of the contradictions present in existence, but readily accepts them and approaches life in general from this perspective; perhaps he is even able, through his humouristic resolve, to remedy the truly “suffering” contradictions (i.e. tragedy) which he finds in his own life situation.

The last point which I want to make about Johannes Climacus is that he is not Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard himself, Climacus’ editor, makes this assertion in “A First and Last Explanation”, which is tacked on to the end of *Postscript*. Here Kierkegaard reveals himself as the author behind Climacus as well as the other pseudonyms:

My pseudonymity or polynymity has not had an *accidental* basis in my *person*...but an *essential* basis in the *production* itself, which, for the sake of the lines and of the psychologically varied differences of the individualities, poetically required an indiscriminateness with regard to good and evil, brokenheartedness and gaiety, despair and overconfidence, suffering and elation, etc., which is ideally limited only by psychological consistency, which no factually actual person dares to allow himself or can want to allow himself in the moral limitations of actuality.

...[I]f it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author’s name, not mine.... (CUP 625, 627).

Besides Kierkegaard’s insistence, there are a few other reasons why we should not assume that Johannes Climacus and Soren Kierkegaard are the same author. One major difference between them is that Kierkegaard is a Christian, while Climacus is not. Also, as Kierkegaard explains in the above quotation, Climacus’ *persona* is in actuality quite improbable, as he exhibits a “psychological consistency” which is not found in actual human

beings. Even though Kierkegaard shares some views with Climacus, such as the importance of indirect communication, he does not, and probably could not, perpetually take the perspective of such a psychologically tidy personality.

A further reason for not identifying Climacus as Kierkegaard is that these two authors differ in their thinking from Kierkegaard's other pseudonyms as well as from each other. If each of the pseudonymous books offered Kierkegaard's 'real' viewpoint, then there would be some justification for the stereotype of him as an irrational, confused writer. One of the principal functions of the pseudonyms is to present different perspectives on life situations and intellectual issues related to spiritual existence. Thus it is only to be expected that they will often disagree with one another as well as Kierkegaard's signed works. While Kierkegaard did adopt these perspectives (in order to write from them at all) and may still have been sympathetic to some of them when he was not wearing masks of pseudonymity, there is no reason to force him, as Kierkegaard, to take any one of these perspectives or to adopt them all at once.¹⁴

While these reasons alone would justify reading *Fragments* and *Postscript* as the work of Climacus rather than Kierkegaard, there is a further consideration which lends support to my approach. In his presentation of Christianity, Climacus says almost nothing on two themes that are central to Kierkegaard's theology: the imitation of Christ and love of one's neighbour. Both of these themes are treated extensively in Kierkegaard's signed works, such as *Works of Love* (1847), a four hundred page deliberation on Christian love. As one would expect from a humourist, Climacus, always attentive to life's contradictions, is most

intrigued by Christianity's paradoxes, such as the appearance of God in time and the fact that the Christian bases his "eternal happiness" on this historical event. Kierkegaard is generally identified as the philosopher of the 'paradox'; however, it is seldom recognised that the term paradox is found almost exclusively in the Climacus writings. Kierkegaard rarely uses the term in his signed works; the other pseudonyms use it more frequently, but not to the extent that the humourist does. Climacus himself is aware of the difference between his writings and those of Kierkegaard. In *Postscript*, Climacus briefly reviews some of Kierkegaard's discourses, which he receives favourably, but notes that here "the decision [of becoming a Christian] is...not placed in a paradox" (CUP 270), as he would have preferred. In my view, a study of Kierkegaard's theology would be misleading and incomplete if it focused exclusively on Climacus' preoccupations, as this one does.

One final note: in my analysis of Climacus' thought I have deliberately refrained from considering the work titled *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*. I have chosen not to include this text in my analysis because the work is unfinished and was never published by Kierkegaard himself. A more important reason for not including this text, I think, is that it is written by Kierkegaard; it is his production, not Climacus'.

Chapter Three: G.W.F. Hegel

Any study of Kierkegaard's authorship would be incomplete if it did not include a discussion of his favourite object of ridicule--Hegel. Indeed, It is almost customary in Kierkegaard as well as Hegel scholarship to address his pillory of the great German idealist. The general consensus is that Kierkegaard is unfair, or unjustified, in his attacks.¹⁵

Many of the charges that Kierkegaard is unfair to Hegel are based on a misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's method and intention in his treatment of Idealist philosophy. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, Kierkegaard's approach to philosophical issues is seldom straightforward; he writes under various pseudonyms, insists that religious and ethical truths can only be communicated indirectly, and frequently employs irony and humour to make his point. If one were to ignore all of this and read Kierkegaard's works as strictly philosophical texts, then it would definitely appear that Hegel is grossly mistreated. One also needs to keep in mind that neither Kierkegaard nor his pseudonyms presume to be authorities or commentators on Hegel. As far as Kierkegaard is concerned, writing authoritative expositions of Hegel's or any other philosophy is the work of assistant professors.

Kierkegaard's picture of Hegel is quite different from that of professional philosophers; simply put, it is a caricature. That is what makes him unreliable as a source on Hegel, if one is looking for a systematic critique of Hegel's philosophy, but it does not necessarily mean

that Kierkegaard is unfair or his criticisms unfounded. It would be wrong to judge a caricature as if it were a portrait. Though he does raise serious objections to Hegel, Kierkegaard often represents him in the manner of a caricaturist who is satirising his subject's natural features.

Perhaps Kierkegaard could have avoided the charge of launching unfounded criticisms against Hegel had he taken a strictly philosophical approach to his opponent, challenging him premise for premise. One needs to recognise, however, that Kierkegaard was not interested in the technicalities of Hegel's system but in the broader intellectual movement which it inspired. Furthermore, what mattered most about Hegel's philosophy to Kierkegaard was not so much that (he thought) it was wrong but that it claimed to have grasped absolute knowledge (*absolutes Wissen*)¹⁶. This he thought was laughable. Arguing with Hegel over the specific points of speculative-idealist interpretations of reality would only make oneself laughable too. A philosopher who claims that he has found absolute knowledge, in Kierkegaard's view, does not need to be refuted--he needs to be laughed at.

But even though Kierkegaard laughs at the lofty claims of Hegel's system, this does not mean that he dismisses speculation without giving it adequate thought or that he does not take Hegel seriously. Climacus seems to have anticipated such a misunderstanding of the irony and humour employed in his own works. In a footnote in *Postscript*, he writes, "But the presence of irony does not necessarily mean that the earnestness is excluded. Only assistant professors assume that." (CUP 277).

Furthermore, Kierkegaard denies neither the importance of Hegel's philosophy nor his

own debt to it. In an important entry in his *Journals*, which is overlooked by defenders of Hegel such as J.N. Findlay and Walter Kaufmann¹⁷, Kierkegaard writes:

I here [in 1845] request the reader's attention for an observation I have often wished to make....I feel what for me at times is an enigmatical respect for Hegel; I have learned much from him, and I know very well that I can still learn much more from him when I return to him again....His philosophical knowledge, his amazing learning, the insight of his genius, and everything else good that can be said of a philosopher I am willing to acknowledge as any disciple.--Yet no, not *acknowledge*--that is too distinguished an expression--willing to admire, willing to learn from him. (JP 1608).

Climacus has learned from Hegel too. Kierkegaard explains to a reviewer of *Postscript* that, even though Climacus makes extensive use of classical philosophy, “he is also indebted very much to an earlier German scholarship as well as to Hegel.” (JP 6596).

Readers of Kierkegaard also need to keep in mind that the subject of his caricatures is the Hegelian more often than it is Hegel.¹⁸ This is the reason why Kierkegaard, despite so many attacks on Hegelianism, makes relatively few references to Hegel's texts themselves. The precise timing of the attacks further indicates that the target is the Hegelian movement rather than Hegel; it also attests to how current Kierkegaard's thinking always was. The two Climacus texts, the most anti-Hegelian in the Kierkegaard corpus, were written in 1844 and 1846 respectively. They appeared during the peak of the Hegel craze which swept through the university as well as Copenhagen's intellectual circles in the mid 1840s. His timing could not have been better, as Kirmmse notes that the enthusiasm for Hegel wore off by 1850.¹⁹

Copenhagen's most prominent Hegelian was Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884).

Martensen's Hegelianism would later haunt him as he manoeuvred up the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of Denmark, but for now his "brilliant lectures on speculative dogmatics" attracted quite a following among Copenhagen's theological students.²⁰ Kierkegaard often had Martensen's followers in mind, if not Martensen himself, when he ridiculed Hegelianism under the personality of Johannes Climacus.²¹

Without any further delay, we will take leave of Denmark's Hegelians and Kierkegaard's caricatures to examine the philosophy itself which sparked such a commotion. To present Hegel's thought in just a few pages is a difficult task; his philosophy is ambitious in scope and complex in its details. My brief discussion of Hegel, then, does not aspire to be a complete overview of his philosophy but only an outline of its most essential features.

Our attention is focused on two fundamental aspects of Hegel's philosophy. First, Hegel insists on a single reality which is at once immanent and transcendent; secondly, that one reality is a self-conscious subject.²² Kierkegaard's attacks on Hegelianism are ultimately rooted in his opposition to this monistic metaphysic. Hegel, arguing that his speculative programme has overcome the principle of non-contradiction (PG 114-19), conceives all reality (including contradictions, or contrasts, such as infinite/finite, objective/subjective, ideal/real) as one whole. In direct contrast to the speculative position, Kierkegaard upholds the division of opposites recognised by classical logic. He argues that Hegel's synthesis of opposites (the famous "mediation") takes place only in thought, or abstraction, and thereby ignores the reality of opposites experienced in an actual world.²³

Loosely following the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I will begin to approach

Hegel's philosophy by looking at his notion of 'Subject', which partly derives from his critical reflections on Spinoza.²⁴ Subject is Hegel's term for what Spinoza called Substance. While Kant and Fichte are clearly Hegel's most important and immediate predecessors, it should not be forgotten that there was a revival of Spinozism among Hegel's *Sturm und Drang* and romantic contemporaries. Goethe, Herder, and Hegel's friend Hoelderlin were all swayed by the monism of Spinoza's philosophy, as well as the pantheism which it inspired. Hegel's own admiration of Spinoza cannot be overstated. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (posthumously published in 1833), Hegel writes:

To be a follower of Spinoza is the beginning of all philosophy. The soul must bathe itself in this ether of the one Substance, in which everything that human beings have held to be true has disappeared. This negation of all particulars, to which every philosopher must have come, is the liberation of the Spirit and its absolute foundation.²⁵

While Hegel rejected romanticism's revolt against rationality, he did join in its search for a view of the world that expressed the unity of all reality. Both the romantics and Hegel found a modern ally in Spinoza. Disillusioned and weary of the Enlightenment's compartmentalisation of knowledge and nature, many German intellectuals in Hegel's day devoted themselves to the development of theories which attempted to discover an underlying unity where modernity only saw particularity and division. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant is representative of modernity's bifurcation of reality; his epistemology divides subjective experience from an unknowable objective world, and his ethics sets rational obligations against human beings' unruly instincts.²⁶ This train of thought also

dominated the natural sciences, where the world was likened to a machine composed of divisible parts. While Hegel was more interested in logic and human society than nature, he did prefer the romantic view of the world as an organism to that of the rationalist's machine.

But terms like "organism" and "Substance", thought Hegel, were not adequate expressions of the one whole reality. Hegel's criticism of other monistic philosophies is particularly focused on Spinoza's Substance. He identifies two major problems in Spinoza. On the one hand, Substance appears to be static, that is, it cannot account for the successive stages of development in human history. In one place, he speaks of Spinoza's philosophy as "motionless Substance".²⁷ Secondly, Hegel claims that Substance is merely an abstract idea which, though it is largely correct, falls outside of existence. Ideality and actuality never meet in Spinoza's philosophy.²⁸ (Ironically, this latter criticism of Spinoza is one of the primary objections which Kierkegaard and Climacus raise against Hegel himself.) Hegel maintains that his new term, Subject, avoids these problems. Subject is a 'moving', dynamic being whose comprehension of itself as the whole of reality *is* human history; and it is because this movement is carried out through the medium of human history that we know Subject is grounded in the actual world (PG 528-31). (In the pages to follow, I will more frequently speak of Subject as Spirit, as Hegel does; God, Absolute Spirit, or simply the Absolute, are also terms used by Hegel to designate the one whole reality which is Subject.)

This is a summary of the story of Spirit's journey to self-consciousness, which is the story of the universe itself and a description of all reality. Be aware that, for the sake of brevity, I am simplifying and even omitting many of Hegel's arguments. Hegel himself

always presents arguments for the logical necessity of every ‘movement’ of Spirit. As I mentioned above, Hegel sees Spirit as a subject rather than a substance. But a subject cannot be a subject without an object. So Spirit externalises itself as the material universe, that is, it posits the material universe as its object. In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes, “the living Substance is...being which in truth is *Subject*, or what is the same, is in truth actual (*wirklich*) only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation (*Vermittlung*) of its self-othering with itself.”(PG 14). Thus Spirit is embodied, which is crucial because consciousness is always embodied, and hence located, in some place at some time.

Already, it is apparent that Hegel has considerably distanced himself from the transcendental premises of much traditional theism. The notion of God as a disembodied consciousness outside of space and time is incomprehensible for him. But he cannot be charged with pantheism, when he says that the universe is the embodiment of Spirit (i.e. God). For one thing, Hegel is not ascribing a divine status to the material world. Secondly, as Charles Taylor emphasises, Hegel’s Spirit is not ‘natural’, simply given, as the pantheist’s world usually is. Spirit is a conscious agent which rationally charts its own self-development. Taylor writes: “What distinguished Hegel’s position from pantheism in his own mind was the rational necessity which, it is true, could not exist without the world as the ensemble of finite things, but which was in this sense superior to the world, that it determined its structure according to its own exigences.”²⁹

In positing the universe for its object, Spirit realises and resolves several incongruities

in itself (PG 14). For example, one of them is the contrast of infinite and finite. Spirit is infinite because it is not limited by anything, it is absolute. But Spirit is also finite because it is embodied in finite material--human beings. Hegel is not equating Spirit with human being; rather, human beings are the instruments of Spirit, as they embody rational subjective consciousness. The ascent of human consciousness from a basic, primitive awareness of an external world to reason's recognition of the unity of subjectivity and objectivity (i.e. the primal unity of subjective consciousness, Spirit, and the external world, its self-positing object) is Spirit's progressive movement towards absolute knowledge, which is Spirit's complete self-consciousness.

