

**FAITH, PARADOX, REASON AND THE
ARGUMENTUM SPIRITUS SANCTI IN CLIMACUS
AND KIERKEGAARD***

JOHANNES POST-CLIMACUM
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ABSTRACT. The pseudonymous author of this article argues that neither Kierkegaard nor Climacus in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* are claiming that Christian beliefs are nonsense or contradictory, but that it is contrary to universal epistemic norms to believe these beliefs or even to believe they can be believed. In an appendix for which the rest of the article is a preparation the author gives an interpretation of the pseudonymity and form-content contradiction and of how Kierkegaard in a sense agrees with all the assertions made in the *Postscript*. If Kierkegaard is right, this article could only have been written pseudonymously.

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Analogously to Kierkegaard's relation to his pseudonyms, the legal and literary responsibility for Mr. Johannes Post-Climacum's pamphlet is mine, but that is all.

The "main body" of Post-Climacum's pamphlet consists of an examination and exegesis of various unsettling statements by Johannes

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Climacus, a pseudonym of Søren Kierkegaard, in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*¹. Some of these statements have been characterized as mislogisms and have led interpreters such as Mulhall² to suppose that the whole work is *only* a kind of satire on speculative philosophy. Post-Climacum notes, for instance, that on the other hand assertions formally equivalent to some of the statements of Climacus can be found in the works of Søren Kierkegaard. This main body of the Pamphlet seems to set the stage for the Appendix in which Post-Climacum lays out what seems to be his general exegetical view of the *Postscript*, with the discussion in the main body being merely a preparation for this Appendix.

The purpose of my whole production is to examine what Kierkegaard was doing rather than whether he was in fact right. But if he was right (in fact, *in persona propria* I think he is not), the unusual form of this production is quite necessary. – *Editor*

1. INTRODUCTION

Before I begin, I would like to thank my editor's kindness in typesetting my small pamphlet, though it is beyond me to know why he would be interested in the work of a poor humorist such as I am.

¹Abbreviated *CUP*, with all references being to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Volume I*, Kierkegaard's Writings, XII.1, edited and translated by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

²Stephen Mulhall, "The absurdity of philosophy" in *Faith and Reason*, London: Duckworth, 1994, 37–52.

Both Johannes Climacus and Søren Kierkegaard have written on faith, paradox and reason. While Søren Kierkegaard is the creator of the persona of Johannes Climacus, it is by no means clear what the relation between the two is. Kierkegaard insists that none of the remarks of the pseudonymous authors whom he has created should be attributed back to Kierkegaard. Nonetheless, the thought of Climacus and Kierkegaard does bear a close relation, and as a pragmatic interpretational attitude I will consider arguments of Climacus as supplemented by various remarks of Kierkegaard, with Climacus representing a non-Christian (or perhaps pre-Christian) attitude and Kierkegaard a fuller Christian approach. Some justification for this approach will be suggested in the Appendix.

The most hair-raising claim that Johannes Climacus makes in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* is that not only is probabilifying evidence (“approximation”) for Christianity not helpful in attaining to Christian faith, but on the contrary the less evidence there is, the better, and the crowning evidence for Christianity is its maximal absurdity. This notorious claim, not surprisingly, has led some interpreters to conclude that the primary purpose of the *Postscript* is merely to inoculate one against the error of using a speculative philosophical approach in subjective domains. Indeed, could

such a claim be at all maintained? As Mulhall³ asks, how can we measure the degree of absurdity of statements? And is it actually possible for there to be a maximally absurd belief? After all, if absurdity is not taken to be equivalent to logical contradiction⁴, then it seems that given any belief P , we can take an absurd belief Q , even an absurd belief about a finite state of affairs (e.g., that cows ordinarily fly), which is not implied by P , and form a belief $P \wedge Q$ which is strictly more absurd than P .⁵ On the other hand, if absurdity is logical contradiction, then it follows that by holding any one absurd belief one is committed to all absurd beliefs—and in fact that one is committed to *all* propositions being true (and, equivalently, being false). It certainly does seem as if the notion of a maximally absurd belief is a very difficult one to make sense of.

It is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to discuss how far Climacus' Religiousness B and Kierkegaard's Christianity really correspond

³Mulhall, p. 44.

⁴Adams [Robert M. Adams, "Kierkegaard's arguments against objective reasoning in religion, in: *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, 25–41] appears to suggest that a maximally absurd belief P for Kierkegaard[sic] might be one which holds with a probability $p > 0$ such that given any other non-equivalent belief Q which has a probability $q > 0$, we have $q > p$.

⁵One could argue, however, that this is not the case, but that a conglomeration of absurd beliefs can be less absurd than one absurd belief. After all, holding a large quantity of absurd beliefs may simply indicate one's conviction that the universe is, generally speaking, absurd. And this conviction is perhaps not as absurd as holding to *one* absurd proposition P , and yet in all other respects holding the universe to be quite sane. But if we take this view that more absurdities can be less absurd than a single absurdity, then it is not at all an easy matter to determine how a given *single* absurdity is a maximal absurdity. After all, perhaps we can decompose that absurdity into sub-absurdities, and these sub-absurdities taken separately are then more absurd than the full absurdity?

to orthodox Christianity. Except for some brief remarks in which the context will show the sense in which I use the term, by “Christianity” I shall routinely mean “Kierkegaard’s Christianity”, which I shall assume is closely related to Religiousness B, but which are likely not synonymous with orthodox Christianity at large.

2. THE PARADOX AND NONSENSE

The central notion of Religiousness B is the *paradox* which is to be believed⁶; “an individual in faith relinquishes the understanding and believes against the understanding”⁷. The paradoxicality of the paradox, according to Climacus, is not in any way diminished by the believer’s gaining understanding.⁸

What is the paradox for Climacus, and how does it differ from sheer nonsense of the form “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously”⁹?

2.1. The Trisector. To throw the notion of a paradox into relief, let me introduce the “mathematical crank *sensu stricto*”.¹⁰ This character not only goes beyond what mathematicians have done, but goes against

⁶*CUP*, 540.

⁷*CUP*, 565.

⁸*CUP*, 566.

⁹This is the example of Mulhall, p. 44.

¹⁰There are two kinds of mathematical cranks. The crank *sensu laxiori* claims to have mathematical theories or proofs that go beyond, but not against, what mathematicians know. In days past, such characters have often produced faulty proofs of Fermat’s Last Theorem. However, it may at times be difficult to find an essential difference between the crank *sensu laxiori* and the mathematical amateur, and maybe even the professional mathematician, who also after all can make mistakes. More interesting is the crank *sensu stricto*.

it, and believes that he is in the possession of proofs or constructions contrary to what mathematicians say.

Let me introduce an individual of the species *mathematical crank sensu stricto*, the Trisector.¹¹ The Trisector has heard that mathematicians say it is impossible to trisect an angle with compass and straightedge.¹² Nonetheless, the Trisector has a geometric construction and writes: “I have done what two and a half millenia of mathematicians have failed to do.” He notifies his local newspaper, which dutifully prints a story about the local mathematical genius who has solved the great riddle of geometry. Eventually, the Trisector writes up his construction, publishes it himself, and sends it out to Mathematics Departments at various Universities.

Many Mathematics Departments have faculty members who deal with these matters, and so we may suppose that we have a Mathematician who receives the construction, and dutifully goes through it. By means of trigonometry she checks that while the construction is wrong, nonetheless it is a close approximation.¹³ She writes to the Trisector,

¹¹The Trisector will be quite close to some real existing human beings portrayed by Dudley [U. Dudley, *A Budget of Trisections*, New York: Springer Verlag, 1987], and hence is not really a fictional construction, although I do not know if all the features described fall within any single person. Angle trisectors are some of the most common members of the species. Other members of the species are such characters as circle squarers, but these seem to be more rare these days.