This last point needs some clarification. Since Hegel believes in the inherent unity of all reality as Spirit, contrasts, such as infinite/finite, are not absolute (PG 15). I have just explained in the preceding paragraph that Spirit is not simply infinite or finite; both infinity and finitude are present in this one subject, Spirit. The discussion thus far, of Spirit's externalisation, has shown that it is true to state: Spirit is infinite; Spirit is finite. From Hegel's point of view, philosophers had struggled unsuccessfully ever since the Greeks to come to terms with the incongruity of infinite/finite; consequently, each successive generation of philosophers resolved to maintain the incongruity, to perpetuate a division between an infinite and a finite realm. This division of infinite and finite is really Spirit's incomplete understanding of itself. But now, in Hegel's philosophy, the incongruity is overcome through a "mediation" of what is true about Spirit's infinity and finitude into a more complete truth. The more complete truth is that all contrasts such as infinite/finite, are

not absolute, that they are of one subject--Spirit--and that our (i.e. rational beings') grasp of this truth constitutes that subject's more enriched self-consciousness. Human history, particularly the history of ideas, is the drama of Spirit's overcoming of the incongruities found in itself. The centuries long debates which arose out of the philosophers' division of reality into pairs of antagonising opposites, such as infinity and finitude, spirit and matter, rational being and nature, individual and society, were not in vain. It was a necessary process which has led to our current realisation, argues Hegel, that Spirit is all reality. Spirit has resolved all oppositions via the development of its self-consciousness (or self-knowledge) which is finally consummated in Hegel's philosophy. Spirit is now completely conscious of its all-embracing self; absolute knowledge has been reached.

Not surprisingly, Hegel's philosophy of Spirit goes hand in hand with an unorthodox view of Christianity. According to Hegel, Christianity has for its *content* the absolute truth; that content is the Hegelian philosophy. However, Christianity lacks the *form* of the absolute truth. Instead, Christianity reflects the absolute truth in pictorial thought (*Vorstellung*), which is incomplete (PG 497-99). The true and clear form of absolute truth is pure thought (or *Begriff*, as it is often termed by Hegel). Therefore, Christian belief will need to be reformulated in the language of speculative philosophy.

What is the content of Christianity and how is it true? Hegel sees the Church's principal doctrines, such as creation, the Trinity, the incarnation, and the resurrection to be conveying certain truths, not about the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, but about the phenomenology of Spirit. Of course, many will claim that Hegel has transformed these

doctrines to such an extent that it is only to be expected that critics will emerge claiming that they are no longer Christian doctrines at all.

One obvious problem with Hegel's philosophy for orthodoxy is God's necessary positing of Himself as the world, which has already been mentioned. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (posthumously published in 1832), Hegel states: "Without the world God is not God."³⁰ This understanding of God and the world raises some difficulties for the traditional doctrine of creation. The most serious being that the creation is no longer contingent, an act of God at a particular time in cosmic history which He might have chosen not to perform. Moreover, as we were able to see in the discussion of the externalisation of Spirit/God, the creation is also the condition of God's existence. He needs to posit the world in order for Himself to be at all. Translating the doctrine into speculative language, in a rather condescending tone from a Kierkegaardian perspective, Hegel says, "This 'creating' is pictorial thought's word for the Idea itself in its absolute movement...."(PG 503).

The determinism of Hegel's system creates another difficulty for Christianity, which, if we may leave theories of predestination aside for the moment, presupposes that the eternal destiny of individual human beings is determined by their own free responses to the gospel. Since Hegel's Spirit is ultimately the only subject there is, human subjectivity vanishes. While Hegel does allow that Spirit may have taken any number of routes to self-consciousness, there really is no room for human freedom, if we understand freedom to involve self-determination. In Hegel's philosophy, only Spirit has self-determination which it carries out through human beings in their social and intellectual history. Taylor succinctly

describes the fate of freedom and individual human subjectivity in Hegel's system:

...[W]e have seen that the absolute, what is at the foundation of everything, is *Geist*, or subject, and this is not just a matter of fact, e.g., that the world is so made that there is a single current of life in it which we can call a world-soul. Rather it is so in virtue of rational necessity. Hence the dialectic of identity and opposition in subjectivity is not of local interest. On Hegel's scheme, it must be of ontological import. If the absolute is subject, and everything that is can only be in being related to this subject, then everything is caught up in the interplay of identity and opposition which makes up the life of this subject.³¹

We will illustrate Hegel's restatement of Christian doctrines with one more example: the incarnation, a topic of particular importance for this study. According to Hegel, the truthful content of this doctrine is that God is revealed as concrete Spirit. But here too difficulties are created by the logical necessity inherent in Hegel's system of philosophy. Hegel stands opposite orthodox interpretations of the incarnation, which speak of God's revelation in Christ as His gift of redemption to a sinful humanity. On Hegel's construal, God does not send His Son to the world out of love and mercy, but out of necessity. But could God's *love* not be that which compels Him to become incarnate and suffer a death that redeems the world? Climacus certainly believes this to be the case (PF 24). Hegel's evolutionary understanding of God, however, complicates this traditional view of God as being moved to act out of love for His creation. The incarnation, in Hegel's philosophy, is but another station that God must pass on His journey to self-consciousness. Thus, even though the necessity of the incarnation is still intrinsic to God's own nature, it is an event for which God cannot be responsible because He only becomes fully conscious of it and its

purpose at the end of the world historical process.

Also, Christianity's understanding of the incarnation as a revelation of God needs to be reformulated if we are to see it in terms of speculative philosophy. One normally thinks of a revelation as a communication from God to his non-divine creatures, who would otherwise have no possibility of acquiring the knowledge which they have now received from Him. A revelation also indicates God's free choice to enter into human history. In Hegel's usage, however, a revelation is neither a free, contingent act by God nor a communication from Him. For Hegel, the revelation of God in Christ is Spirit's (inevitable) recognition of itself. After all, if Spirit is the ultimate metaphysical subject, then it cannot make 'revelations' to anyone except itself. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes:

This incarnation of the divine Being, or that it essentially and directly has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of the absolute religion [Christianity]....[I]n this religion the divine Being is *revealed*. Its being revealed obviously consists in this, that what it is, is known. But it is known precisely in its being known as Spirit, as a Being that is essentially a *self-conscious Being*. (PG 494-95).

The incarnation is not a gift from God but a philosophical insight; it "represents the *absolute history of the divine Idea* that in itself had taken place and eternally takes place."³² The emergence of Christianity signals humanity's recognition of the divinity of the one subjective consciousness which operates through the species. It is specifically for this reason that Hegel regards Christianity as the absolute religion. He rejects the traditional view of Christ as the union of the divine and human in one *individual*; instead, he sees the incarnation as an idea which awakens human beings to the realisation that the divine and

human natures in general are united, and even one and the same.³³ In a revealing passage from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel writes:

The essence of the Christian principle...is the principle of mediation [here, the mediation is the universalisation of the particularity of Christ's divinity]. The human being [*der Mensch*] realises its spiritual essence only when it overcomes the Natural which is attached to it. This overcoming is only possible on the supposition that the human and divine natures are essentially one, and that the human being, insofar as it is Spirit, also possesses the essentiality and substantiality that belong to the concept of the Deity. The mediation is conditional on the consciousness of this unity, and the intuition of this unity is given to humanity in Christ.³⁴

Also of interest to our present study is Hegel's inability to speak of Christ as *the* truth. Hegel's understanding of truth is worth a brief mention, as our next chapter opens with Climacus' discussion of truth, and his eventual identification of the "god in time" with truth itself.³⁵ Hence any discussion of Hegel and the incarnation must address 'the truth' as it is understood in his philosophy. The excerpt from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, below, states that the whole of the movement of Spirit is the truth. Hence Christ's appearance in history, we can deduce, reflects the truth of Spirit at that stage of history only. Hegel writes:

The truth is the whole. But the whole is nothing more than the essence completing itself through its own development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the end is it what it truly is; and its nature consists precisely in this, which is to be actual, subject, or, self-becoming. (PG 15).

Despite the obvious tensions between orthodox Christian doctrines and their Hegelian counterparts, some of Hegel's followers in nineteenth-century Denmark viewed his

philosophy as Christian, nonetheless. This sentiment is still present today. Even J.N. Findlay, whose work was instrumental in reviving Hegel studies in the English-speaking world in the 1960s, says, “The Christian God is essentially redemptive, and Hegel’s philosophy is essentially a philosophy of redemption, of a self-alienation that returns to self in victory. If Hegel was nothing better, he was at least a great Christian theologian.”³⁶ While not all of Hegel’s interpreter’s would call him a great Christian theologian, there are certainly a number of them who feel that his philosophy is compatible with a Christian worldview.³⁷

Johannes Climacus challenges the thesis that speculative philosophy and Christianity can stand together. He believes that the translation, or even accommodation, of Christian doctrines into the conceptual apparatus of speculative philosophy cannot be successful because they reflect fundamentally opposite views of God, humanity, and the universe. Determined to discover how speculation and Christianity became entangled together in his own day, Climacus writes:

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. I thought 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. (CUP 241).

Part II

The Experiment in *Philosophical Fragments*

My analysis of Climacus' understanding of Christianity is focused on his first work, *Philosophical Fragments*. It is a small book, just over one hundred pages in length. Notwithstanding its brevity, *Fragments* tackles some broad issues of interest to both philosophers and theologians. And, as one can expect from Climacus, it is not lacking in humour. Even its title, *Philosophiske Smuler* in Danish, is humourous. The Danish word *smuler* literally means "scraps", or even "crumbs". *Smuler* are left on dinner tables as well as writing desks. Walter Lowrie, a pioneer in Kierkegaard studies in North America, did translate the work as *Philosophical Scraps*.¹ The principal humour of the title, though, is not its gastronomical pun. The title is striking because the scraps, or fragments, are philosophical. In calling his own work fragmentary, Climacus is ironically distancing himself from his Hegelian contemporaries who write grand, scientific systems of philosophy. It is for this same reason that he calls the *Postscript* "unscientific" (*uvidenskabelig*).²

The "thought-project" itself in *Fragments* is humourous. The proposed project is, as I have briefly mentioned earlier, Climacus' invention of a non-Socratic view of the truth³-- which happens to resemble Christianity. Since Climacus' readers are Christians, it is only a short while before they recognise that he is not offering them something new, but is "plagiarising" Christianity; an imaginary interlocutor voices their indignation at the stunt.

Yet Climacus' irony and jesting extends even further than pretending to invent something which is so familiar. One of the essential characteristics of his invention is that it cannot be invented by any human being. Any conception of the truth that could be invented by a human being presupposes the Socratic view that the ability to discover the truth is given in human nature. The whole point of the experiment is to find an alternative to this understanding of the truth. Climacus is well aware of what he is doing; he readily admits to the interlocutor that his ideas (about sin, repentance, the incarnation, etc.) are not his own, and that he is inventing something which he repeatedly insists cannot be invented. In effect, Climacus undermines his own thought-project.

However, Climacus only undermines his thought-project *as* a thought project. Despite its many layers of irony and humour, *Fragments* contains some serious and sound philosophical theology. The book engages its reader in a lively and fruitful discussion of the distinctive features of Christian and Socratic ways of thinking, even though it is being carried out in a humorous manner.

One should remember that Climacus' primary purpose is not to distinguish between Christianity and Socrates but, as we observed at the end of Chapter Three, to disentangle Christianity from Idealist philosophy (or "speculation"), which influenced Danish culture and theology in the middle of the nineteenth century. Putting his theory of indirect communication into practice, Climacus indirectly attacks Idealist methods in theology by drawing attention to the differences between Christian and Socratic thought. Only two references are made to Hegel in *Fragments*, and Christianity is not named until the last page,

yet the thought-project is transparent enough that the reader finds himself pausing to reflect on the idealist and Christian ideas of God and humanity throughout his reading of the book. Because the text is transparent, I will occasionally discuss Christian doctrines explicitly, stripping away Climacus' ironic formulation of them in the thought-project. Climacus' opposition to the alliance of Christianity and idealist philosophy is also subtly reflected in the motto of *Fragments*: "Better well hanged than ill wed". Climacus borrows this line from Shakespeare to express his conviction that total abandonment of Christianity by the modern age would be a better fate for the religion than a marriage to Idealism. The motto could also be interpreted as a reference to Climacus himself, who would sooner be hanged by the critic's noose than join the chorus of esteemed "System" builders.

The following four chapters reflect what Climacus' deems to be the most essential features of Christianity. Chapter Four discusses the transcendent character of truth in Christianity. Chapter Five introduces Climacus' treatment of sin and its relation to the notion of the self, or the individual. In Chapter Six I will examine Climacus' unique representation of the incarnation; first through a love story between a king and a peasant maiden, and then in terms of a paradox that reason cannot disentangle. Finally, in Chapter Seven I will discuss Climacus' understanding of faith.

Chapter Four: A Non-Socratic View of the Truth

Climacus begins the first chapter of *Fragments* by asking, “can the truth be learned?” (PF 9). Before that question can be answered, however, we need to clarify what Climacus means when he speaks of “the truth”. He is not talking about truth in general or truth in its usual philosophical senses, concerning empirical truths or the necessary truths of logic. Rather, Climacus is speaking of ‘ultimate’ or ‘essential Truth’; it is that truth about what it means to fully exist as a human being. To realise the Truth⁴ is to fulfill one’s spiritual or moral potential. What distinguishes this Truth from other types of truth is that it is as much about *being*, or *living*, the Truth as it is knowing it. This is not to suggest that the Truth lacks objective content; the point is that the Truth is only recognisable as such, and in some sense is only ‘true’, when it is realised in the actual life of a human being.

In posing this question, Climacus is assuming of course that there is a Truth which is the essence and fulfillment of being human. It is an assumption that is seldom found in contemporary works of philosophy. The suggestion that there is an ultimate Truth and a single essence of human being is often seen in current western thought as naive. Even among those who do not deny the possibility of an ultimate Truth about the nature and purpose of human existence, many doubt whether it can in fact be known. It is possible that Climacus was aware of such views; nevertheless, if he did not assume that there is a Truth which is the

fulfillment of every human life, then his entire experiment would have been meaningless. Furthermore, the purpose of *Fragments* is not to prove the existence of the Truth. Rather, Climacus is proposing an answer to a hypothetical question: if there is an Truth about human existence, and if it can be known, then what are the possible ways that one could go about learning it?

Climacus reminds us that the question of learning the Truth was first given prominence in the philosophy of Socrates. Indeed, such questioning is Socrates' legacy. In the opening line of the *Meno*, the dialogue's namesake asks him: "Can you tell me, Socrates--is virtue something that can be taught?" (70a). (Climacus sees his own question, can the Truth be learned, to be another phrasing of the question posed by Meno.) Presented with Meno's question, Socrates immediately recognises that he has touched upon a serious difficulty regarding virtue/the Truth. In order for the Truth to be learned, it must be sought. However, somebody cannot seek what he already knows, nor can he seek what he does not know. Socrates solves, or perhaps avoids, this problem by suggesting that each person already has the Truth within himself. He bases his claim on the theory of recollection, which appears in many of the dialogues, including *Meno*. After some deliberation with Meno, Socrates reasons:

[T]he soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge--*learned* it in ordinary

language--there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest, if he keeps a stout heart and does not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection. (*Meno* 81c-d).

If one accepts this view of learning, then the most that one person could do for another who seeks the Truth is assist him in recalling what he already knows. Socrates believes that his dialectical method of inquiry is one way of helping somebody recall “the knowledge of virtue or anything else”, which is latent in each person’s own soul.

Thus Socrates’ answer to the question raised by Climacus is “no”. Since learning is nothing more than the learner’s recollection of knowledge that he already possesses, neither the Truth nor anything else can be taught to him. From the Socratic point of view, the god, if we identify the source of the Truth as divine, is within oneself. Knowledge of the Truth, or, putting it in more Platonic language, knowledge of the Good, is internal to each human being. From the Socratic perspective, “every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge.” (PF 11).

Climacus ultimately characterises the Socratic view of the Truth in terms of “the moment”. The moment of the learner’s discovery, or re-discovery, of the Truth is insignificant from the Socratic point of view because the learner always possessed the potential to discover it at any other moment as well; the Truth was never introduced to him for the first time, but was present in his soul from eternity. Climacus writes:

The temporal point of departure is a nothing, because in the same moment I discover that I have known the Truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal, assimilated into it in such a way that

I, so to speak, still cannot find it even if I were to look for it, because there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere].” (PF 13).

Employing basic logic, Climacus reasons that since the moment is insignificant from the Socratic perspective, a non-Socratic view of the Truth would be one which regards the moment as being of the utmost importance. The moment becomes significant if, rather than assuming that the Truth is intrinsic to human nature, it is taken to be transcendent of the learner. If the Truth is transcendent, the learner will be incapable of acquiring it unless it is brought to him in time, since recollection is an impossibility for him. (PF 56, 62). If the Truth does become historical, that particular moment will not vanish into the eternity of the learner’s soul, as happens in recollection, but will stand firmly before him in time; it will be an unforgettable reminder to the learner of when he first apprehended the Truth about his spiritual task as a human being. It is from this hypothetical deduction that Climacus begins to construct his alternative to Socrates.

The moment is an important term in *Fragments*, as several of Climacus’ key concepts issue from it. Scholars have interpreted the moment in a number of ways. For example, Gregor Malantschuk identifies Christ as the moment.⁵ A different interpretation is given by Frederick Sontag. His view is typical of existentialist readings of Kierkegaard: “When matters of your own life and its future shape are concerned, there comes a time (a moment) when you stand alone. Then it is yours to decide without external aid.”⁶ Niels Thulstrup interprets the moment as neither Christ nor a point in time when life decisions are made; instead, he speaks of the moment *of* Christ’s appearance in history, as distinct from Christ

Himself.⁷ Alastair Hannay speaks of the moment as the time of Christ's appearance in history as well. Hannay also recognises a second meaning of the term, when he refers to the moment of faith in which the Christian is "contemporary" with Christ.⁸

I find all of these interpretations of the moment to be problematic. Though there are passages in *Fragments* that lend support to each of them, none of these interpretations alone can account for Climacus' various uses of the moment throughout the whole of the text. The exclusivity of the above positions makes them indefensible. And because the moment is such a central term in *Fragments*, one cannot make sense of the text without a full understanding of the different applications of the moment by Climacus.

My interpretation of the moment attempts to reconcile the various meanings which Climacus assigns to this term. As I read *Fragments*, the moment is used by Climacus in three ways. First, it refers to the point in time when the eternal truth becomes historical (PF 19); it is this understanding of the moment that I have assumed from the beginning of this chapter. Secondly, the moment is also used to designate the 'teacher' who brings the Truth to the learner (PF 47). (As Climacus develops his thought-project, it becomes apparent that the teacher is not a teacher at all, but Christ, who teaches the Truth by *being* the Truth.) Thirdly, the moment is identified as the instant when the learner subjectively appropriates the Truth (PF 21), i.e. the moment of faith.

The first meaning is used by Climacus in the early stages of his thought-project to signify a break in the immanent relation between the learner and the Truth. I refer to this meaning of the moment as its general meaning. The second and third meanings of the

moment, the incarnation and the time of the learner's response of faith, shall be called the specific meanings. Though the specific meanings of the moment are distinct, they also form a single moment, for the incarnation is only a reality for one who has faith. I will analyse separately the incarnation in Chapter Six and the response of faith in Chapter Seven.

In the present chapter, I will continue to assume the general meaning of the moment as that point in time when the Truth first comes to the learner from outside of him, disrupting his immanent relation to eternity and the Truth. This premise, that the Truth must be brought to the learner, is contrary to the assumption that the learner is already in possession of the Truth, or at least has an innate capacity for acquiring it, which is the cornerstone of the Socratic position. Thus, as Climacus portrays it, the Socratic position is not limited to the theory of recollection or Socratic-Platonic philosophy generally. Any ideology or school of thought that assumes human beings can acquire the Truth through their own abilities satisfies Climacus' understanding of 'the Socratic'. For example, one can identify humanism, Marxism, as well as other varieties of secular thought as Socratic. Hinduism and Buddhism, which describe the Truth as something which human beings can attain through proper reflection and action, are examples of Socratic thinking in religion.

Nineteenth-century Idealist philosophy is the variety of Socratic thinking that Climacus is especially interested in contrasting with Christianity, his 'alternative'. More specifically, Climacus wants to illuminate the fundamental differences that he contends exist between Christianity and right-wing Hegelianism, which purports to be Christian.

But why the thought-project? Why does Climacus formulate his argument as a

hypothetical invention of Christianity? He explains in the *Postscript*, why such an unconventional approach to this issue was taken in his first book:

Because everyone knows the Christian truth, it has gradually become such a triviality that a primitive impression of it is acquired only with difficulty. When this is the case, the art of being able to *communicate* eventually becomes the art of being able to *take away* or to trick something away from someone....When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must 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 but his knowledge is meaningless or virtually meaningless to 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? When a communicator takes a portion of the copious knowledge that the very knowledgeable man knows and communicates it to him in a form that makes it strange to him, the communicator is, as it were, taking away his knowledge, at least until the knower manages to assimilate the knowledge by overcoming the resistance of the form. (CUP 275n).

According to Climacus, his prospective audience, living in Christendom and catechised from an early age, has a good knowledge of Christianity but has failed to *understand* it. (One indication of modernity's failure to understand the Christian faith, it would seem, is the conflation of the gospel and Idealist philosophy.) With his deduction of Christianity from a few basic premises, Climacus is attempting to increase his readers' understanding of Christianity by "taking away" some of their knowledge of it, a ploy that he thinks will also reveal idealism to be incompatible with Christianity. Climacus uses the thought-project as a means to suspend his readers' knowledge of Christianity just long enough so that he can

effectively communicate the principal argument of *Fragments*: if Idealism says p, and Christianity says not p, then the notion of a Christian idealism is contradictory.

My assessment of *Fragments* is that Climacus does successfully demonstrate the incompatibility of Hegelianism, and all idealist schools of thought, with Christianity. From our survey of Hegel's philosophy in Chapter Two, for instance, it is evident that the Hegelian view of the Truth, though more sophisticated than the theory of recollection, is essentially Socratic. For Hegel, the Truth is something that human beings can attain through the exercise of reason. Though he speaks of the Truth as something that human beings attain collectively over centuries of social and philosophical evolution, rather than individually, he still understands the acquisition of the Truth to be a natural human capacity. Moreover, since "the truth is the whole [of the process of world history]" (PG 15) in Hegelian philosophy, Hegelianism is excluded from Climacus' alternative hypothesis. For not only does the Truth transcend the learner in the non-Socratic alternative, so that he can only realise it when the divine teacher makes it known to him, but it is given to him in one exceptional moment. The world-historical process, on the other hand, does not assign any eternal significance to one particular moment. Climacus' opposition to the marriage of Hegelianism and Christianity is always at the forefront of his philosophy. In the remaining chapters of Part II, we will frequently take notice of the deliberately anti-Hegelian terms in which Climacus characterises Christianity.

Before moving on to the subsequent steps in Climacus' deduction of Christianity, we will use his own words to summarise the presuppositions with which we have begun:

Now if the moment is to acquire decisive significance, then the seeker up until that moment must not have possessed the truth, not even in the form of ignorance, for in that case the moment becomes merely the moment of occasion; indeed, he must not even be a seeker. This is the way we have to state the difficulty if we do not want to explain it Socratically. (PF 13).

Chapter Five: The Consciousness of Sin

In the previous chapter we saw that Climacus begins constructing his alternative to Socrates by assuming that the learner does not possess the Truth. Climacus adds to this assumption, that the learner is so radically separated from the Truth that he does not even have the capacity, or “the condition”, for acquiring it, “because the condition for understanding the Truth is like being able to ask about it--the condition and the question contain the conditioned and the answer.” (PF 14).

This scenario affects the role of the teacher, who is now required to do more than simply prompt the learner’s recollection. Since any instruction presupposes the presence of the condition for learning, the teacher who is to provide the learner with the Truth must bring him the condition as well. A Socratic teacher will not do; the learner does not need to be reformed, but *transformed*. “But no human being is capable of doing this; if it is to take place, it must be done by the god.” (PF 14-15). Hence the teacher in Climacus’ alternative is not an ordinary human being but the god.

Climacus contends that it was not always the case that the learner lacked the condition. Given his understanding of the Truth as the Truth about what it means to be fully human, the condition must have been present initially for the learner to have been a human being at all (PF 15). Climacus is not saying that the learner ceased being human when he lost the condition, but that the learner is now deprived of the potential to fulfill his spiritual task as

a human being.⁹

Climacus considers three possible ways in which the condition may have been lost. First, there is the possibility that the learner's creator, the god, who originally gave him the condition, took it away. Climacus rejects this idea because it would be a "contradiction". Though he does not explain why it would be contradictory for the god to take the condition away from the learner, one could suggest several reasons in support of his assertion. By depriving the learner of the condition which he needs in order to realise his full human potential, the god would be thwarting his own intentions, for it is unthinkable that he would have originally given the learner the condition for realising his full potential as a human being if he did not want him to achieve this goal. Also, since the god is the teacher who provides the Truth, it is reasonable to assume that he is essentially related to the Truth and all goodness; it would indeed be contradictory for a god who is essentially good to deprive his creature of something that would enhance the creature's well-being.

The second possibility is that the learner lost the condition, though not through his own fault. This possibility is also rejected. Climacus disregards it on the grounds that something inferior cannot displace something superior. He claims that this too would be a contradiction. Here Climacus is not speaking of "inferior" and "superior" things in general; the issue still concerns essential Truth, moral perfection. He is contrasting the eternal (superior) quality of the condition for learning the Truth with the accidental (inferior) nature of its loss. In other words, if the condition was lost accidentally, then it was only possessed accidentally, which is not to possess it at all. Climacus writes:

If he [the learner] could have lost the condition in such a way that it was not due to himself, and if he could be in this state of loss without its being due to himself, then he would have possessed the condition only accidentally, which is a contradiction, since the condition for the truth is an essential condition. (PF 15).

The point being made by Climacus is very similar to the argument that moral actions are never accidental. Integrity, or moral character, is something that one has essentially or not at all. One does not lose one's integrity by accident; if it is lacking, it is lacking because the individual chooses not to possess it. My integrity is exclusively in my power and control. Neither other persons nor any accidental event can bring harm to it--only I can do that. As Socrates argues in the *Apology*, "nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death." (41d). Similarly, Climacus is saying that the condition, when it is possessed, is woven essentially into one's being, and only the individual himself is in a position to cause its loss, which is always a deliberate act.

This is the third possibility, which Climacus sees as the only explanation for the loss of the condition: that it was forfeited by the learner himself. Having forfeited the condition for learning the Truth, the learner has chosen to become untruth. The untruth of the learner is not his ignorance of the Truth, which would just be another way of saying that he lost the condition accidentally; rather, he is untruth because he wilfully rejected the condition and now stands *against* the Truth. Having deduced the only possible explanation for the loss of the condition, Climacus suggests a name for the state that the learner is in: "[T]his state--to be untruth and to be that through one's own fault--what can we call it? Let us call it *sin*." (PF

15).

If Climacus' readers have not already begun to see that his imaginatively constructed alternative to Socrates bears a suspicious resemblance to Christianity, they will certainly begin to see through the humourist's jest with the introduction of this 'new' term, sin. But, even though Climacus' jest has been recognised as such, this does not mean that we should abandon his experiment. The experiment is no less instructive even when, as an imaginary interlocutor puts it, it becomes obvious to us that Climacus is behaving "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." (PF 21).

Before following Climacus' experiment any further, we need to consider his concept of sin more closely. For the separation of the individual human being from God through sin is expressed in everything that Climacus says about God and humanity. This polarity should not be misunderstood as philosophical dualism. For, as we have just seen, it is not based on a metaphysical or ontological distinction between God and humanity, but on the sinfulness of the individual human being. Kierkegaard echoes this conviction when he writes, "if the difference is infinite between God, who is in heaven, and you, who are on earth, the difference between the Holy One and the sinner is infinitely greater."¹⁰ Also, whereas the two contrasting principles in dualistic philosophies are often equal or co-dependent, the human being in Christianity is absolutely dependent on God. In fact, it is the inequality of the human being and his need for God that creates the dialectical tension between them. And here we have one of the starkest contrasts between Climacus and Hegel: unlike Hegel's polar

opposites, the incongruity between God and human being is never mediated in Climacus' philosophy. In both its popular and philosophical uses, mediation means to synthesise, or resolve, differences. Climacus, the humourist who delights in the irresolution of contrasting terms, sustains the "absolute difference" (PF 47) between God and human being throughout his works. In one place, he asserts that "worship is the maximum for a human being's relationship with God" because worship most perfectly expresses the difference between God and the sinner (CUP 413).