¹²Indeed, it is an established mathematical theorem that it is impossible to give a finite procedure whereby with compass and straightedge an arbitrary angle is trisected. In fact, it is impossible to trisect a 60° angle.

¹³A non-fictional example of such a Mathematician would be U. Dudley. Note that it is possible to produce procedures which come arbitrarily close to trisecting angles, but they will never be exact.

telling the Trisector about his error. She also tells the Trisector that there is a solid mathematical proof of the impossibility of a construction of the type he claims to have. She even goes so far as to recommend reading material on this proof. The Trisector remains unconvinced. He thinks that mathematicians are simply a closed community unwilling to admit an outsider who does not have the same formal education as they do, and also thinks that they have various ulterior motives in their refusal to grant him credit for his discovery. He writes back to the Mathematician that her refutation is flawed. He says that she was in the wrong to have used trigonometry because trigonometry was not invented in Euclid's time. He emphasizes that he tried the construction empirically and it was right. The correspondence between the Mathematician and the Trisector may continue for some time, but neither convinces the other.

It seems the Trisector believes against logic. He is convinced that an angle can be trisected, even though mathematical logic rigorously proves this is impossible. Thus, at first sight, the Trisector seems to be in a position not too different from that of the person that Climacus describes as believing "against the understanding". How then does Climacus' believer differ from my Trisector? One difference is provided by the fact that the believer must have the infinite pathos to have Religiousness B.

[T]he dialectical is decisive only insofar as it is joined together with the pathos-filled and gives rise to a new pathos.¹⁴

However, one imagines that the Trisector might have an infinite pathos, believing that his total all-embracing calling is to spread the news about the angle trisection and about the duplicity of mathematicians. This is “fanaticism” from Kierkegaard’s point of view. But within Religiousness A it appears difficult to distinguish it from a religious faith. In the following section I will examine how the Trisector differs from Climacus’ believer.

2.2. Dialectics and understanding. Climacus emphasizes a need for dialectics and for use of the understanding.

[A Christian] may very well have understanding (indeed, he must have it in order to believe against the understanding.)¹⁵

The one purpose to which the understanding in the paradoxical-religious sphere may be applied is to show that the “absolute paradox ... cannot be understood.”¹⁶

Mulhall on the other hand thinks that Climacus’ use of philosophy to examine the paradox is a contradiction.

It may seem that the argument emphasizing the absolute absurdity of Christianity avoids this mistake, because it presents Christianity’s capacity to *repel* reason as the basis of its claim to superiority. But in fact it demonstrates exactly the same internal incoherence, for reason is required to appreciate this

¹⁴ *CUP*, 555.

¹⁵ *CUP*, 567.

¹⁶ *CUP*, 218.

point; the essential irrelevance to faith of objective, disinterested reason is presented as an insight that only objective reason can vouchsafe to us, a truth that can only be perceived with the aid of a new philosophical apparatus or theory.¹⁷

However, Climacus never pretends to present any “claim to superiority” on behalf of Christianity. Climacus’ point is just to delineate what Christianity is not and what it is.¹⁸ Thus, he is only outlining categories. Now it is in principle possible that a reader upon hearing the categories delineated will conclude that one of the categories is superior and should be entered into, but this does not appear to be Climacus’ point. Mulhall thinks that according to Climacus, objective, disinterested reason is essentially irrelevant to faith. This may be true in the case of the faith of the “simple”, but does not seem to be so in the case of the faith of the “wise” who, according to Climacus, knows that the object of faith “must be a paradox”.¹⁹

Yes, Climacus certainly does claim that faith in a paradox is what fits maximal inwardness best.²⁰ However, *pace* Mulhall, this is not an illicit immanent transition between categories,²¹ because the very idea of the maximal inwardness is a hypothetical one, one described within an imaginary construction,²² so that Climacus’ claim should rather be

¹⁷Mulhall, p. 50.

¹⁸See, e.g., *CUP*, 371–372.

¹⁹*CUP*, 227.

²⁰E.g., *CUP*, 199.

²¹Cf. Mulhall 44

²²Climacus mentions the imaginary construction in *CUP*, 587. Note also the repeated use of the conditional “Suppose” in *CUP*, 213–216, and Climacus’ remark: “I say merely “suppose,” and more I do not say” (*CUP*, 216).

read as saying that *if* there is such a thing as maximal inwardness, and *if* there is such a thing as faith of the type of Religiousness B, *then* faith in a paradox fits maximal inwardness best.²³ However, Climacus as a non-Christian is unable to demonstrate the antecedents of the conditional here, since on his grounds, they can only be demonstrated by them being actually present in the demonstrator (and even then, the demonstration only has force for those who have the premisses actualized in themselves). But to accept that there is such a thing as maximal inwardness *possible* for human beings and that faith, in Climacus' sense of the word, is *possible* for human beings is a non-immanent leap. Thus the argument that Climacus gives here is a mere argument, because the antecedents can only be checked by someone whose case satisfies them (i.e., by someone who instantiates the existential quantifier in "There is someone who has maximal inwardness and has faith of the type of Religiousness B"), and Climacus's life does not satisfy the proposition that there exists faith.

In fact, objective and disinterested reason does have a position in examining the paradox, not only for Climacus, but even for Kierkegaard himself.

²³Note that in the history of Western religion, *faith* (*pistis*: trust, persuasion, belief) seems to be a specifically Christian notion. One may with good reason argue the historical thesis that first century Judaism strictly speaking was not a faith but a *praxis*, while first century Christianity definitely placed a large value in faith (this distinction should, of course, not be overemphasized, but as a first approximation it seems to be valid). Given that *pistis* is a specifically Christian notion, the argument that it is Christianity (not only in Kierkegaard's sense, but also in a wider sense) that fits best with *pistis* should not be a particularly surprising one.

Speculation can present the problems, can recognize that every individual problem is a problem for faith, is compounded and characterized in such a way that it is a problem for faith—and then can submit: Will you believe or not?

Furthermore, speculation can supervise and check faith [...] to see that there is no rattle-brained mixing with faith of categories which are not objects of faith but, for example, of speculation.²⁴

On another occasion, Kierkegaard wrote:

The task is not to understand Christianity but to comprehend that one cannot comprehend. This is the holy cause of faith, and reflection is therefore sanctified by being used in this way.²⁵

Climacus says that the believer (at least, I suppose, the “wise”, but perhaps not the “simple”) can himself advance the objections against the paradox which he believes, and that this is what distinguishes “nonsense” from the “incomprehensible”.²⁶ It is in this that I claim the difference between Climacus’ believer and the Trisector lies. The Trisector was given objections against his views by the Mathematician. But presumably, he did not understand the objections, or at least see their logical force. If he did, then he would see that his view is incoherent from the point of view of pure logic. Climacus, in my view, would want to claim that once the Trisector actually fully understood the objections against his view, he would have to abandon it; it would

²⁴Søren Kierkegaard, Entry 3315 (1850), in: *Journals and Papers*, edited and translated by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967. Further references to the *Journals and Papers* will be flagged “*JP*” and the entry number and date will be given.

²⁵*JP*, 3704 (1848).

²⁶*CUP*, 568.

be impossible for him to seriously hold to two logically contradictory beliefs while understanding them to be contradictory.²⁷ Climacus' believer (assuming such a person exists), on the other hand, understands the objections, is able to state them clearly, and yet believes. This understanding of the objections means that he understands that the paradox is a paradox.