But, even though Climacus does not resolve the difference between God and human being in his philosophy, this does not mean that the damaged relationship between them is irreparable. Climacus is consistently orthodox in his views on the atonement and the mercy of God towards the sinner. Indeed, one can hear an echo of the Reformation formula *simul justus et peccator* in such statements as, "[t]he consciousness of sin definitely belongs to the consciousness of the forgiveness of sin." (CUP 524). However, according to Climacus, if Christianity is true, the separation from God is not finally overcome in time, but only in the "eternal happiness" that Christianity promises the individual. That promise is the *telos* of the Christian existence and that which gives the individual hope in his constant struggle against sin, particularly Socratic self-reliance. But Climacus does not speculate about the nature of the relation between God and the individual human being in the state of eternal happiness; his focus is always on the individual's temporal existence that precedes it.¹¹

I shall compliment Climacus' treatment of sin with Kierkegaard's own thoughts on the subject as well as those of another Kierkegaard pseudonym, Johannes Anti-Climacus¹². I am

allowing Kierkegaard and Anti-Climacus to speak alongside Climacus on this subject because their understanding of sin is largely consistent with his. The primary difference between Climacus' treatment of sin, on the one hand, and that of Kierkegaard and Anti-Climacus on the other, is that the latter speak from the perspective of faith. Another important difference that should be pointed out is the prominence of the polarisation of God and the sinful individual in Climacus' works. This polarity is also found in the works of Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard, but its presentation is different from that of the Climacus writings. The polarity is still quite strong in *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*; however, Anti-Climacus, unlike Climacus, is not intent on demonstrating that Hegelianism and Christianity are exclusive genres. Also, Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals* that Anti-Climacus' *The Sickness Unto Death* is intended "for upbuilding" (JP 6431); the same could be said of *Practice in Christianity*, which emphasises the importance of a practical Christian ethic. In Kierkegaard's signed works, such as the discourses and *Works of Love*, the polarity is not nearly as visible as it is in the writings of Climacus. And when the polarity of God and the sinful individual does surface, it is usually in the context of a passage in Scripture that exalts God in His loving and forgiving nature. Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard speak of sin in order to awaken their readers to the depth of God's forgiving love as well as the grave consequences of turning away from Him. Climacus, on the other hand, seizes upon the notion of sin in order to underscore the differences between Christianity and Hegelianism. In particular, it is through the notion of sin that Climacus introduces the gulf that Christianity posits between God/the Truth and human beings. Such

a view of the relationship between God and humanity contrasts sharply with the homogeneity that Hegelianism assigns all reality. Climacus believes that modernity has lost sight of this fundamental disagreement between traditional Christianity and idealism. Notwithstanding the differences in motivation and emphasis in Climacus' works, it seems that Kierkegaard and Anti-Climacus, based on what they have written on sin, would regard Climacus' understanding of the dogma as correct, though it is presented from the perspective of an outsider.

As long as these qualifications are made, we can profitably use the works of Kierkegaard and Anti-Climacus in conjunction with Climacus' writings. For these three authors do share similar views on sin and its place in Christianity. Their proximity to each other is seen in other aspects of their thinking too. I have already indicated in Part I that Climacus and Kierkegaard both make use of indirect communication and are opposed to Hegelian methods in theology. In the case of Johannes Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard explains in his *Journals* that Anti-Climacus is very similar to Johannes Climacus, except that the author of *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* is an extraordinary Christian. (JP 6431). (Another important difference, which Kierkegaard does not mention, is the temperament of the Climacean and Anti-Climacean works; Anti-Climacus is all earnestness, while the earnestness of Climacus is usually coupled with his humour.) The relevant entries in the *Journals* also illuminate the relationship which Kierkegaard himself has to the two Johannes:

The pseudonym [to whom *The Sickness Unto Death* is

attributed] is Johannes Anti-Climacus in contrast to Climacus, who said he was not a Christian. Anti-Climacus is the opposite extreme: a Christian on an extraordinary level--but I myself manage to be only a very simple Christian. ...I would place myself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus. (JP 6431, 6433).

The first observation which we need to make is that Kierkegaard and both of his pseudonyms insist that the consciousness of sin is the exclusive entrance to Christianity. At the end of the first section of *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus sums up his initial deliberations with a “Moral”, in which he writes: “Admittance [to Christianity] is only through the consciousness of sin; to want to enter by any other road is high treason against Christianity.” (PC 67-68). Kierkegaard, in his *Journals*, says that the “consciousness of sin is and continues to be the *conditio sine qua non* for all Christianity” (JP 452). And in this chapter we have been following Climacus’ hypothetical deduction of Christianity, in which he takes the learner’s untruth (i.e. sin) as its necessary first principle. Until the learner becomes conscious of himself as sinful, he will never advance beyond an immanent understanding of the Truth.

When Climacus speaks of one’s understanding of the Truth, he is not only referring to that person’s intellectual conception of what the Truth is, but also his *relation* to it. The question, ‘can the Truth be learned?’, is much more than an epistemological query; it is the pressing moral and existential issue of Climacus’ philosophy. Climacus could have also begun *Fragments* by asking, ‘how is one related to the Truth?’, without altering the arguments pursued in the book.

As we have seen in our analysis of the first chapter of *Fragments*, Climacus provides us with an either/or choice between two types of relations which one may have to the Truth. In the Socratic relation to the Truth, which Climacus regards as the only relation that human beings can acquire through their own abilities, the essential, eternal Truth is present to the individual immanently. The individual relates to the Truth in his own soul; this is what Climacus has in mind when he says that, in recollection, self-knowledge amounts to God-knowledge (PF 11). A much different relation to the Truth is given when the consciousness of sin is introduced. The individual who is conscious of being sinful is conscious of being outside the Truth. The Socratic relation to the Truth is no longer possible, “the backdoor of recollection is forever closed” (CUP 208). The idea of the Truth as immanent is destroyed. Now, in sin, the Truth transcends the individual, which calls for a new understanding of his relation to it.

Of course, being untruth, the individual learner is not aware of this relation until it is revealed to him by God. God communicates the individual’s sinfulness to him in the form of a transcendent and authoritative revelation. The revelation enables the individual to recognise the true nature of his relation to God/the Truth, namely, that it is a *dis*relation, or, as I have already described it, a polemical relation.

Moreover, the individual learner is now aware that he, in his forfeiture of the condition, is responsible for the damaged state of his relationship with God. That the learner is fully responsible for this situation is an obvious but important point. Climacus’ insistence that sin is against the Truth, that it is evil, and that the sinner alone is responsible for it speaks against

modern tendencies to regard sin as human imperfection or ignorance. When sin is defined as ignorance, it is defined Socratically. According to the Socratic view of the Truth, the learner's preceding state is one of ignorance, of not knowing that the Truth is within. Christianity, on the other hand, has traditionally understood sin as defiance and rebelliousness against God; sin is properly discussed in terms of the will, not the intellect (PF 13-15). For Climacus, to speak of sin as ignorance would be like saying that the condition was lost accidentally. An extensive treatment of sin as a distinctly Christian concept, as opposed to a description of imperfect human nature, is found in Johannes Anti-Climacus' *The Sickness Unto Death*. Like Climacus, Anti-Climacus protests against any identification of sin with ignorance. He writes:

What constituent, then, does Socrates lack for the defining of sin? It is the will, defiance. The intellectuality of the Greeks was too happy, too naive, too aesthetic, too ironic, too witty--too sinful--to grasp that anyone could knowingly not do the good, or knowingly, knowing what is right, do wrong. (SUD 90).

In receiving the revelation, the individual learner not only becomes conscious of his sinfulness, but he also recognises his spiritual impotence, and hence his need for God. The consciousness of sin cannot be discussed apart from the consciousness of one's need for God. The learner lost his freedom, and thereby his spiritual strength, when he forfeited the condition for untruth. He cannot even know that he is in this state without God's revelation, much less repair it. One can literally say that, in his former state, the learner was in bondage to sin "because to be free from the Truth is...to be excluded, and to be excluded by oneself

is indeed to be bound” (PF 15). Thus we can identify the consciousness of sin as God’s grace because the individual sinner does not know that he is a sinner in need of grace until he in fact receives it. The distinction that we have made between revelation and recollection, dependence on God and self-sufficiency, illuminates the fundamental difference between Christianity and the Socratic.¹³

The fact that the consciousness of sin awakens the individual to his need for God is the reason why it is identified as the only road by which to enter Christianity. The obvious reason for this is that, as we have been discussing, one does not know that one has this need until it is given in grace. But we can identify a couple of other reasons. First, to attempt to approach God without a sense of need for him would be a denial of his sovereignty and the absolute dependence which the individual learner has on Him. The absolute sovereign, God, requires absolute respect, and “only the consciousness of sin is absolute respect.” (PC 68). Secondly, an individual would not endure the suffering that accompanies a Christian existence unless he believed that Christianity alone could meet his spiritual need. Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals*, “if the consciousness of sin does not drive a person, he must be mad to get involved with Christianity.” (JP 4081). The Christian suffers because he must renounce the world, not in a monastic sense, but in the sense of giving up his reliance on himself and anything else of the world. Climacus explains below in the *Postscript* (where there is no thought-project, but an explicit discussion of Christian belief and existence) that the Christian exists “in immediacy” but is oriented towards “the absolute”:

The basis of this suffering is that in his immediacy the

individual actually is absolutely within relative ends; its meaning is the turning around of the relation, dying to immediacy or existentially expressing that the individual is capable of doing nothing himself but is nothing before God, because here again the relationship with God is distinguishable by the negative, and self-annihilation is the essential form for the relationship with God. (CUP 461).

This emphasis on the learner's need for God clearly reflects the polarity of the sinner and the Holy One. For the consciousness of sin speaks of more than human need; it is also a reflection of the sovereignty of God, because only He can fulfill that need. The stress that Climacus puts on the negative aspect of sin-consciousness, i.e. the suffering and "dying to immediacy" characteristic of Christian existence, further expresses the individual's separation from God and the irresolution of this *diastasis* so long as he is existing in immediacy. Yet paradoxically, while sin-consciousness awakens the individual to his separation from God, it also draws him closer to God (JP 4011). If Climacus were a Christian, he may describe this positive aspect of sin-consciousness in the same manner as Anti-Climacus, who writes:

From on high he [God] has drawn you to himself, but through the consciousness of sin. He leads the single individual to this place along many different ways, but he draws him to himself along only one way: through the consciousness of sin. For he will entice no one to himself, but he wants to draw all to himself. (PC 155).

As one can discern in the final sentence above, the consciousness of sin is not impressed on the individual learner. Throughout his writings, Kierkegaard is always careful to secure the freedom of the individual, especially in his relationship with God, where it often seems

to be threatened by divine grace and omnipotence. Hence Climacus addresses the human being's freedom in *Fragments*; of course, he does so in the language of his thought-project. Climacus explains that God, through His revelation, enables the learner to become aware of his sinfulness, He does not force it. The learner himself needs to recognise his own sinfulness. In this one respect, then, the alternative hypothesis follows the Socratic model.

Climacus writes:

To this act of consciousness, the Socratic principle applies: the teacher is only an occasion, whoever he may be, even if he is a god, because I can discover my own untruth only by myself, because only when *I* discover it is it discovered, not before, even though the whole world knew it. (PF 14).

The key to understanding Climacus' position is not to confuse the grace that makes sin-consciousness possible with sin-consciousness itself. Revelation is the necessary but not the sufficient condition for the consciousness of sin. The individual learner must still choose to recognise his sinful state which has been revealed to him. The question of the resistability of grace will be discussed at more length in Chapter Seven, where I examine Climacus' understanding of faith.

At this point in our study, we merely want to point out that in the consciousness of sin the learner regains the freedom that he lost when he forfeited the condition. Climacus, we have already noted, argues that only a teacher who is the god could release the individual learner from the untruth/sin to which he has bound himself. Obviously adopting Christian language, Climacus suggests that, since the god saves the learner from sin, he should be called a "saviour"; or perhaps he should be called a "deliverer", for he does deliver the

learner who has imprisoned himself (PF 14).

The consciousness of being a sinner before God is also a positive first step in the learner's realisation of himself as an individual. The "individual" is a term that is used interchangeably with the "self" throughout Kierkegaard's writings. Because Climacus does not develop this term as extensively as some of the other pseudonyms, particularly Anti-Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis (the author of *The Concept of Anxiety*), we will only outline its essential features as they pertain to the issues in *Fragments* and *Postscript*.

When Climacus speaks of the individual, he often does so in contrast to the "race" (i.e. species) or the "universally human". And, like many of his other concepts, Climacus uses the individual to argue against Hegel's philosophy as much as he uses it to positively develop his own. As we have already seen in chapter three, one of Climacus' main criticisms of Hegel's philosophy is that it is too abstract, that it does not articulate the concrete reality of life as it is experienced by individual human beings. Furthermore, because individuals are actual, *existing* human beings, they cannot be contained in an all-embracing system of philosophy; "system and conclusiveness correspond to each other, but existence is the very opposite." (CUP 118). According to Climacus, many men and women in the modern age, most of whom have never heard of Hegel, have also universalised the individual into the race. In *Postscript*, he writes:

The more the generation-idea has taken over even in the common view, the more terrible is the transition to becoming an individual existing human being instead of being a part of the race and saying "we", "our age", "the nineteenth century".... Every age has its own [immorality]; the

immorality of our age is perhaps not lust and pleasure and sensuality, but rather a pantheistic, debauched contempt for individual human beings....Everything, everything must be together; people want to delude themselves world-historically in the totality; no one wants to be an individual existing human being. This may account for the many attempts to hold fast to Hegel even by people who have seen the dubiousness of his philosophy. (CUP 354-55).

More important to Climacus than the alleged philosophical sleight of hand that dissolves the individual into the race are the ethical consequences of this move. Climacus argues that, once meaning is located in the race and the “world-historical process”, the actions of individual human beings become morally neutral. This is because the world-historical perspective of idealist philosophy only recognises the *effects* of human actions, that is, their contribution to the dialectical process of world history, rather than the *intentions* of their agents. As the following two excerpts, from Hegel’s *Lectures On the Philosophy of History* and Climacus’ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* indicate, Hegel and Climacus both recognise that the world-historical perspective deprives the individual of assigning any ultimate meaning to his particular actions. It is only Climacus, however, who is scandalised by this scenario. Hegel writes:

The history of the world moves on a higher level than that proper to morality....Those who through moral steadfastness and noble sentiment have resisted the necessary progress of the Spirit stand higher in moral value than those whose crimes have been turned by a higher purpose into means of carrying on the will behind this purpose. But in revolutions of this kind both parties stand within the same circle of disaster. It is therefore only a formal right, forsaken both by the living spirit and by God, which the defenders of ancient right and order, no matter how moral, maintain....It is irrelevant and

inappropriate to raise moral claims against world-historical acts and agents; they stand outside of morality. World history could on principle altogether ignore the sphere of morality and its often mentioned difference with politics. It could not only refrain from moral judgements--its principles and the necessary relations of actions to them already are the judgement--but leave individuals entirely out of view and unmentioned. For what it has to record are the actions of the spirits of peoples.¹⁴

Climacus responds:

If world history is the history of the human race, it follows automatically that I do not come to see the ethical in it. What I do come to see must correspond to the abstraction that the human race is, must be something just as abstract. The ethical, on the other hand, is predicated on individuality and to such a degree that each individual actually and essentially comprehends the ethical in himself...

....Insofar as the individuals participate in the history of the human race by their deeds, the observer does not see these deeds as traced back to the individuals and to the ethical but sees them as traced away from the individuals and to the totality. Ethically, what makes the deed the individual's own is the intention, but this is precisely what is not included in world history, for here it is the world-historical intention that matters. World-historically, I see the effect; ethically, I see the intention. (CUP 155).¹⁵

For Climacus, individuality means responsibility; human beings cannot be ethical creatures unless they are also individual creatures. Like Kant, Climacus insists that ethics must be rooted in the individual subject and the intention behind his actions.

We still need to explain how Climacus derives his concept of the individual from the consciousness of sin. And we need to examine the grounds on which he claims it as a distinctly Christian concept. First, it should be pointed out that Climacus does not deny that

individuality exists outside of Christianity. For example, in contrast to the broad characterisation of Greek philosophy that is given in *Fragments*, in *Postscript* Climacus makes a distinction between Socrates and Plato, attributing the theory of recollection solely to the latter, so that he can make Socrates an example of individuality (CUP 205, 206-7n). Climacus' concept of individuality is not simply a distinction between particular members of the race; it especially concerns the degree of "inwardness", or self-consciousness, of each person. Thus Climacus can look to Socrates, who had turned Greek philosophy away from an examination of the natural world and towards an examination of the self, as a paradigm of individuality. However, Socrates lacked the consciousness of sin (PF 47); and it is through the consciousness of sin that one acquires the most intense inwardness, the highest degree of individuality. When the learner becomes conscious of himself as a sinner, "he becomes aware of himself in his difference from the universally human" (CUP 584). For the learner does not perceive sin as a universal human condition; he is conscious of sin as something that belongs to him alone. "[S]in, however common it is to all", writes Anti-Climacus, "does not gather men together in a common idea, into an association, into a partnership...instead, it splits men up into single individuals and holds each individual fast as a sinner." (SUD 120n). Similarly, Kierkegaard speaks of sin as that which "isolates" each person. He writes: "sin alone is the unconditionally isolating. My sin does not concern one single human being except me and touches my personality on the deepest level." (JP 4050). The correlation of sin and the degree of self-consciousness is bluntly expressed by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*, when he writes, "the more self there is, the more intense is sin" (SUD 114).

The final point that I want to make in this chapter is that the consciousness of sin necessarily entails consciousness of God. One cannot be aware of being a sinner without being aware of God, for sin is a relational term between the individual human being and God. Sin does not characterise the individual in himself, but in his relation to God; sin-consciousness is the individual's awareness of this relation. Anti-Climacus, in the same manner that he equates the depth of sin-consciousness and self-consciousness, links self-consciousness with consciousness of God. He writes: "the greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God" (SUD 80). Kierkegaard expresses this same conviction in one of his discourses, "The Care of Lowliness", where he maintains that one cannot know one's true self unless one is *before* God.¹⁶

In this chapter I have examined the notion of sin-consciousness in Climacus' understanding of Christianity. Two important aspects of the consciousness of sin have been identified. First, in the consciousness of sin, the individual becomes aware of his radical separation from God; he recognises that God is transcendent. Furthermore, the individual learns that a relationship with God is necessary if he is to realise the Truth about his existence as a human being, and that it is only through the *grace* of God that this relationship is possible. Climacus' thought-project convincingly demonstrates that it is especially the concept of sin that differentiates Christianity's view of God and humanity from that of natural religion and philosophical idealism. Secondly, the emerging relationship with God increases the individual's awareness of himself. That each human being become an individual, or self, is imperative if his relationship with God is to be a true relationship.

According to Climacus (and Kierkegaard), a true relationship can only exist between individuals who are conscious and free. Thus I have attempted to show in this chapter that consciousness and freedom lie at the core of Climacus' concept of individuality. That it is important that the learner emerge from his untruth as a free and self-aware individual, a "new creation", will become more evident chapters to follow.

Chapter Six: Poetry and Paradox: The Incarnation of God

We have seen in the previous two chapters that in Climacus' alternative to Socrates the Truth transcends the learner, who has enclosed himself in sin. If the learner is to acquire the Truth, it must be 'taught' to him by the god. (A human teacher, Climacus has argued, is powerless to initiate the radical transformation that turns the learner away from sin and towards the Truth.) Furthermore, the god shall teach the learner the Truth in time, in the "moment", which, by virtue of its eternal significance, is distinct from every other moment in the passage of time. Borrowing a phrase from the New Testament, Climacus calls this moment "the fullness of time" (PF 18). The distinctness of this particular moment cannot be verified empirically or through reason; it is only in faith that the eternal significance of the moment is recognised.

It is not until the second chapter of *Fragments* that Climacus begins to specifically articulate the manner in which the Truth shall be brought to the learner. The reader, having sensed from the outset the direction that the thought-project would take, already knows how the Truth will be brought to the learner: the god (who is the Truth) will reveal himself to the learner in the form of a human being. It does not concern Climacus that his audience knows in advance where his thought-project is leading; he makes little attempt to disguise the Christian terminology used in his deduction of the alternative view of the Truth. Climacus' intention, after all, is not to fool his audience, nor does he presume to tell them something

new. As he explains in *Postscript*, the overriding experiment in *Fragments* (behind the thought-project) is his attempt to present his readers something familiar in an unfamiliar form (CUP 275n). As we have noted elsewhere, Climacus expects that the unfamiliar form in which he presents Christianity in *Fragments* will enable his audience to recognise the fundamental differences between it and philosophical idealism and natural religion.

In this chapter, I shall examine Climacus' understanding of the incarnation and the unfamiliar form in which he discusses it. Climacus approaches the incarnation in two ways: poetically and philosophically. First, in the "poetic venture" of chapter two, he describes the relationship between the god and the learner in terms of a tale of love between a king and a peasant maiden. Climacus continues discussing the incarnation in the remaining three chapters of *Fragments*, but now he uses language that is more philosophical than poetic. It is in these latter chapters of the book that Climacus speaks of the incarnation as a paradox, indeed, as the "absolute paradox". Our discussion of the incarnation will give particular attention to the notion of the absolute paradox, one of the most controversial terms in all of Kierkegaard's writings.

Climacus uses the figure of Socrates to initiate his discussion of the incarnation, as he did with the doctrine of sin. And once again Climacus considers Socrates in his role as a teacher. Climacus points out to his audience that Socrates, like any human teacher, "stands in a reciprocal relation" to his pupils and the wider community (PF 23). Socrates learns from his pupils just as they learn from him; even the most generous teacher "owes" something to his pupils, as they owe him. Moreover, Socrates, having received a "call and a prompting"

to become a teacher, teaches to meet his own needs as well as those of his pupils (PF 23). Self-fulfilment, Climacus reminds us, is always an essential component in a human being's decision to become a teacher.

While there are some readily identifiable motivations in a human being's decision to become a teacher, it is not clear what would motivate the god to become a teacher. Unlike Socrates, the god is not influenced by any social circumstances. And teaching does not fulfill a need for learning and personal growth in the god; utterly self-sufficient, "the god needs no pupil in order to understand himself" (PF 24). In a reference to Aristotle, Climacus describes the god as an unmoved mover, as one who has no need outside of himself. However, unlike Aristotle's unmoved mover, Climacus' god is not an abstract philosophical formula; he is a very personal being, whose steady movement is guided by passion. Unable to determine any other cause that would move the god to become a teacher, Climacus says that he is moved by love. "[I]f he moves himself and is not moved by need, what moves him then but love, for love does not have the satisfaction of need outside itself but within." (PF 24). It is love, then, that motivates the god to become a teacher.

We are told that love is also the goal of the god's activities, for in the case of such an absolutely selfless love for an other, the motivation and the goal must coincide (PF 25). The god, then, looks forward to establishing a loving relationship with the learner. Climacus frequently points out that such a relationship shall be characterised by equality and understanding.

However, establishing a loving relationship with the learner will not be a simple matter.

For an immense inequality exists between the learner and the god. In fact, a greater inequality is not imaginable. The teacher-god does not stand in a reciprocal relation to the learner, as Socrates does. The learner is wholly dependent on the god, whom he owes everything; were it not for the grace of the god in providing the condition, the learner would not be able to attain the Truth. The learner, it will be recalled, is in untruth through his own fault (PF 28). Thus the god is not obliged to act at all; he does not owe the learner anything. Nevertheless, the god does act, because he loves the learner.

Because there is such a fundamental inequality between the god and the learner, Climacus describes the god's love as "unhappy" (PF 25). He writes:

There has been much talk in the world about unhappy love, and everyone knows what the term means: that the lovers are unable to have each other....There is another kind of unhappy love: the love of which we speak, of which there is no perfect earthly analogy....The unhappiness is the result not of the lovers' being unable to have each other but of their being unable to understand each other. And this sorrow is indeed infinitely deeper than the sorrow of which people speak, for this unhappiness aims at the heart of love and wounds for eternity, unlike that other unhappiness, which affects only the external and the temporal and which for the high-minded is only something of a jest about the lovers' not getting each other in time. (PF 25-6).

Climacus distinguishes between two types of unhappy love. First, love can become unhappy if the lovers are prevented from having each other. Environmental circumstances, such as war or feuding families, could prevent the lovers from realising a relationship with each other. In such cases it is something external that frustrates the lovers' union; there is nothing in the lovers themselves or their relationship that would prevent them from being together.

Since the obstacle that prevents the pair from realising a love-relationship is external, their love is only unhappy in time. There is nothing to stand in the way of the lovers having each other in eternity. The second type of unhappy love, which afflicts the god, is more troubling; here the lovers are able to have each other neither in time nor in eternity. It is the inequality of the lovers and their inability to understand each other that prevents their union. The god's love will continue to be unhappy unless the inequality between him and the learner is removed. Of course, only the god is aware of the situation; the learner, having bound himself in untruth, does not even know that he is the god's beloved. Climacus writes, "this infinitely deeper sorrow is identified essentially with the superior person, for he alone also understands the misunderstanding." (PF 26).

The inequality between the god and the learner of which we are speaking is not a metaphysical inequality. Climacus does assume that the god is eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient; however, he does not base the inequality on a contrast of the infinite nature of the god and the finitude of the learner. The inequality is principally derived from the *dependence* of the learner on the god. The ostensible purpose of the thought-project, it will be recalled, is to find an alternative to the Socratic understanding of the Truth and how it is attained. It was shown that there is a natural equality between Socrates and his pupils. Hence each pupil is ultimately responsible for attaining the Truth through his own powers, as all knowledge is recollection. Moreover, both the teacher and his pupils participate in the mutual giving and receiving that takes place in human society. In effect, no human being is indebted to another in any ultimate sense. In direct contrast to this view of human beings and their

natural abilities, Climacus establishes the dependence of the learner on the god as one of the principal premises in his alternative hypothesis.

While there is no perfect comparison to the situation of the god and the learner, Climacus introduces the tale of a king who falls in love with a peasant maiden as an adequate analogy. And the poetic tale does fulfill its purpose; it effectively communicates the inequality of the god and the learner, and convincingly conveys the sorrow that this causes the god. Contemplating how he will attempt to “win” the maiden, the king realises that simply by taking her as his queen he will be doing her a favour for which she could never adequately thank him. “Alone he grappled with the sorrow in his heart: whether the girl would be made happy by this [a union with the king], whether she would acquire the bold confidence never to remember what the king only wished to forget--that he was the king and she had been a lonely maiden.” (PF 27). The king finds himself in a difficult situation. Genuine love wants to inspire self-confidence in the beloved; yet the king’s love may have the opposite effect. His actions could possibly destroy his beloved’s sense of self by serving as a reminder of her lowly station.

The point that Climacus makes in the above quotation can be understood in terms of our discussion of sin-consciousness. It was shown that the consciousness of sin builds up the learner, enabling him to become a true self, which is necessary if he is to establish a relationship with the god, or any other self for that matter. For the sake of observing the development of the self, it was assumed that the consciousness of the forgiveness of sin comfortably accompanies the consciousness of sin. While the consciousness of being a sinner

and being forgiven are equally present in the encounter with the god's revelation, it is the ongoing task of the learner to balance these two poles. The learner's success in this matter is far from guaranteed. Instead of responding to the god's revelation in faith, the learner may be so wounded by the sight of his own sinfulness that he despairs over it. (According to *Anti-Climacus*, despair over sin is 'the sickness unto death'.) Or, now that the learner knows that the god forgives him, he may despair over being the recipient of such undeserved forgiveness. Would it not have been better for the learner had he never come to know the god, and thereby his own sinfulness? Would it not be better for the peasant maiden to remain in her simple environment where she would not be so acutely aware of her lowly station, as she would be in the king's palace?

The god is taking a real risk. He is in danger of harming that which he hopes to save, "for the individual's tender shoot can be crushed as readily as a blade of grass" (PF 32). We are even told that the god's task of winning the learner's love is more strenuous than upholding the created universe (PF 32). Like the god, the king recognises that he may not only fail to win the maiden, but he may even harm her in the attempt. This is the difficulty that makes the story of the god a story of suffering. *Climacus* implies throughout *Fragments* that Christ's suffering is not limited to His forsakenness in death, but that He suffers at every moment of his earthly life because many will misunderstand Him. The very act that He takes in order to draw closer to each individual human being and establish a relationship with him may prove to be that which separates them.

The king shall act in order to establish equality between himself and the maiden. A

genuine love-relationship, it has been said, is only possible on the basis of equality. The relationship will be unhappy if one of the parties is inferior to the other. There are two possible ways of achieving equality: the king could either elevate the maiden to his level or else he could descend to her level.

First, the king could raise the maiden to his level. Climacus provides us with a couple of possible ways in which the king could accomplish this. On the one hand, he could dazzle the maiden with the splendour of her new position as his queen. Returning to the situation of the god, Climacus explains what this option would be like: “the god would then draw the learner up toward himself, exalt him, divert him with joy lasting a thousand years...let the learner forget the misunderstanding in his tumult of joy.” (PF 29). The god realises, however, that this would be a deception. Similarly, the king would be deceiving the maiden if he were to manipulate her appearance and environment in order to prevent her from remembering that she had been lowly maiden. The king would be violating the maiden’s freedom to enter into a relationship with him fully conscious of her own self. The maiden would presumably be happy in the relationship but the king, aware of his dishonesty, would not. The parallel in the relationship between the god and the learner concerns the learner’s sinfulness. The god could have chosen to free the learner from his sinfulness in such a way that the learner would not remember that he was once an unsaved sinner. But such a deception could hardly be called a true liberation.

There is a second way in which the king could elevate the maiden to his level: he “could appear before the lowly maiden in all his splendour...and let her forget herself in adoring

admiration.” (PF 29). This approach is also problematic. First, because he is in love, the king desires “not his own glorification but the girl’s”.(PF 29). Secondly, the king wants the maiden to love him for himself, not for his power and wealth. If the king were to use his status to lure the maiden, he could not be certain that she was responding to him rather than the royal display.

A sincere lover, the king wants the maiden to respond to him in freedom and self-confidence. But as we have just seen in the examples provided, if the king were to elevate the maiden to his level, he would inadvertently impose on her freedom and allow her to build up a false self-confidence.

Therefore, rather than elevating the maiden to his level, the king decides to descend to her level. The king accomplishes this by coming to the maiden dressed in the garments of a peasant. The king’s simple garments will protect the maiden from the distraction of his power and wealth; she will now be free to respond to the man himself rather than the splendour of his position. To appear before the maiden in his glory would be too much for her, as it would be too much for the learner if the god were to appear before him in glory (PF 30).