Climacus, therefore, has no difficulty in distinguishing the believer from the Trisector, even if the Trisector had infinite passion (which may well be an impossible counterfactual for Climacus, insofar as a finite object—the question of trisectability of an angle—cannot really be endowed with infinite passion).

2.3. Nonsense and logical contradiction. Is Climacus and/or Kierkegaard claiming that Christian beliefs are nonsense or logically contradictory? I shall call a positive answer to this “the Nonsense Interpretation”. Allison discusses two arguments that could be given for this interpretation.²⁸ Firstly, Climacus does talk of belief *against* the understanding²⁹, instead of using the traditional distinction of speaking of belief as being *above* or *beyond* reason. Secondly, according to Climacus

²⁷One could argue that maybe if the Trisector had infinite passion, then in the heat of this passion he could hold to two logically contradictory beliefs. However, neither for Climacus nor for Kierkegaard is the concept of passion something that clouds the understanding. Their insistence on the dialectical shows that according to them, the infinite passion in the religious sense is only increased by clear-headed reasoning. (This is similar to the phenomenon of how the Scholastic exposition of the transubstantiation not only does not remove the mystery, but deepens it.)

²⁸See pp. 450–451 of Henry E. Allison, “Christianity and nonsense”, *Review of Metaphysics* **20** (1967), 432–460.

²⁹E.g., *CUP*, 565 and 567.

there are two kinds of dialectical contradictions in the Christian faith: (a) eternal happiness being based on the historical, the difficulty here being with the approximate knowledge of the historical, and (b) the content of the faith which can only be as it is “by virtue of the absurd”.

2.3.1. *Reply to the first argument.* With regard to the expression “against the understanding” as opposed to “above the understanding”, it is not clear whether this establishes the Nonsense Interpretation. As Søe notes³⁰, Kierkegaard himself says that what he expresses

by saying that Christianity consists of paradox, philosophy in mediation, Leibniz expresses by distinguishing between what is above reason and what is against reason. Faith is above reason.³¹

Thus, Kierkegaard appears to be equating his notion of a paradox with what in Leibnizian terminology is “above reason”, and so one perhaps should not equate Kierkegaardian “against the understanding” with the Leibnizian “against reason”, the latter of which does simply mean “contradictory” or “nonsense”. Some caution may be needed here, though, because the date of this quotation (1842–43) precedes the date of the *Postscript* (1846), so that Kierkegaard could in principle have changed his mind by the time of the *Postscript*. Therefore, I shall have to give some further arguments for my interpretation.

³⁰See p. 220 of N. H. Søe, “Kierkegaard’s doctrine of the paradox”, in: H. A. Johnson and N. Thulstrup (eds.), *A Kierkegaard Critique*, Chicago: H. Regnery Company, 1967, 207–227.

³¹*JP* 3073 (1842–43).

I claim that Climacus' words "against the understanding" need not be read as saying that the understanding actually disproves the beliefs in question, but can instead be read as saying that the understanding knows it has insufficient evidence for them (in a very strong sense of "insufficient" to be elaborated later), so that if the understanding be queried about whether the beliefs should be held, it answers in the negative, insofar as it is against ordinary epistemic practice to hold to beliefs for which there is insufficient evidence.

Certainly whatever interpretation one takes, it appears clear enough that at the least Climacus and Kierkegaard do not think that the Christian who is really accepting faith is doing so because of having evidence making the faith sufficiently probable. If one accepts a normative epistemological stance that one should not accept propositions without probable evidence, then such an acceptance of faith is contrary to universal³² epistemic norms, and as such can be described as "against the understanding". In fact, such a going against epistemic norms could be argued to be analogous to the teleological suspension of the ethical that Johannes de Silentio describes in *Fear and Trembling*. Climacus' insistence on *understanding* that the paradox is against the understanding can then be seen as analogous to de Silentio's emphasis on how before Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac it was necessary that Abraham

³²The universality of such norms is not essential to the argument, but Climacus would probably hold that epistemic norms in the objective sphere, i.e., as concerning the understanding, are universal.

should deeply love Isaac and on how he would have to act in fear and trembling. The Climacean believer's consciousness of a transgression against epistemic norms by believing something not sufficiently supported by the evidence thus shows another contrast with the Trisector who actually thinks that the evidence he has for believing that he can trisect an angle is sufficient.

Perhaps Climacus would insist on a somewhat stronger characterization of "against the understanding", namely not only that there is insufficient evidence for the doctrines (so that it is contrary to epistemic norms to believe them), but that there is (inconclusive) evidence against them and that they are contrary to intuition. The difference, however, between this and the previous claim (namely that there is insufficient evidence for acceptance) is only quantitative.

2.3.2. *Reply to the second argument.* The second argument discussed by Allison was based on dialectical contradictions. The first of these was that the approximate nature of historical knowledge was such as to be insufficient to justify the degree of certitude that is required in faith. This claim certainly can be found in Climacus.³³ As Allison notes, this does not however entail a logical contradiction or nonsense in the content of faith. The approximation claim that Climacus makes fits neatly into my reading of "against the understanding" as meaning something

³³ *CUP*, 23–49 and 574–577. Adams (*op. cit.*), it is worth noting, criticizes Climacus' claim by saying that perhaps faith does not require such certainty. I shall not pursue this further.

the acceptance of which is contrary to universal epistemic norms, as according to Climacus in the case of Religiousness B, pragmatic epistemic norms require complete certainty if the faith is to totally encompass the whole believer.

The second of the dialectical contradictions is more serious. We are talking about an event believed to be historical and yet which Climacus alleges “consists of that which can become historical only against its nature, consequently by virtue of the absurd.”³⁴ Kierkegaard, on the other hand, plainly asserts that the Incarnation is not self-contradictory.³⁵

Let me first consider one incorrect counterargument against the dialectical contradiction argument for the Nonsense Interpretation. Climacus admits that one *can* “understand [the Incarnation] eternally”³⁶, and so apparently there need be no contradiction *sub specie aeterni*. It would seem that this suffices to show that then there is no *logical* contradiction in the Christian faith. However, talk of understanding “eternally” may well be a reference to Hegelian speculative philosophy, which according to Climacus’ reading removes all contradiction because the law of non-contradiction is itself annulled through mediation. Being told that there is no contradiction from the point of view of Hegelian speculative philosophy tells us nothing about the question

³⁴ *CUP*, 578.

³⁵ *Søe*, p. 219.

³⁶ *CUP*, 578.

of a *logical* contradiction that interests us (unless we are Hegelians in which case it is not abstract, logical contradiction that interests us).

But there is something good in this argument, in that what is essential for Climacus and Kierkegaard in the “contradiction” is that it is a contradiction for *us existing finite beings*, i.e., that there is a subjective problem.

I would like to offer a solution again along the lines of my interpretation of “against the understanding”. Let \mathcal{T}_0 consist of the doctrines of the Christian faith, let \mathcal{T} be \mathcal{T}_0 together with any epistemically certain philosophical propositions that Climacus and Kierkegaard might admit, and let $C(\mathcal{T})$ be the assertion that \mathcal{T} is logically consistent. Thus, I would suggest that what Climacus and Kierkegaard are saying is that acceptance of the proposition $C(\mathcal{T})$ is against the understanding, in the sense of “against the understanding” as contrary to universal epistemic norms, i.e., there not being sufficient evidence for us existing finite beings to believe $C(\mathcal{T})$ to be true, and perhaps there being some (inconclusive) evidence against $C(\mathcal{T})$. Moreover, at least the wise are aware of this. This is almost the strongest reading I can make of Climacus and Kierkegaard while avoiding the hair-raising (when coming from someone who does not reject Christianity) claim that not- $C(\mathcal{T})$ or the relativism that says that not- $C(\mathcal{T})$ is *true for us* but *false for God*. (I wrote that this is “almost” the strongest reading; in the next section I will propose a slight strengthening.)