It is on this point that the analogy proves to be imperfect. The king only puts on the garments of a peasant, he does not become a peasant. The god, when he descends to the level of the learner in the form of a human being, does not put on a disguise; the god really becomes a human being. The god’s humanity, Climacus stresses, is “not something put on like the king’s plebian cloak...but is his true form” (PF 32). And the god does not assume any

human form. Since he desires to establish a love-relationship with all human beings, the god will assume the form of a servant. As a servant, the god will be “the equal of the lowliest of human beings” (PF 32-33).

Climacus’ understanding of the *kenosis* conforms to the traditional teaching of the Church. Yet it is somewhat striking. What makes Climacus’ view of the *kenosis* unique, besides the unusual manner in which it is presented, is his intensification of the incarnate God’s humanity. Climacus appears to reach even further than the traditional position in attributing full humanity to Christ, when he writes that God is held “captive” by his human form.

[T]he god, from the hour when by the omnipotent resolution of his omnipotent love he became a servant, he has himself become captive, so to speak, in his resolution and is now obliged to continue (to go on talking loosely) whether he wants to or not. He cannot betray his identity; unlike that noble king, he does not have the possibility of suddenly disclosing that he is, after all, the king--which is no perfection in the king (to have this possibility) but merely manifests his impotence and the impotence of his resolution that he actually is incapable of becoming what he wanted to become. (PF 55).

For Climacus, the humanity of God is so real that even He cannot remove it, but “must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings”. (PF 32-33).

After reproducing the story of the incarnation in the form of a tale of a king’s love for a peasant maiden, Climacus returns to a line of argument that seems to follow from his deduction of the non-Socratic view of the Truth in Chapter One more clearly than the god’s

poem. He replaces the language of love with the language of philosophy.

Specifically, Climacus now speaks of the incarnation as the “absolute paradox”. (In *Postscript*, Climacus also calls the incarnation the “absurd”; however, this term is not used in *Fragments*.) So, what is paradoxical about the incarnation? It is commonly assumed that Climacus regards the incarnation to be paradoxical on account of the dual nature of Christ. That Christ is believed to be both truly God and truly man certainly lies at the heart of the paradox. At times, Climacus simply calls Christ the paradox, or the “God-man”. However, it is not so much the dual nature of Christ that Climacus finds paradoxical, but that God became *a particular man in time*. Thus he writes in *Postscript*: “The paradox is primarily that God, the eternal, has entered into time as an individual human being.” (CUP 596). In the moment that is the incarnation, eternity is no longer outside existence, sustaining it, but is now present *in* existence. Climacus describes the paradox as “the eternalising of the historical and the historicising of the eternal” (PF 61).

The paradox, then, does not arise from the mere placing together of the *concepts* of God and humanity. For, as one witnesses in the Hegelian logic, even antithetical concepts can always be mediated into a harmonious unity. As Anti-Climacus points out, there is nothing paradoxical about the “speculative unity of God and man”. There is no paradox here because speculation leaves out the “scandal of particularity”, that an historical human being was uniquely God (PC 123-24).

The paradox has been the subject of much controversy in the literature on Kierkegaard. Much of the disagreement among scholars stems from Climacus’ own characterisation of the

paradox. One of the flash-points in this debate is Climacus' repeated description of it as a "contradiction". In *Fragments*, for example, he writes: "in order for the teacher to be able to give the condition, he must be the god, and in order to put the learner in possession of it, he must be man. This contradiction is in turn the object of faith and is the paradox, the moment." (PF 62). What does Climacus mean when he says that the incarnation of the god is a contradiction? Does Climacus view the paradox as a *logical* contradiction? These are the burning questions in the paradox controversy.

Some commentators argue that the paradox is a logical, or formal, contradiction. They generally base their position on the assumption that "God" and "human being" are things that possess logically contradictory attributes. Thus, if God is omniscient and human beings are limited in their knowledge, it would be contradictory to say that a particular human being is God. Herbert M. Garelick and Brand Blanshard are representative of those scholars who view the paradox as a logical contradiction. Garelick explains his position thus: "This paradox is the ultimate challenge to the intellect, for all attempts to understand it must conform to the laws of judgement and discourse: identity, contradiction and excluded middle. Yet the paradox violates these laws...Rationally, the statement 'God-man' is a nonsensical statement."¹⁷ Blanshard makes a similar argument in his essay "Kierkegaard On Faith":

The central fact of Christianity, Kierkegaard holds, is the incarnation. "The object of faith is...the fact that God has existed as an individual human being." But he admits that by rational standards, this fact is inconceivable and inconsistent with itself. A being who is eternal or out of time cannot have measured out his life in human years. A being who is omnipresent could not be confined in his movements to a

small area in the eastern Mediterranean. A being who is omniscient cannot grow in knowledge, or a being who is perfect grow in grace. A son who is a separate person from his father cannot also be one with the father; still less can three persons be one. So speaks logic. But faith requires us to put logic aside and accept what Kierkegaard admits to be a “contradiction”.¹⁸

Other scholars have argued that the paradox is not a logical contradiction. According to this interpretation, the paradox is only an apparent contradiction; it is not against reason but above reason. N.H. Soe captures the essence of this argument, when he writes, “for Kierkegaard the ‘paradox’ is an expression for what is *supra rationem* rather than for what is *contra rationem*”.¹⁹ I shall support the view that Kierkegaard is not an irrationalist. However, while I am in agreement with scholars like Soe who believe that the paradox does not violate the principles of logic, I will attempt to show that the paradox, nevertheless, is against reason in some sense.

One possible way of attempting to defend Kierkegaard against the charge of irrationalism is to separate him from his pseudonyms--especially Climacus. Two scholars, Henry E. Allison and Russell F. Sullivan, Jr., have made the argument that Climacus is an irrationalist, not Kierkegaard. Allison, in his essay “Christianity and Nonsense”, misunderstands Climacus’ self-identification as a humourist to mean that there is no serious philosophy in his books. Because Climacus is a humourist, Allison contends, “the doctrinal content of the work [*Postscript*] must be regarded as an ironical jest, which essentially takes the form of a carefully constructed parody of [Hegel’s] *The Phenomenology of Spirit*”.²⁰ According to Allison, if Kierkegaard makes irrational statements in the Climacus writings,

it is only because he is being ironic and making fun of Hegel. Sullivan, for his part, wrote an entire monograph in his attempt to rescue the rational Kierkegaard from his irrational pseudonym. Sullivan writes: “[I]t is Climacus’ view that faith is irrational, not Kierkegaard’s. Kierkegaard did not believe that the God-man in history was a logical impossibility. He did not think that something could be truly illogical, yet existentially possible...Kierkegaard does not consider the fact of the God-man in history irrational.”²¹ Sullivan maintains that Kierkegaard created this irrational pseudonym in order to “goad” modern Christianity into recognising that genuine faith requires intense subjective commitment, not objective certainty.

Sullivan’s argument is unconvincing for a couple of reasons. First, he does not explain how Kierkegaard is serving the cause of Christianity by declaring (seriously or not) that the incarnation is illogical, that Christians believe something which is impossible. Secondly, and this point speaks against Allison’s position as well, even if one could dismiss the Climacus writings as Kierkegaard’s jest, one would still be confronted with a handful of entries in the *Journals* where Kierkegaard discusses the paradox in his own voice (e.g. JP 3074, 3084). Moreover, there are also places in the *Journals* where Kierkegaard places his own views very close to those of Climacus (e.g. JP 6433).

The arguments of Allison and Sullivan, even if they could stand up to critical scrutiny, would only exonerate Kierkegaard from the charge of irrationalism. Climacus would still stand accused of being an opponent of reason and clear thinking. Since I have taken the position in this thesis that Climacus should be treated as a serious thinker, I shall attempt to

defend his writings against charges of irrationalism. It is my contention that the Climacus writings, regardless of whom one identifies as their author, are not the manifesto of an irrationalist.

As I have already mentioned, the argument that Climacus is an irrationalist derives largely from his use of the word “contradiction”. Commentators like Garelick and Blanshard assume, as most philosophers today do, that a “contradiction” is necessarily a logical contradiction. However, nowhere does Climacus indicate that the contradiction that makes the incarnation a paradox is of a logical variety. It is anachronistic to assume that the contradiction inherent in the incarnation is a logical contradiction. Climacus’ use of this term needs to be understood in the context of the philosophical discourse of the nineteenth century, when many philosophers, following Hegel, would describe any relation of opposites as a contradiction. For Climacus as well as for Hegel, a logical contradiction is only a particular species of contradiction.

We have already encountered Climacus’ broad application of the term contradiction in the discussion of humour (p.22). One example of a (humorous) contradiction that Climacus offers us in *Postscript* is that of a man who falls into a cellar while gazing up at a shop window (CUP 516n). The contradiction is between his upward gaze and the downward fall. This event, like the other examples of contradictions given, concerns an *incongruity* between two terms (gazing upward and falling) but this does not amount to a logical contradiction.

Furthermore, the incarnation is not just any paradox, but it is the *absolute* paradox. Obviously, Climacus believes that there is something unique about the paradox of the

incarnation. Unfortunately, he never says directly what makes this paradox so remarkable. It seems to me that the paradox of the incarnation is distinct from every other paradox because its two incongruous elements, time and eternity, are the ultimate existential contraries. But, again, Climacus is not clear on this point. Nevertheless, the argument that I am making here is that Climacus would not call the paradox absolute if he considered it to be a logical contradiction. For there is nothing unique about logical contradictions. They can be created at will, and reason declares them to be unfit for belief all the same.

There is considerable textual evidence to support my claim that Climacus is not an opponent of sound reasoning. In *Postscript*, for example, Climacus distinguishes between what is “nonsense” and what is “incomprehensible”. The following passage from that work may appear to be advancing an irrationalist position, as it speaks of the Christian believing “against the understanding”. However, as I will explain shortly, this is not the case. For now, though, we are interested in noticing the difference between “nonsense” and the “incomprehensible”.

[T]he believing Christian both has and uses his understanding, respects the universally human, does not explain someone's not becoming a Christian as a lack of understanding, but believes Christianity against the understanding--in order to see to it that he believes against the understanding. Therefore he cannot believe nonsense against the understanding, which one might fear, because the understanding will penetratingly perceive that it is nonsense and hinder him in believing it, but he uses the understanding so much that through it he becomes aware of the incomprehensible, and now, believing, he relates himself to it against the understanding. (CUP 568).

Far from being an irrationalist or fideist, Climacus insists that reason²² plays an important role in determining what one believes. Reason examines beliefs and promptly dismisses some of them as “nonsense”. No amount of willpower will allow one to believe what one knows to be illogical or impossible. However, this does not mean that one will never encounter paradoxes and “contradictions” in life. There are some concepts that lie beyond the reach of reason; they are “incomprehensible” but not nonsense. Climacus is not repudiating reason or subordinating it to religious belief. Rather, he is saying that reason has limits and, moreover, reason itself identifies those limits. Kierkegaard expresses the same conviction in the *Journals*, writing: “The *absurd*, the *paradox*, is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense...reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense.” (JP 7).

Philosophers today do not spill so much ink arguing that reason has limits. Since the demise of idealism, philosophers have not debated *whether* reason has limits, but how far reason extends before it reaches those limits. Climacus and Kierkegaard, however, faced that more basic question. For Hegelianism, armed with its dialectical method, sought to comprehend all reality through the exercise of reason. As we saw in chapter three, the Hegelian dialectic mediates all opposites (or contradictions) into higher realisations of Spirit until “absolute knowledge” is reached. Climacus’ quarrel is not with reason per se; rather, he opposes the limitless range that his Hegelian opponents have granted reason. Climacus’ provocative terminology, such as the “paradox”, the “absurd”, “objective uncertainty”, etc., is not directed against reason but against what he regards as the illegitimate application of

reason in the philosophy of his day.

Finally, the interpretation of the paradox as a logical contradiction is also problematic because it speaks against the basic presupposition of the alternative hypothesis, namely, that human beings lack the Truth. The paradox could only be known to be a logical contradiction if human beings had a complete understanding of what God and human being are. Without that understanding, it would not be possible to know that the predicates “God” and “human being” are logically exclusive. Thus, if Climacus were to identify the paradox as a logical contradiction, he would undermine the alternative hypothesis. For it is the whole point of the alternative to deny that such knowledge is not possible without divine grace.

The paradox, it has been shown, does not signal a breach of logic; instead, it identifies the limits of human reason. Whereas logical contradictions fall within the sphere of reason, and are dissolved as errors, the contradiction of God’s appearance in time as a human being remains outside the domain of reason. Therefore reason can neither dismiss it as nonsense nor affirm it as true. If the incarnation is to be believed, it must be believed “against the understanding”.

What does it mean to believe against the understanding? In this context, Climacus is not saying that one believes against logic or pure reason. Here, the understanding, or reason, refers to human beings’ common sense view of themselves and the world. The god’s revelation does not violate the principle of logic, but it does offend the natural self-confidence of reason.

By way of summary, I want to point out three essential functions of the paradox. First,

by identifying the incarnation as the paradox, Climacus is able to secure the transcendent character of Christianity. If the incarnation were not a mystery that transcended human reason, then there would be no essential difference between Christianity and the Socratic. Secondly, the paradox protects human freedom. It has been evident throughout our analysis of *Fragments* that whatever school of theology Climacus is gleaning his information from, it is certainly one which emphasises the freedom of the individual in the transition to faith. Since the paradox cannot be verified in any objective way to be true, the decision to believe in Christ requires intense subjective commitment. This also means that the individual is free to reject Christianity. The tale of the king and the peasant maiden, besides vividly illustrating the *kenosis* theory, reflects God's desire to establish a relationship with individual human beings on the basis of freedom. Thirdly, the paradox guarantees the equality of all human beings. Because the paradox transcends the reason of all human beings, being clever is no advantage on the journey to salvation. Climacus writes:

If the speculative thinker explains the paradox in such a way that he cancels it...then there is an essential difference between the speculative thinker and the simple person, whereby all existence is fundamentally confused. God is insulted by obtaining a group of hangers-on, a support staff of good minds, and humankind is vexed because there is not an equal relationship with God for all human beings. (CUP 227).

Chapter Seven: Faith and the “Condition”

In this chapter we will turn our attention to faith, the “moment” of the individual’s response to the love of God expressed in the incarnation and atonement. Like many philosophers and theologians before him, Climacus wrestles with the dichotomy of grace and will as he attempts to explicate the nature of faith. Is faith an unconditional gift from God or the task of the believer? I shall interpret Climacus’ notion of the condition in such a way that divine and human agency both receive their due recognition in his treatment of faith.

The tension between grace and will is frequently discussed in terms of its classical prototype in the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius. Kierkegaard has been interpreted by scholars as holding both Augustinian and Pelagian positions on the question of the acquisition of faith. For instance, Gregor Malantschuk, relying on some early entries in the *Journals* from Kierkegaard’s student days, argues that faith and salvation are gained solely through grace in his thought. For him, “Kierkegaard’s endorsement of Augustine’s view is unmistakable.”²³ Furthermore, Malantschuk contends that Kierkegaard even detects a Pelagian streak in his Hegelian opponents. He writes:

[F]or Kierkegaard the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius is not merely an historical event but the continuing current battle about the proper understanding of man’s abilities and capabilities, including Christianity’s view of them. While Kierkegaard himself represents Augustine’s position, he feels that Hegel’s system in particular represents Pelagius’s optimistic view of man. When Kierkegaard says of Pelagius that his “system addresses itself to man as he is

(Christianity fits into the world)” [JP 29], Hegel’s name could very well be substituted for Pelagius, for he also sought to make Christianity conform to the world.²⁴

Others, however, view Kierkegaard’s understanding of faith as being closer to that of Pelagius than Augustine. With the Climacus works in mind, Mark C. Taylor writes in his classic *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*: “It is of central importance for Kierkegaard’s argument that man himself be responsible for faith.” And: “One believes in the God-man not because of discernible evidence or ascertainable reasons, but by the sheer strength of his own will by which he *wills* to believe that which cannot be understood.”²⁵

There is certainly no lack of passages in the Kierkegaard corpus to support each of these positions. In *Fragments*, Climacus insists that faith is not a natural human capacity but a gift of divine grace (PF 68-9). He even writes explicitly that “faith is not an act of will” (PF 62). Kierkegaard too, in his *Journals*, frequently speaks of the acquisition of faith as only being possible through grace (e.g. JP 1480, 3096).

However, Climacus also describes faith as something that the believer does. For example, notwithstanding his previous statement that faith is not an act of will, Climacus says that faith is “an act of freedom, an expression of the will” (PF 83). He also speaks of the understanding stepping aside in order to accommodate faith (PF 47, 59). Though the believer is not creating faith in this latter example, *he is doing something* in order to make faith possible for himself.

Kierkegaard acutely recognises the dilemma of grace and will:

But no one can give himself faith; it is a gift of God I must

pray for.

Fine, but then I myself can pray, or must we go farther and say: No, praying (consequently praying for faith) is a gift of God which no man can give to himself; it must be given to him. And what then? Then to pray aright must again be given to me so that I may rightly pray for faith, etc.

There are many, many envelopes--but there must still be one point or another where there is a halt at subjectivity...unless we want to have fatalism. (JP 4551).

The problem facing us is to determine at what point subjectivity/the will introduces itself into the story of the individual's salvation.

I believe that it is here that the "condition" can help us understand how Climacus is able to remain committed to his persistent claim that the learner is dependent on the god as well as the idea of the learner's autonomy. The condition can be of assistance in unraveling this dilemma because, unlike other Kierkegaardian terms, such as the "leap", it contains both the passive and active components of the acquisition of faith.

We shall begin looking at the condition by recalling what has already been said about it. First, we know, "if the learner is to obtain the Truth, the teacher must bring it to him, but not only that. Along with it, he must provide him with the condition for understanding it." (PF 14). Without this condition, the learner is in untruth (PF 15). Receiving the condition (along with the Truth) leads to a "turning around", or "conversion", of the learner towards the Truth. Thus the bestowal of the condition effects a radical transformation in the learner; it is for this reason that Climacus insists that only a teacher who is the god could provide it.

This transformation is the transition to faith. There are two possible ways in which one can interpret the condition as initiating the transition. 1) The condition could be seen as an

ability that is conferred on the learner, or 2) the condition could be seen as an *actualised* ability that is given to the learner. The first possibility is the most plausible. The problem with the second option is that it speaks against Climacus' insistence that faith is a free act. Furthermore, if the faith that the god bestows on the learner were actual, this would not explain how faith builds up the learner and allows him to become more free and self-conscious, the qualities of a true self. The king who disguised himself in peasant's clothes would seem to have gone through a great deal of unnecessary trouble and heartache if this were the case.

Curiously enough, the crucial element in my argument that the condition is a gift of unactualised faith is the Socratic model of the learner's relation to the Truth. Consider what Climacus says about faith in this passage:

Faith is not an act of will, for it is always the case that all human willing is efficacious only within the condition. For example, if I have the courage to will, I will understand the Socratic--that is, understand myself, because from the Socratic point of view I possess the condition and now can will it. But if I do not possess the condition...then all my willing is of no avail, even though, once the condition is given, that which was valid for the Socratic is again valid. (PF 62-63).

Climacus is saying that the nature of the condition is the same in both the Socratic and non-Socratic models. The difference between them is that the learner already possesses the condition in one case, while in the other it the learner must first receive it from the god before he can understand the Truth. Also, the learner in the Socratic model possesses the condition eternally; the learner in the alternative model receives the condition at a historical

point in time. However, this detail, though important, does not alter the nature of the condition. Climacus continues: “Faith itself is a wonder...But within this wonder everything is again structured Socratically.” (PF 65).

The most important aspect of that Socratic structure is how it deals with the will. In the above passage, Climacus claims that faith is not an act of will but goes on to say that “all human willing is efficacious only with the condition” and that without the condition “all my willing is of no avail”. In order to make sense of this we need to determine what activity constitutes willing in the Socratic model.

According to the Socratic model, the learner attains the Truth through recollection. Although the learner possesses the condition for understanding the Truth already, this does not mean that he has realised that understanding. The Socratic model distinguishes between knowing the Truth in ignorance and realising that knowledge. Thus, even though the learner is in possession of the condition, he must still do something, namely, recollect, in order to understand the Truth. Climacus is apparently adjusting the term ‘willing’ to refer to the activity of recollection. For coming to realise something that one already knows is not normally regarded as a volitional act; it seems to be associated more with concentration or altering one’s perspective.

I believe that Climacus understands something like this to be taking place in the transition to faith. The learner’s faith is not acquired through “the sheer strength of his will”, as Mark Taylor describes it, but emerges from his recognition of the gift that the god has bestowed on him. The gift of faith is provided when the god brings it to the learner, but it is

only actualised when the learner recognises and appropriates it. In one place, Climacus describes the bestowal of the condition as the god “opening the eyes of faith” of the learner. (PF 65). The learner still needs to focus the eyes of faith on its object, otherwise these eyes will be of no more use to him than those of a blind man.

If one views the condition in this way, then one does not have to contend with the problems associated with a strictly volitional understanding of the will, such as semi-Pelagianism. If faith is seen as an actualisation of a bestowed ability, one can still accommodate Climacus’ claim that a definite transition is being made from one state to another and that the learner, while dependent on the grace that makes the transition possible, is responsible for the transition. For Climacus does tell us that willing must still take place once the condition has been bestowed; and this willing is “efficacious” in the learner’s coming to understand the Truth.

Conclusion

The tension between *grace* and *will* that was discussed in the previous chapter is present throughout *Philosophical Fragments*, and hence made its way into our analysis of the text. Two themes have constantly surfaced in each of the four chapters of the exegetical part of the thesis: the believer's absolute dependence on God and his growth into a true self. Climacus repeatedly reminds us that if the individual's absolute dependence on God is not presupposed, "then we go back to Socrates". Also, a genuine relationship can only exist between two selves, two beings who are self-conscious and autonomous. According to Climacus, a human being can only become self-conscious and free through the recognition of his moral and spiritual failure before God. *Philosophical Fragments* was written in an attempt to remind modernity of the importance of these two features of Christianity which, in Climacus' view, it has carelessly forgotten.

In the unusual form of his thought-project, Climacus reformulates Christianity's central doctrines *as they pertain to the individual human being*. Thus he always speaks of God in his relation to one human being, not humanity in general. Nor is there any distinction between hereditary sin and actual sin; Climacus simply addresses the individual's need for repentance on account of his sinfulness. He also insists that God's grace is not distributed collectively, but is given to each human being separately (PF 103-04). Hence there is no discussion of the Trinity, God's earthly Church, or the Christian in society.

We have also seen that Climacus describes Christianity in direct opposition to philosophical idealism. This is not accidental; one of Climacus' primary objectives in *Fragments* is to show that idealism, specifically Hegelianism, is logically incompatible with Christianity. This polemic against Hegelianism is present everywhere in his writings and obviously influences his understanding of Christianity. (I suspect that he is unaware of this.) It leads him to envisage a dualistic universe, with God at one pole and the sinner at the other, in contrast to the monism of Hegel. Similarly, he emphasises the historicity of the incarnation and the humanity of Jesus in opposition to the Hegelians' translation of the incarnation into an abstract formula about God and humanity generally. And he rescues faith from its subordination as "pictorial thought" in the Hegelian philosophy.

Our reading of *Fragments* has enabled us to recognise this self-described humourist as a distinct author from Kierkegaard. While Kierkegaard is also fond of humour and irony, they do not find their way into his discussions of sin or Christ; Kierkegaard maintains that one should always be serious when it comes to sin (JP 4019). Nor does his emphasis on individuality shut out the social dimensions of Christian faith, as Climacus' does. Kierkegaard's signed works are also less easy to trace back to a debate with Hegelianism than those he attributed to Climacus.

The question that needs to be answered, now that we have examined the essential features of the thought-project, is, did Climacus succeed in distinguishing Christianity from Hegelianism? Climacus has shown that the presuppositions of transcendence, sin, the god in time, and faith reaching past the borders of reason to hold fast to a paradox, all of which

are essential to Christianity, are incompatible with the principles of Hegelian philosophy. Thus I think that Climacus met his objectives. But he goes no farther than this. Climacus' presentation of Christianity is accurate; however, one would have to look elsewhere for a more complete exposition.

Endnotes to Introduction

1. Niels Thulstrup, "The Complex of Problems Called 'Kierkegaard'", in Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, eds., *A Kierkegaard Critique* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962) 286. This essay first appeared in Danish in *Det danske Magasin* in 1955. The English translation in *A Kierkegaard Critique* is by Margaret Grieve.

2. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong began translating Kierkegaard's works for Princeton University Press in 1978. This project, which is now nearing its completion, will be the first complete edition of Kierkegaard's works available in English. The edition, titled *Kierkegaard's Writings*, will comprise 26 volumes; this does not include the 7 volumes of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* which the Hong's translated for Indiana University Press in 1967-78.

3. Walter Lowrie and David F. Swenson translated many of Kierkegaard's works in the 1930-50s. A bibliography of their translations as well as those of others can be found in Francois H. LaPointe, *Soren Kierkegaard and His Critics: An International Bibliography of Criticism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980) 6-15.

4. The most recent Kierkegaard bibliography is LaPointe's *Soren Kierkegaard and His Critics* (1980). A glance at its content reveals that the existentialist reading of Kierkegaard, while not the only interpretation of his works, has certainly been the most dominant.

Endnotes to Part I

1. Kierkegaard dedicated his *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847) to “that single individual”, whom he claims as his intended reader. Kierkegaard’s understanding of individualism has been variously misinterpreted as Enlightenment political liberalism, a romantic valorisation of the artist, existential defiance of a meaningless world, and relativism. I will examine Kierkegaard’s (and Climacus’) understanding of the individual in the discussion of sin-consciousness in chapter five. For now, we can make a broad observation. Two of Kierkegaard’s most frequent preoccupations stand firmly behind his emphasis on the importance of recognising oneself as an individual: his opposition to idealist philosophy, which he accuses of adopting an abstract concept of human being at the expense of particular human beings, and the Protestant focus on personal devotion and responsibility before God. The theme of individualism is indicative of the importance that must be given to the Christian and anti-Hegelian contexts of Kierkegaard’s works.

2. A notable exception is Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

3. The charge against Kierkegaard of excessive individualism was already being made in his own day. Defending himself in his *Journals*, Kierkegaard says that he never retreated from the public eye, either by isolating himself in the privacy of his home or by adopting the habits and opinions of his fellow citizens. Kierkegaard points out that being so perfectly public, as many of his critics were, is the real retreat from life. With a touch of irony, he adds that he had only become Copenhagen’s laughing-stock because he did not isolate himself:

Another foolish objection to me and my life...is that I remain apart from life and that this precisely is not religiousness since true religiousness engages in life.

O, you fools or hypocrites; how do I remain apart from life? In such a way that literally not one single person here at home is so conspicuously at the front of the stage. No, to live apart from life is to run with the flock, to be in the “crowd”, thereby gaining obscurity but also influence and power. I remain apart from life in such a way that I am recognised by every child, am a stock character in your plays, my name is a byword....

But why then this talk that I remain apart from life? Well, I will tell you. It comes from the fact that in spite of all my work I have no earthly reward, I am not applauded at public gatherings, which I do not attend, but am insulted in the

streets, where I am active; it comes from not fashioning my life in a way appropriate to a cabinet appointment; it comes because people detect that I am a fool, a fool--who fears God! (JP 6580).

4. Kirmmse 139.

5. In *The Point of View For My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard calls his early pseudonymous writings aesthetic because of their artistic, imaginative character (pp.22-43). The other common quality of the aesthetic works is their indirect approach to the problem of becoming a Christian. Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication will be discussed shortly in the body of the thesis.

6. The division of the authorship into "aesthetic" and "religious" phases is Kierkegaard's (see the *Point of View*). The aesthetic works are: *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Stages on Life's Way*. The religious works are: the discourses (*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Christian Discourses*), *Works of Love*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, and *Practice in Christianity*. Kierkegaard sees *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as the "turning-point" which stands between the aesthetic and religious writings (PV 13). Thus, while Climacus' first book, *Philosophical Fragments*, is considered to be an aesthetic work, *Postscript* is not. Kierkegaard explains that *Postscript* maintains the aesthetic momentum set by the previous pseudonymous works, while also looking forward to the specific focus of the religious works to come:

This work [*Postscript*] concerns itself with and sets 'the Problem', which is the problem of the whole authorship: how to become a Christian. So it takes cognisance of the pseudonymous works, and of the eighteen upbuilding discourses as well, showing that all of this serves to illuminate the Problem.... (PV 13).

Throughout his discussion of the aesthetic and religious phases of the authorship, Kierkegaard continually reminds his readers that the works need to be seen as a unity.

7. Alastair Hannay points out that Kierkegaard's insistence that he is a religious, rather than a philosophical, author reinforces his anti-Hegelian view that religion and ethics fall outside of the realm of Hegelian science. *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) 10.

8. The phrase "essential Christianity" appears throughout Kierkegaard's writings. What Kierkegaard understands to be the essence of Christianity (at least in the Johannes Climacus writings) will be developed in the thesis.

9. Socrates explains how he adopts the midwife's art as his philosophical method in *Theaetetus*, 150b-151b. All references and quotations from Plato's dialogues are taken from the translations in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

10. It should be recognised that Kierkegaard is not endorsing a Socratic-Platonic epistemology. Certainly, he agrees with the premise that ethical-religious truths cannot be understood as such until the individual recognises them for himself. But, unlike Socrates, he does not argue that this is because the individual is recollecting something which his pre-existent soul already knows. Moreover, as I have already explained, Kierkegaard does not extend the principle of indirect communication to all forms of knowledge, but restricts it to the realm of ethics and religion. Also, being a Christian, Kierkegaard believes that absolute religious truth can only be communicated from God, and is categorically inaccessible to human beings otherwise.