To sustain my reading, I have to read Climacus' claim about the Incarnation as involving a Being going "against its nature" as a claim that as far as we know this nature (and since we are talking about God, Climacus will say there must be serious limitations in the knowledge), it is against universal epistemic norms to accept that the event is compatible with the Being's nature, and perhaps also that the event *intuitively* appears to be against the nature.

My reading has the advantage that it is compatible with Kierkegaard's approval of Leibniz's distinction between faith beyond reason and faith against reason, and that it does not force us to attribute direct misologism to Climacus. If Kierkegaard and Climacus held that the doctrines of faith were logically contradictory, then one would expect them to take issue with those Christian philosophers (e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas) who held that while the Christian faith could not be proved by philosophical reason, neither could it be disproved, and much of whose activity consisted in trying to disprove arguments brought against the Christian faith. However, we do not meet much criticism of apologists who simply tried to defuse arguments contra Christianity; instead, Kierkegaard and Climacus's main work is in criticism of those who try to prove Christianity or who, like the Hegelians, try to show that $C(\mathcal{T})$, which the Hegelians, in Climacus' view, do by getting rid of the principle of non-contradiction.

3. COMING TO BELIEVE, BELIEVING, AND THE *argumentum spiritus sancti*

3.1. **Climacus.** In the previous section I have described my reading of Kierkegaard and Climacus as claiming that the epistemic acceptance of (understood as the act of coming-to-accept) the Christian doctrines \mathcal{T}_0 and of their consistency $C(\mathcal{T})$ with reason was contrary to universal epistemic norms (which one might perhaps consider as a species of ethical norms). Note that I very carefully talk of the *acceptance* of the doctrines. Climacus, in fact, cannot speak of anything beyond the acceptance. Since he himself is not a Christian, and since faith is something inward, he can only speak of faith on the *assumption* that there exists a person having faith in the sense of Religiousness B. It is in this conditional sense³⁷ that I read his remark that “all of [Christianity] can be believed” though of course against the understanding.³⁸ Moreover, his insight into faith cannot go beyond the question of the *acceptance* of the faith, which he sees as something that cannot be attained except by a leap, and contrary to universal epistemic norms. Like de Silentio who could look from his standpoint at Abraham’s Religiousness A³⁹

³⁷Important exegetical evidence for the conditionality is in the already cited repetition of the word “Suppose” in *CUP*, 213–216, culminating in the remark on p. 216 that Climacus cannot say more than “Suppose”.

³⁸*CUP*, 579.

³⁹Although of course de Silentio did not use the term “Religiousness A”.

but see it as beyond himself, so, too, Climacus can look at Religiousness B and see that *if it exists*, it is beyond him—but into the heart of this religiousness (even if it exists) he cannot see.⁴⁰

In fact, one can perhaps strengthen my reading a little by adding some more paradoxicality. Let $\mathcal{T}_1 = \mathcal{T}_0 \wedge C(\mathcal{T})$.⁴¹ Inductively define \mathcal{T}_{n+1} be the proposition that it is possible for \mathcal{T}_n to be believed by an existing human being who is fully aware of all paradoxicalities involved in \mathcal{T}_n . Then, the strengthened reading would be that \mathcal{T}_n is against the understanding for all n , where I always understand “ p is against the understanding” as meaning that it is against universal epistemic norms to accept p as true (i.e., no existing human being can have sufficient evidence to conclude that p ; note that questions of whether the probability $P(p)$, which I assume is neither one nor zero, is large or small are merely quantitative questions and cannot exhaust what is at issue here

⁴⁰One might criticize Climacus for a lack of more clear and explicit highlighting of the conditionality of his discourse on faith. However, Climacus does emphasize that his intent is to clarify categories, whereas clarifying categories can be here taken to be an activity conditional on the categories being non-empty, and in *CUP*, 213–216, he is clear about the conditionality of his analysis. One may with more justice criticize de Silentio since he does not seem to consider the sacrifice of Abraham to be one that he (de Silentio) could make, and yet if this sacrifice was possible for one person, then it would be possible for all, since the religious category is open to all in Kierkegaard’s view. By accepting that *Abraham* could make the sacrifice but that *de Silentio* could not, de Silentio shows that he does not really understand the sacrifice. This lack of understanding could have been remedied if de Silentio proceeded to structure his work as Climacus did in an imaginary construction, with an explicit or at least implicit conditional clause of the type “if Abraham truly did this act and if he did it in true infinite inwardness”, whose scope would be the whole of the text.

⁴¹Note that \mathcal{T}_1 may well be equivalent to \mathcal{T}_0 , since if \mathcal{T}_0 is true, then it may be argued to be necessarily compatible with all epistemically certain propositions, so that $C(\mathcal{T})$ would follow.

which is a qualitative question.) Thus, in particular, on this reading of Climacus, by \mathcal{T}_2 not only is it against the understanding to accept that the Christian doctrine is consistent, but in fact it is against the understanding to accept that someone can believe the doctrine while understanding its paradoxicality (i.e., it is against the understanding to accept \mathcal{T}_1). Our slightly stronger reading is well in line with Climacus only being able to *suppose* there is such a thing as a Christian.

This stronger reading will be my way of understanding the claim of maximal paradoxicity. It will not affect my arguments below if one adds to this reading some other *additional* qualifications of maximal paradoxicity, providing these qualifications do not imply inconsistency of \mathcal{T}_0 . For instance, one could add a probabilistic criterion suggested by Adams⁴², namely that:

- (i) $P(\mathcal{T}_0) > 0$, and
- (ii) if \mathcal{T}'_0 is a proposition such that $P(\mathcal{T}_0) \geq P(\mathcal{T}'_0)$, then either \mathcal{T}_0 and \mathcal{T}'_0 are equivalent, or $P(\mathcal{T}'_0) = 0$.

However, even if my argument would not mind such an additional qualification, the difficulty with all such quantitative criteria for maximal paradoxicity is that they are *quantitative* and thus do not give rise to a decisive qualitative distinction between \mathcal{T}_0 and other propositions

⁴²*Op. cit.*

which merely have a higher probability. My reading in terms of universal epistemic norms appears to be closer to the spirit of Kierkegaard and Climacus.

3.2. Kierkegaard. As opposed to Climacus, Kierkegaard was a Christian, and he holds that once the faith is present, “the faith itself is the testimony, faith is the justification”⁴³; he calls this the “inward proof, *argumentum spiritus sancti*.”⁴⁴ Admittedly, these utterances made *in persona prioria* were written four years after the *Postscript*, but I will argue it is in logical continuity with Climacus. Kierkegaard assures us that *for faith*, the absurdity of the faith is not absurd.⁴⁵ Sørensen concludes that for Kierkegaard “the thought content of Christianity is not nonsense but is clear and understandable within the sphere of faith.”⁴⁶ I do not see justification in Kierkegaard for supposing a claim of such strength, but if we replace “clear and understandable” by the weaker “not absurd”, then the conclusion appears reasonable.

For Kierkegaard, there is an essential difference between the viewpoint of a believer and of an unbeliever. I have claimed that for *Climacus*, it is contrary to the understanding for a human being to *come to believe* that the thought-content \mathcal{T}_0 of Christianity is true, and perhaps even more strongly, one can add, to *make an act of assent* to the

⁴³*JP* 3608 (1849).

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Sørensen, 209 cites this as X⁶ B 68.