11. Though Kierkegaard stresses the importance of using indirect communication to clarify the *meaning* of Christianity for a public living in Christendom, he does not believe that the Christian *message* can be communicated indirectly. While there are plenty of discussions of indirect communication in the secondary literature on Kierkegaard, this qualification from his *Journals* is seldom mentioned:

Yet the communication of the essentially Christian must finally end in "witnessing". The maieutic cannot be the final form, because, Christianly understood, the truth doth not lie in the subject (as Socrates understood it), but in a revelation which must be proclaimed. (JP 1957).

Kierkegaard follows this sequence of presentation himself. We have taken notice of the fact that the indirect, aesthetic works were the main preoccupation of the first half of his authorship, while the directly Christian, or religious, works completed his literary production.

12. A case in point is Johannes Anti-Climacus' *The Sickness Unto Death*. The first paragraph of this book, which offers a horribly vague definition of the self, is often assumed to be a parody of Hegelian concepts and terminology. According to Louis Mackey, whose influential work may be the source of the parody interpretation, Kierkegaard "is holding the jargon of his Hegelian contemporaries against them, to show that when one tries to grasp human nature categorically, he comes up with nonsense." *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) 136. In his discussion of the book, Mackey even manages to use the word "gobbledygook" twice.

There are a couple of reasons why this notorious paragraph cannot be read as a parody. First, it is substantially related to Anti-Climacus' argument that one only becomes a true self when one defines oneself in relation to God. Secondly, and this reason pertains to my point about the individual personalities of the pseudonyms, parody is totally foreign to Anti-

Climacus. He is consistently serious in his writings, which is only fitting for somebody who is “a Christian on an extraordinary level” (JP 6431). We are told by Johannes Climacus that Christianity is all seriousness, that there is no room in it for humour and pranks (CUP 271n). He explains that Christianity demands a *decision* (to choose Christ or not), whereas humour merely reflects on the possibilities of decision and the cross-purposes that particular decisions may entail. (A more detailed discussion of Climacus and humour will be given shortly in the body of the thesis.) This seems to be Kierkegaard’s view as well. Many examples of humour, irony, and satire are found throughout the aesthetic works; however, such playfulness is completely absent from the two dozen discourses signed under Kierkegaard’s own name as well as the works by the Christian Anti-Climacus.

I am not suggesting that one must insulate Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms from each other. In fact, I will use Anti-Climacus to corroborate Climacus’ work later on in this study. My argument is that this can only be done meaningfully so long as the differences between the pseudonyms are taken into account. Mackey’s error is that he bases his assessment of the passage from *The Sickness Unto Death* on his reading of Climacus, a humourist who does parody Hegel. It should be pointed out, however, that Climacus never employs humour for its own sake; it is always in the service of a serious argument. The joke of the little paragraph in question is really on Kierkegaard: it testifies to his own use of the philosophy that he so vehemently opposed.

13. Here I am in disagreement with Howard and Edna Hong. In the introduction to their translation of *Fragments*, the Hongs claim that Kierkegaard uses “the name and the title [of the historical Johannes Climacus and his work] to symbolise the structure of logical sequence in both *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* and *Philosophical Fragments*.” See their “Historical Introduction”, in *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (Princeton: University Press, 1985) ix. However, the Hongs provide no evidence to demonstrate that the logical sequence of *Fragments* or the unfinished *Johannes Climacus* is in fact following the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, rather than some other source or Kierkegaard’s own pattern of argument. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* is thematically typical of monastic writing: it speaks of the monk’s break with the world, the struggle against the passions, and the balance of activity and contemplation. The ascent up the ladder is steady and progressive. This is in sharp contrast to the structure of *Fragments*. The reader of *Fragments* has to contend with an imaginary interlocutor who frequently interrupts the argument; Climacus himself even interrupts the text with a mock theatrical interlude designed to “shorten the time” that has elapsed since the appearance of Christ (as if one were witnessing Climacus’ argument being performed on a stage). Furthermore, Climacus frequently retraces his steps and moves back and forth between metaphysics and poetry. Incidentally, the entries in Kierkegaard’s *Journals* pertaining to *Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus* suggest that he only had a casual acquaintance with the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. See John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

14. Kierkegaard anticipated the confusion that would result if one were simply to attribute to him the positions taken by his literary personae. In his *Journals*, Kierkegaard writes:

The pseudonymous writers are poetic creations, poetically maintained so that everything they say is in character with their poeticised individual personalities....Anyone with just a fragment of common sense will perceive that it would be ludicrously confusing to attribute to me everything the poeticised characters say....It is easy to see that anyone wanting to have a literary lark merely needs to take some verbatim quotations from "The Seducer" [in *Either/Or*], then from Johannes Climacus, then from me, etc., print them together as if they were all my words, show how they contradict each other, and create a very chaotic impression, as if the author were a kind of lunatic. (JP 6786).

15. For example, J.N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-examination* (New York: Collier Books, 1962) 14; and Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) 289. Some scholars who are sympathetic to Kierkegaard, such as Alastair Hannay, also believe that he is guilty of intentional misrepresentations of Hegel's philosophy. See his *Kierkegaard*, p.21.

16. Hegel's discussion of absolute knowledge is found in the last section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). The meaning of this term will emerge shortly in my outline of Hegel's philosophy.

17. See their works cited in note 15.

18. Even though Hegelianism is the principal target of Kierkegaard's attacks, I have chosen to discuss Hegel's philosophy in this section rather than the Hegelian movement. In my view, the idealist philosophy that Kierkegaard opposed so insistently is represented in Hegel's own work more vividly than it is in the works of his nineteenth-century followers. Furthermore, this approach absolves me from deciding which Hegelians to use as my sources. The Danish theologian H.L. Martensen would be the obvious candidate. Unfortunately, his works have not been translated into English and, except for his correspondence with Bishop Mynster, none of them have been printed in this century. (Kirmmse, however, does translate select passages from Martensen's works in *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*.) Also, I do not want to be committed to deciding how true my Hegelian representatives are to the master. (Kierkegaard, incidentally, thought that the Hegelians only differed from Hegel in their lack of originality.) I think that the most efficient way to represent the phenomenon of Hegelianism in this study is to focus on some key passages from the movement's common source in the works of Hegel.

19. Kirmmse 171.

20. Ibid.

21. A contemporary reviewer of *Postscript*, Magnus Eiriksson, identified Martensen as the subject of Climacus' parody of the speculative philosopher. In an unpublished response to the reviewer, Kierkegaard does not deny that Martensen is ridiculed in *Postscript*; he only reminds Eiriksson that Martensen's name is never mentioned in the book (JP 6596). Martensen's own reception of Kierkegaard's works seems to affirm Eiriksson's surmise. On Kierkegaard, Martensen writes:

In the beginning his relation to me had been friendly, but it assumed an increasingly hostile character. He was moved to this in part by the differences in our views and in part by the recognition I enjoyed from the students and the public, a recognition which he clearly viewed--nor did he attempt to conceal it--as an unjustified overestimation. S. Kierkegaard had a natural tendency to find fault, to tear down, and to disparage--something Mephistophelian, something in the nature of Loki. I was now chosen to be the object of his attack, and in many ways he sought to disparage me, my abilities, and my work. He sought to annihilate and extinguish every bit of activity that emanated from me.....But he never attacked me in straightforward and open battle. I...assume that he was unsuited to do scholarly combat in theology, because he was suited to fight only in quasi-poetic, humorous circumstances in which he could make use of playful discourse and flank attacks. He did not have the gift for instructive and dogmatic discourse, which explains why he continually polemicises against "the teachers" whom he loathed. [From Martensen's autobiography, *Af mit Levnet* (From My Life), 1882-83. The excerpt is taken from Bruce H. Kirmmse, ed., *Encounters With Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries*, trans. Bruce R. Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 196-97.]

Kierkegaard knew Martensen personally since at least the spring of 1834, when Martensen tutored him. Martensen guided his student through Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*. According to Niels Thulstrup, the choice of Schleiermacher was a practical one, as Kierkegaard's examiner, H.N. Clausen, was influenced by his theology. Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaards Verhaeltnis zu Hegel und zum spekulativen Idealismus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972) 41.

22. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phaenomenologie des Geistes* [*Phenomenology of Spirit*], ed. Hans-Friedrich Weiss and Heinrich Clairmont (Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1988) 12-14. All subsequent references to the *Phenomenology* will appear in the body of the thesis in brackets with the abbreviation 'PG' and the page numbers from this edition. All translations from Hegel's works are mine.
23. For example, see *Postscript*, pp.196-98.
24. Another important forerunner of Hegel's philosophy is Fichte. Though Fichte's philosophy is not monistic, it presages Hegel's Subject in its identification of subjective consciousness (the 'ego') as the principal agent of activity in the world.
25. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesugen ueber die Geschichte der Philosophie* (III) [*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*], ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, Werke XX (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1969-72) 165.
26. Kant's main work on epistemology, as well as the foundation of his entire philosophy, is his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan Press, 1992). His main ethical works are: *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), trans. Thomas K. Abbott (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1949); *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1956); and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
27. Werke XX 423.
28. Ibid., 171-72, 264.
29. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 102.
30. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Religion* (I) [*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*], Werke XVI 192.
31. Taylor 104.
32. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Religion* (II) [*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*], Werke XVII 293.
33. Throughout all of his writings, Kierkegaard argues that the Hegelian understanding of the incarnation is so focused on the *concepts* of God and human being that it effectively denies the actuality and historical nature of the incarnation. Anti-Climacus' assessment of

the speculative threat to Christianity is typical:

In the first period of Christendom, when even aberrations bore an unmistakable mark of one's nevertheless knowing what the issue was, the fallacy with respect to the God-man was either that in one way or another the term "God" was taken away (Ebionitism and the like) or the term "man" was taken away (Gnosticism). In the entire modern age, which so unmistakably bears the mark that it does not even know what the issue is, the confusion is something different and far more dangerous. By way of didacticism, the God-man has been made into that speculative unity of God and man *sub specie aeterni* [under the aspect of eternity] or made visible in that nowhere-to-be-found medium of pure being, rather than that the God-man is the unity of being God and an individual human being in a historically actual situation. (PC 123).

34. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Geschichte* [*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*], Werke XII 453.

35. The identification of Christ as the truth is given in the New Testament (e.g. John 14:6). Both Climacus and Kierkegaard are intrigued by Christianity's claim that its founder does not teach truth, but is truth. Pretending that he is writing an original incarnation story, Climacus writes "the god" to indicate his hypothetical deity. But as the momentum of the narrative/hypothesis increases, he frequently uses "God" as well. The only apparent difference between his uses of the word is that, with the capitalised "God", there is no ambiguity about the possible existence of other deities or the omnipotence of this God.

36. This statement is found in his foreword to A.V. Miller's translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) xxvii.

37. A fine survey and defense of Hegel's Christology is given by Peter C. Hodgson, "Hegel's Christology: Shifting Nuances in the Berlin Lectures", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53.1 (1985) :23-40. The importance of Hegel's thought for contemporary theology is discussed by Hans Kueng, *The Incarnation of God*, trans. J.R. Stephenson (New York: Crossroad, 1987) and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, trans. G.H. Kehm (London: SCM Press 1970).

Endnotes to Part II

1. Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962) 308f.
2. Like the German word *Wissenschaft*, *videnskabelig* has a broader definition than its English counterpart, “scientific”, referring to any systematic body of knowledge.
3. I will define Climacus’ use of “truth” in the next chapter.
4. I will write “Truth” where the broader, existential meaning is assumed.
5. Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard’s Thought*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 247.
6. Frederick Sontag, *A Kierkegaard Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) 43.
7. Niels Thulstrup, *Commentary on Kierkegaard’s “Concluding Unscientific Postscript”*, trans. Robert J. Widenmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 106.
8. Hannay 111-12. Because Jesus’ divinity cannot be empirically verified, Climacus frequently points out that his contemporaries had no advantage over subsequent generations in matters of faith. Furthermore, later generations can also be seen as “first-hand followers” of Jesus since they receive the grace that makes faith possible directly from God (PF 100).
9. I will identify the “condition” as faith in chapter seven, where this term will be discussed more extensively. At this point in our study we will simply refer to it as the condition that makes it possible for one to understand the Truth.
10. Soren Kierkegaard, “The High Priest”, in *Without Authority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 123.
11. Kierkegaard also regards Christianity’s focus on eternity as one of its essential characteristics. Defining Christianity in contrast to Judaism, he writes: “Judaic religion relates to this life, has promise for this life--the Christian religion is essentially promise for the next life....” (JP 2517).
12. Kierkegaard indicates in his *Journals* that “Anti” does not mean “against” but “before”, like its Latin root (*ante*).

13. Kierkegaard, like Climacus, emphasises the individual's need for God, most frequently in his discourses. Kierkegaard regards the individual's need for God as the *only* basis on which there should be a relationship with God at all. In one place, he asserts that one should not love God because He is "the highest, the holiest, the most perfect being", but because one needs Him. He writes: "In relationships among people there can perhaps be a fanatic kind of love that loves someone solely for the beloved's perfection, but the fundamental and primary basis for a person's love of God is completely to understand that one needs God, loves Him simply because one needs Him." ["All Things Must Serve Us For Good When We Love God", in *Christian Discourses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 188.] Readers of the discourses will notice that their pastoral and passionate tone contrasts with Climacus' somewhat detached treatment of sin and forgiveness in *Fragments* and *Postscript*. Another discourse, which appeared only two months after *Fragments*, is titled "To Need God Is a Human Being's Highest Perfection" [in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (Princeton University Press, 1997) 297-326.]

The emphasis on one's need for God in Kierkegaard's writings should not be equated with Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence". Kierkegaard always locates the feeling of dependence in sin-consciousness which, as we have seen in the Climacus writings, requires a revelation.

14. Georg Wilhelm Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Geschichte* [*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*], Werke XII 90-1.

15. It is possible, but unlikely, that Kierkegaard knew this particular text, which was compiled from students' notes and first published in 1837. Kierkegaard does not cite it in any of his writings.

16. "The Care of Lowliness" in *Christian Discourses* (Princeton University Press, 1997) 37-47.

17. Herbert M. Garelick, *The Anti-Christianity of Kierkegaard* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965) 28.

18. Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard On Faith", in Jerry H. Gill, ed., *Essays On Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1965) 119.

19. N.H. Soe, "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox", in Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, eds., *A Kierkegaard Critique* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962) 209. Cornelio Fabro's essay in this collection, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic", also

argues that the paradox is above reason.

20. Henry E. Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense", in Gill, ed., 127.

21. Russell F. Sullivan Jr., *Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard* (Washington: University Press of America, 1978) 95-96.

22. I will use reason and understanding interchangeably.

23. Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 143.

24. *Ibid.*, 144.

25. Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 314, 315.

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