⁴⁶Sørensen, 221.

possibility of an existing human being making an act of assent in \mathcal{T}_0 , or even in its consistency, while understanding the paradoxical nature of \mathcal{T}_0 . However, I now claim that according to *Kierkegaard*, once a human being has faith, then this human being *can* continue to believe \mathcal{T}_0 . Thus the difficulty is with *coming to believe*, and not so much with *continuing to believe* (although I will have to say something more about this in the conclusions of this pamphlet). Between the two one must place the famous Lessing-Climacus-Kierkegaard leap.

What is Kierkegaard's *argumentum spiritus sancti*? One could suppose that it may be some kind of religious or mystical experience. However, this reading would seem to make the *argumentum* into something immediate, while

“the testimony of the Spirit” is really present and is decisively present only when all the spontaneous, immediate testimonies have been nullified.⁴⁷

Instead of positing a religious experience, I would like to propose that Kierkegaard's *argumentum* may in fact be an argument, or may be made into an argument, which I will reconstruct as follows. Assume the following premisses:

- (1) Kierkegaard believes \mathcal{T}_0
- (2) \mathcal{T}_0 is paradoxical and lacks sufficient evidence for it, in my reading of Climacus' sense of the word “paradox”⁴⁸

⁴⁷*JP* 1658 (1850).

⁴⁸i.e., with a proposition being said to be paradoxical if it is against universal epistemic norms to make an act of assent to it.

- (3) Kierkegaard when coming to believe \mathcal{T}_0 was aware of this paradoxicality and of a lack of sufficient evidence for \mathcal{T}_0
- (4) it is contrary to universal epistemic norms to assent to the claim that a finite human being while aware of the paradoxicality of \mathcal{T}_0 can possibly come to believe it
- (5) if P is a proposition to which it is contrary to universal epistemic norms to assent, and if a person genuinely *knows* that P , then a miracle has occurred.

Of these, it is quite reasonable to suppose the Kierkegaard would assent to (1) and (2).⁴⁹ It is certainly true that Kierkegaard was of the view that \mathcal{T}_0 to be paradoxical. Whether this view came *after* his coming to believe in \mathcal{T}_0 or before, is something I cannot determine. If it came before, then (3) follows. If it came after, then still (3) follows in the weaker sense that, according to Kierkegaard, a Christian is *continually* becoming a Christian. As to (4), this follows from my strengthened reading of Climacus' view of paradoxicality, and is in fact a consequence of \mathcal{T}_2 . With regard to (5), I am making the epistemological assumption that, barring supernatural intervention, genuine knowledge enters only through operations following the universal epistemic norms.

Let P be the conjunction of (1) and (3). Now, Kierkegaard can in fact genuinely *know* that P on the basis of a self-examination of his own

⁴⁹Though he would not *publically* assent to (1), since it is an inward matter of which one, it seems, cannot speak.

system of beliefs (here I am using the assumption, true at least in this Kierkegaardian case, that if one believes something, then one knows that one believes it). But by (4), it is contrary to universal epistemic norms to assent to the possibility of P , and hence, *a fortiori*, to assent to the actuality of P . But Kierkegaard knows that P , so that by (5) a miracle has occurred, i.e., a supernatural intervention. Of course, one would still have to argue that this miracle provides veridical testimony with respect to the truth of \mathcal{T}_0 , but perhaps this could indeed be done (arguing in some way that the miracle could only have been done by God, and that God would not allow a miracle of his to be a witness to a falsehood). Is this miracle perhaps the *argumentum spiritus sancti* that Kierkegaard is talking about?

Of course the argument, even assuming (2)–(5) (each of which can be questioned⁵⁰, though Kierkegaard would probably agree with them all), still essentially needs the assumption that Kierkegaard truly has faith in his sense of the word “faith”. This is something that cannot be determined by anyone other than himself, and so the argument can only be probative for Kierkegaard (or for anyone else who is convinced of (2), (4) and (5), and about whom (1) and (3) can be said.) The

⁵⁰Let me say a few words about who will question some of the premisses. Some atheists and/or polemicists against Christianity will hold that \mathcal{T}_0 is in fact inconsistent, and therefore to understand its paradoxicality is to understand that it is inconsistent, and since it is impossible to believe an inconsistent set of propositions while knowing it to be consistent, therefore at least one of (1) and (3) must be false. On the other hand, some Christian apologists will not only argue against these polemicists, but will in fact argue against (2). A success of either group would invalidate Kierkegaard’s approach.

argument, as I describe it above, is really just a more precise way of formulating the intuition that faith as Climacus and Kierkegaard describe it appears to be a thing which cannot be acquired by natural means, so that if someone has the faith in Climacus' and Kierkegaard's sense, then it immediately follows that he must have acquired it by *supernatural* means. Since according to my reading of Climacus, the only way one can know if faith is possible is if one has it, it follows that this argument cannot convince anyone except those who are already convinced.⁵¹

According to Kierkegaard, the *argumentum spiritus sancti* is present as a testimony “deep within” the believer when “everything is going against” the believer.⁵² The idea that for Kierkegaard it is present when things are against the believer supports the claim that Kierkegaard may have been thinking of something along the lines of my above argument, providing we read “everything is going against” as implying that there is no evidence for the believer's faith at the time (and maybe there even is some or much though this is only a quantitative matter evidence to

⁵¹What I have presented may be an *argumentum*, but one might object that it would not be an *argumentum spiritus sancti*. However, since in orthodox Christian theology, faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22; I have no reason to suppose that Kierkegaard deviated from this doctrine), an argument that proceeds from the claim that there is faith to the conclusion that the faith is true would, from a Christian point of view, be an argument that is only made possible by the *Spiritus Sanctus* giving faith to the existing person making the argument, and hence could be said to be an *argumentum spiritus sancti*.

⁵²*JP* 1657 (1850).

the contrary)—cf. (3). Moreover, the argument is very consistent with Kierkegaard's maxim that:

If you do not have faith, then at least believe that you will indeed come to have faith—and then you do have faith.⁵³

To see this, note that if one believes one will have faith, then one can imagine running through the argument starting with (1)–(5) in some future time after the attainment of faith, from which it follows that at that time a miracle will have occurred, and in my view Kierkegaard would be willing to argue that from the existence of this miracle it will be possible to argue that \mathcal{T}_0 will be true at that future time, and hence that \mathcal{T}_0 must also be true now (assuming one rejects a relativism whereby it may be false now but true in the future⁵⁴). (Compare the reasoning here to that behind the less controversial fact that were one to *know* that one *will* have evidence for the truth of p , then one already has evidence for the truth of p .)

observation to the fact that if one believes that were x true observation to the fact that if one believes x would provide a sufficient argument for a proposition p and if one justifiedly believes that x will take place, then one already has reason to accept

To sum up, if Climacus and Kierkegaard are right and if my reading is correct, then while prior justification for the leap cannot be given,

⁵³*JP* 1141.

⁵⁴In *CUP*, 33n, Climacus does reject such a diachronic relativism, attributing it to Hegel.

nonetheless posterior justification can be *rationally* (albeit only subjectively for the leaper) given. Kierkegaard explicitly says: “[T]here is another existing which follows faith. But the first must never be forgotten—otherwise Christianity is completely displaced.”⁵⁵ It is not surprising that Kierkegaard should think that if one has faith, then one has a witness to its truth; after all, if faith is venturing “out into water 70,000 fathoms deep”⁵⁶ then doing this, if it be possible, may be argued to be miraculous.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL ARGUMENTS

Accusing Climacus or Kierkegaard of misologism is a last resort exegetical solution that should not be used until all other reasonable solutions are exhausted. I have argued that a solution better fitting many other texts of Kierkegaard is to suppose that Climacus and Kierkegaard hold that it is contrary to universal epistemic norms to come to believe the Christian faith (or even to accept that the Christian faith is consistent), which for Climacus and Kierkegaard does not imply that the Christian faith is either false or inconsistent, but only that there necessarily is insufficient evidence for it. To get a notion of maximal paradoxicity, I have extended this reading by proposing an interpretation along the lines of the claim that for Climacus and Kierkegaard

⁵⁵ *JP* 1142 (1851).

⁵⁶ This phrase is one of Kierkegaard’s favorites and is oft repeated; see, e.g., *JP* 1142 (1851).

not only is it contrary to universal epistemic norms to come to believe the Christian faith, but it is contrary to universal epistemic norms to believe any of the claims \mathcal{T}_n , where \mathcal{T}_1 is equivalent to the consistency of the Christian faith with the set of epistemically certain propositions that Climacus and/or Kierkegaard would admit, and where \mathcal{T}_{n+1} for all n is the proposition that one can possibly come to believe that a finite human being who understands the paradoxicality involved in \mathcal{T}_n can come to believe that \mathcal{T}_n . Obviously this kind of inductive definition is not found in the *Postscript*, but I propose it as one way to flesh out the claim of maximal paradoxicity, a way that fits well with the Climacean/Kierkegaardian impossibility of being sure that anyone actually has faith and with Kierkegaard's idea that to believe that one will have faith in the future is the same as to have faith.

All this, however, concerns the pre-leap situation. After the leap, Kierkegaard does seem to have available to him an argument (*argumentum spiritus sancti*) for the faith. This argument essentially relies on his awareness that he has no "immediate" argument and on his awareness of his own faith. However, since only Kierkegaard can know whether he has faith (assuming Kierkegaard's conception of the inwardness of faith), therefore this argument will not say anything to anyone other than Kierkegaard—it is intrinsically a subjective argument. Climacus, of course, is before the leap, and hence is unable to apply that argument.

The existence of the argument gives one explanation, too, of the need for pseudonymity. If Kierkegaard wrote about himself in his own name, then he would have to indicate that he has faith. But because there is an argument implicit in Kierkegaard and which proceeds from the claim of the existence of faith to the claim of the truth of this faith (or at least to a miracle), if a reader were to accept that the author of the work really has faith, then the reader would have a non-subjective argument for faith—but a faith backed by a non-subjective argument is, for Kierkegaard, not faith, and so the reader would in fact be *eo ipso* in danger of an *illusion* of faith.

In fact, one could claim that it is important for Kierkegaard's project that his readers not hear about the certitude that faith gives before themselves making a leap of faith, because if one leaps into faith while *expecting* to meet with certitude on the other side, then on Kierkegaardian grounds one is not leaping into *faith*, but into something where one expects to possess a comfortable certainty, even though one does not yet have it. If Abraham knew Isaac would live, what he did would not have been a sacrifice. Paradoxically, then the *argumentum spiritus sancti* is something that can be known about only after one has faith, since if one can count on its existence before having faith, then this makes it impossible to attain to faith. And, if a believer lets go

of the immediate uncertainty of faith, then the argument fails.⁵⁷ This underlines the *existential* nature of the argument.

There is a paradoxicality involved in all this, in that it is claimed that faith becomes certain by the testimony of the Holy Spirit precisely when it is uncertain, and this is a continual process (the Christian is always *becoming* Christian, according to Kierkegaard). Kierkegaard would likely distinguish the uncertainty from the certainty by saying that only the former is immediate in the case of faith. If this immediate/non-immediate distinction were to fail, then in fact all of Kierkegaard's discussion of faith would seem to collapse into incoherence. Let me describe this collapse more precisely. For Kierkegaard, faith is necessarily something without evidence for it. But if the existence of faith is an argument for faith, as I have claimed that for Kierkegaard it is (and it is unimportant whether this argument is the one I describe, or any other), then if faith exists, it witnesses to itself and hence is not unwitnessed, and thus is not faith.

Perhaps this paradox could be resolved by Kierkegaard fleshing out the notion of immediacy as follows. On the time slice at time t_0 , the faith is *phenomenologically prior* to the witness to itself that its existence gives, while the witness to itself that faith gives only gives *phenomenologically posterior* justification and hence is not immediate.

⁵⁷Recall the already quoted text “[T]here is another existing which follows faith. But the first must never be forgotten—otherwise Christianity is completely displaced” (*JP* 1142 [1851]).

Moreover, the self-witness of faith at time t_0 does not give any witness to faith at a time $t_1 > t_0$ since at time t_1 one is no longer immediately aware of having had faith at time t_0 ; indeed, the claim at time t_1 that at time t_0 one had faith is a historical claim, and as such subject to “approximation” and incapable of preserving subjective certainty. Hence, at t_1 , one cannot rely on the witness of the faith at any other given time, so also at t_1 the faith is phenomenologically prior to its self-witness. This argument relies heavily on the assumption that one cannot with certitude know at a given time the historical subjective proposition that at some past time one did have faith. This is the only way I can see of rescuing Kierkegaard from incoherence. Assuming that the notion of phenomenological priority can be made sense of for states on a single time slice (and this is a non-trivial assumption) this may work. But in any case it is difficult to see how such a notion whereby faith witnesses to itself at each time slice, with the witnessing being phenomenologically posterior to the believing, would let one have “the absolute resting in a conviction” that Kierkegaard seems to want to have.⁵⁸ Kierkegaard may say, of course, that this final question is close to the heart of an irreducible paradox and that nothing more can be said about it—but that a Christian is to exist in it.

⁵⁸ *JP* 3608 (1849).

APPENDIX: INTERPRETATION OF THE *Postscript*

In the above, we have reasoned rather objectively and very seriously about subjective matters, basing ourselves on the utterances of Messrs. Climacus and Kierkegaard. There are three ways of justifying the above investigation.

α . Swallowing the bait. First of all, one could simply say that the arguments that Climacus brings up are intrinsically *interesting*, and that for philosophical investigation it is the intrinsic interest of the arguments that matters, and the question of whether Climacus intends the arguments in earnest or in jest is irrelevant. One may argue that philosophical investigation does not care what person has propounded a given argument, whether it was Climacus, or Kierkegaard, or even a monkey typing at random—what matters is whether the argument is sound or at least valid. This attitude is, of course, quite contrary to that of Climacus and Kierkegaard. Insofar as the *Postscript* appears, at least in a sense, to be a satire of speculative philosophy, such considerations could simply imply that one has swallowed the bait—one would be no better than the German reviewer of the *Fragments*.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, one might with some further self-knowledge add: “Yes, I have swallowed the bait, but what do I care? It tastes good, and as a philosopher I do not care whether I am conducting my discussions with a bait, or a hook, or a walking stick, or Plato, or Magister Kierkegaard,

⁵⁹See *CUP*, 274n–277n.

or a figment of Magister Kierkegaard's mind." Such an attitude would, of course, logically entail a rejection (or at least a limited rejection for the sake of intellectual interest) of Climacus's arguments for the importance of the communicator in communications of his genre, but if this rejection were justified, it would not be an entirely reprehensible attitude.

More seriously, one should note that if the arguments in the *Post-script* are all flawed, then the effectiveness of any satire is seriously weakened. Thus the examination of the arguments is necessary for determining whether the satire is effective or not, *even if it is only a satire*. Hence, the need for examining in the main body of this pamphlet whether Climacus and Kierkegaard believe Christianity is nonsense.

β . Objective reasoning about subjectivity. Climacus is objectively reasoning about subjectivity. This constitutes an intrinsic form-content contradiction in Climacus' work. Climacus himself realizes the contradiction, and withdraws his work.⁶⁰ At the same time, he is careful to note that "to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it"⁶¹. We, the readers, may take this as meaning that having gone through his book and having seen the form-content contradiction work its way out, we will be inoculated against committing the same kind of contradiction ourselves. Moreover, Climacus,

⁶⁰ *CUP*, 619.

⁶¹ *CUP*, 621.

as a humorist⁶², will have had a good laugh over how we were taken in by the work and how the punchline—his appendix—punctured our pretensions of being able to objectively reason about subjectivity.

My enterprise of having seriously examined the arguments of the humorist then appears to be an intrinsically humorous and self-defeating one, and reminds one of Isaac Asimov's account of how he was telling his father the joke about the horse and the bathtub⁶³ and his father in full seriousness chided him for having spent too much time in the city and thus having forgotten that a horse is such a big animal that one could never get it up a staircase and into an apartment, much less get it into a bathtub.⁶⁴

Yet, while healthy laughter at the ways of the assistant professor was quite possibly the reason why Mr. Johannes Climacus, humorist, wrote the *Postscript*, perhaps there is a deeper reason as to why Mr. Søren Kierkegaard, M.Theol., consented not only to edit it, but also to publish it at his own expense. Given the unsurprisingly meager sales of the book, the deeper reason was surely not mercenary. One could argue that the reason was a satire inculcating one against objective

⁶²See, e.g., *CUP*, 617.

⁶³A man had a horse in his bathtub in his apartment. Why? Well, he used to have guests come to his house, and sometimes a guest would not laugh at the host's jokes but would instead say "I heard that one before," which naturally the host found annoying. Thereupon, the host would send the guest to the bathroom (presumably on some errand), and the guest would come back with a flabbergasted face and blurt out, "There is a horse in your bathtub," to which host would calmly reply: "I heard that one before." (See p. 4 of H. Eilbirt, *What is a Jewish Joke?*, Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993.)

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

approaches to subjectivity. However, the elaborate nature of the work makes one think that, all other things apart, such a satire could surely have been accomplished much more economically in a fifty page essay than in such a lengthy volume. Moreover, we do have indications that Kierkegaard saw more to the *Postscript* than just an inoculation of this kind:

To be a Christian involves a double danger.

First, all the intense internal suffering involved in becoming a Christian, this losing human reason and being crucified on the paradox.—This is the issue *Concluding Postscript* presents as ideally as possible.⁶⁵

It certainly thus sounds as if we are to make more use of the *Postscript* than just to see the failure of speculation.

In seeking for deeper reasons for the *Postscript*, it is essential to recall that Kierkegaard himself is not against objective considerations of one's subjectivity.

The majority of men are truncated *I*'s; what was structured by nature as the possibility of being sharpened to an *I* is quickly truncated to a third person.

It is something altogether different to relate objectively to one's own subjectivity.

Take Socrates! He is not a third person in the sense that he avoids getting into danger, exposing himself or risking his life, as one usually does when he is third person, not an *I*. By no means. But in danger he himself relates objectively to his own person; in the moment he himself is condemned to death he talks about his sentence as if he were an entirely separate third party. He is subjectivity raised to the second power; his relationship is one of objectivity just like that of a true poet in relation to his poetic production; with this

⁶⁵ *JP* 493.

objectivity he relates to his own subjectivity. This is no mean achievement. Generally we get one of two things—either an objective something, an objective piece of furniture that is supposed to be a human being, or we get a jumble of accidental occurrences and arbitrariness.⁶⁶

Kierkegaard then goes on to say that in God there is no subjectivity at all, and yet “he [God] relates objectively to his own subjectivity, but this again is simply a redoubling of his subjectivity”.⁶⁷ This also reminds one of Climacus’ footnote to the effect that “[t]he dialectical cannot be excluded” in the part of the *Postscript* concerned with the *objective* issue.⁶⁸ It appears that objective reasoning about one’s subjectivity is something that Kierkegaard places a high value on.⁶⁹

However, an important qualification is to be noted. Kierkegaard very carefully avoids saying that one can relate objectively to subjectivity. He talks of relating *oneself* objectively to *one’s* subjectivity. One’s subjectivity is thus presupposed. Given one’s subjectivity, one can reason objectively about it. Climacus, on the other hand, by his own admission appears not to be a Christian; as such, his reasoning is not about *his* subjectivity, but about Christian subjectivity in general.

⁶⁶ *JP* 4571.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *CUP*, 24.

⁶⁹It is worth noting that Kierkegaard, contrary to some readings, also places a real value on objective matters such as doctrine. For instance in *JP* 4544 (1848) we read that “in the initial period of Christianity ... it was certainly doctrine that gave occasion for conflict more than anything else,” but that “[i]n Christendom doctrine is really taken for granted”. Thus it appears that the main reason why Kierkegaard does not focus much on the specifics of doctrine is that this is no longer an occasion for serious conflict in Christendom (except, he notes in the same passage, in the case of a “sectarian movement”); what matters for Kierkegaard in his era is “interiorizing the doctrine” (*Ibid.*).

Yet, since Climacus is neither a Christian nor has he ever been decisively face-to-face with Christianity⁷⁰, he has no grasp of the meaning of what he is reasoning about. He is reasoning about *abstract* subjectivity, unlike Socrates who reasons about his own *concrete* subjectivity, and abstract subjectivity is no subjectivity at all. Through his argumentation, he can perhaps be said to be trying to gradually climb to Christianity without a leap⁷¹—a description making his surname quite appropriate as Mulhall notes.⁷²

On this interpretation, what is wrong with Climacus' work is not so much the argumentation or the use of an argumentative form, but the fact that the arguments are not about anything *existing*, because the author has not grasped the *existence* that the arguments are talking about. The problem is not with the argument but with the arguenter. His words appear to concern *existing* persons, and yet because he has not grasped them, they become purely abstract arguments like the arguments of mathematics would be if we accepted a Russellian (and maybe Kantian) view that mathematics is merely the study of logical implications. However, this does not rule out the possibility of the

⁷⁰For Kierkegaard, it might be possible to come face-to-face with Christianity, grasp its content in a subjective way, and yet be able to either say *Fiat* or *Non fiat* to its demands. However, Climacus has not come face-to-face with Christianity; he has neither decisively said *Fiat* nor *Non fiat*, and he does not know what it would be like to have said *Fiat*.

⁷¹This has been argued by Mulhall, 49–50.

⁷²*Ibid.* To strengthen this point, note that the names of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors were chosen by the authors themselves, as Kierkegaard notes in his *First and Last Explanation* [in: *CUP*, p. [626]].

arguments being *formally* correct, or at least of some of them being correct. Insofar as Climacus has not grasped the meaning of subjectivity and inwardness⁷³, his arguments are merely formal without essential⁷⁴ content, much like the propositions of Russellian mathematics, and one falls for the joke whose punchline is the *Postscript's* appendix if one ascribes essential content to it.

However, Kierkegaard is not Climacus. Kierkegaard was evidently a person deeply concerned about Christianity. He was (or, to use his terminology, *was becoming*) a Christian. As such, his approach to Christianity / Religiousness B was such that I could from a Kierkegaardian standpoint suspect him of being inward and existentially subjective. But just as Climacus could not actually be sure that Lessing was such as Climacus thought him to have been, neither can I, from a Kierkegaardian standpoint, be truly certain that Kierkegaard was a Christian. Henceforth, I *assume* he was, and I also assume the Kierkegaardian standpoint. Then, Kierkegaard could objectively reason about *his own* subjectivity, *his own* inwardness and *his own* God-relationship. In fact, he would probably consider it his *duty* to reason in that way, as I noted before. The merely formal arguments that Climacus has produced (or

⁷³And for Kierkegaard it is a contradiction to “grasp the meaning of subjectivity and inwardness.” As existing subject, one can only grasp the meaning of *one's* subjectivity and *one's* inwardness.

⁷⁴Perhaps *some* content may be ascribed to them, but not the essential content which is subjective.

at least some of them) could then be applied as an analysis of *Kierkegaard's* subjectivity, *Kierkegaard's* inwardness and *Kierkegaard's* God-relationship. For Kierkegaard, these formal arguments would then have content, since Kierkegaard has, I assume, really grasped the concepts about which these arguments proceed.

So why then does not Kierkegaard sign the book entirely himself, and simply qualify all the statements that seem to be talking of abstract subjectivity (and thus causing the form-content chasm) by making them talk of *his* subjectivity? One reason might be simply modesty, Kierkegaard not wanting to boast of his Christianity. But it seems that a deeper reason should be sought. If Kierkegaard signed the work himself and made it talk of *his* subjectivity, then the work would no longer be a forceful exhibit of the form-content contradiction. The reader would no longer learn to avoid abstract objective talk about subjectivity in general (and would not learn that “subjectivity in general is an oxymoron” if Kierkegaard is right). An explicit warning against such talk would itself fall into the same contradiction; moreover, such an explicit warning, unless it were backed up by arguments, would only be an argument from authority—from the authority of Kierkegaard—and as such would be unsatisfactory, while perhaps the only way to argue that such talk should be avoided is to actually produce a *reductio ad absurdum* as Climacus did.

But perhaps even more importantly, if Kierkegaard himself signed the book (having rewritten it of course to talk about *his* subjectivity), then the ideal reader could no longer relate it to *her*⁷⁵ subjectivity. It would be essentially a book about *Kierkegaard's* subjectivity. The reader could try to overcome this by saying that Kierkegaard's subjectivity is a special case of the subjectivity of all human beings, therefore what Kierkegaard writes is applicable to all human subjectivity (this is an argument by induction from one instance!), and therefore since she is a human being, it applies to her subjectivity. But of course this argument would be the exact opposite of how subjective truths are to be grasped, since they are not to be grasped through the syllogism that one is a member of some objective class, while here we have just said that the reader would apply the book to her subjectivity by reasoning that it applies to all humans and thus to her as she is human. Thus, if Kierkegaard wrote the book about *his* subjectivity, then it would be free of subjective content for the reader—and objective content would probably also elude her, since even if Kierkegaard can objectively reason about his subjectivity since he (I have assumed) grasps the requisite concepts of it, *she* cannot objectively reason about

⁷⁵Did Kierkegaard actually intend that one *her* who was special to him to read the *Postscript*? Possibly not, but regardless of this, for anaphoric clarity I will use the feminine pronoun as a generic pronoun for the reader.

his subjectivity, since even if she grasps her subjectivity, she cannot grasp Kierkegaard's subjectivity.⁷⁶

Perhaps this logical difficulty could be solved by application of an appropriate theory of analogy, whereby Kierkegaard could swallow his modesty, forget about trying to convey the message about the impossibility of objective talk of subjectivity in general, and write about *his* subjectivity without further ado, hoping that it will have meaning for the reader *by analogy*, even if taken literally it is contentless. However, this would make the work completely useless for those who do not themselves have the requisite degree of subjectivity and inwardness (Religiousness B) in themselves—for in order for the analogy to come through, this subjectivity and inwardness must be present in the reader. In any case, this approach, however, even when tenable, would still arguably be an indirect communication, and it does not appear that it would have been superior to the one that Kierkegaard actually chose.

In summary, the current interpretation makes the *Postscript* have two levels of indirection. First, Climacus gives his arguments in a direct fashion. Then, Climacus has a good laugh over the reader who was taken in and revokes his arguments, since they do after all violate the form-content congruence that should be present in such communications. Through this, the ideal reader should learn that she cannot

⁷⁶Indeed, the very phrase “Kierkegaard's subjectivity” would be one that she cannot grasp the content of.

objectively reason about subjective-issues-in-general. The sting has been planted. And perhaps this is how far it gets with some readers. But it can actually go one step further in two different ways. Firstly, it could be that the reader will take the text as having content *vis-à-vis* Kierkegaard's subjectivity and inwardness; this, as I have argued several paragraphs above, will not be very helpful to her (except indirectly through a theory of analogy, and that will work only if she has the requisite level of subjectivity and inwardness—namely, the species of infinite interest that is involved in Religiousness B)—absolute passion cannot be grasped by third parties.⁷⁷ But on the other hand, perhaps the reader has some grasp of her subjectivity and inwardness on her own, and perhaps she possesses Religiousness B. Then, the reader can apply the text to *her* subjectivity and inwardness, and it will have content for her. In this case, we will have had the structure of a double negation. First, Climacus negates the work through the revocation—in Hegelian terminology, this is not an abstract negation but a determinate one, since the work leaves a sting. Secondly, the reader herself may negate the revocation by seeing that while Climacus had no business talking objectively of subjectivity and inwardness in general, *she* has every right to reason in her own mind about *her* subjectivity and

⁷⁷ *CUP*, 509.

inwardness—and the formally correct arguments (if they are formally correct⁷⁸) take on content from her existence.

Thus, the reader sees herself in the mirror of the text.⁷⁹ If the reader is a speculative thinker, then she sees a caricature of a speculative thinker trying ridiculously to use speculative methods in a subjective realm—such a reader will see only one negation, one revocation; assuming the Kierkegaard's works have been functioning as they should, this might be what has happened to more than commentator. But if the reader is someone who has decisively met with Christianity, then she may in fact see that not only is the book revoked by Climacus, but there is another level of indirection, that involved in Kierkegaard's involvement with the book—and hence there is overall a double negation (which, as every Hegelian and each intuitionist will say, is of course not the same as a direct assertion). This mirror-like function recalls the epigraph on *Stages on Life's Way*:

Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out.

But I, Johannes Post-Climacum, cannot utter a single word about *the reader's* subjectivity or *her* inwardness or *her* infinite interestedness. Were I, Johannes Post-Climacum, to have decisively met with

⁷⁸And the main body of my pamphlet, less this Appendix, is in part concerned with the question of this formal correctness.

⁷⁹When my reading of the *Postscript* was explained by my editor to Nick Hill, the latter reminded the editor about Kierkegaard's trope of the mirror. It is to this kind reminder, for which both I and my editor are grateful, that I owe the present paragraph.

Christianity, I could reason objectively about *my* subjectivity or *my* inwardness or *my* infinite interest, but as it stands this sentence—and the whole paper including the present Appendix⁸⁰—is empty of content and hereby withdrawn.

EDITOR'S AFTERWORD

Thus far Mr. Post-Climacus's pamphlet. Yet he wrote well, and I would be inclined to say that, from the Kierkegaardian viewpoint, everything (*excepting the concluding paragraph above*) he wrote would have been defensible—assuming (contrary to fact!) that he had decisively met with Christianity since if he had, according to Magister Kierkegaard, he would not be able to write as he did. Beyond Mr. Climacus is only Religiousness A and Religiousness B.⁸¹ It is obvious that the latter has not been reached by Mr. Post-Climacus. Suppose Mr. Post-Climacus has reached Religiousness A. Then surely he would not consider himself as being in any way superior to Mr. Climacus, and so the name *Post-Climacus* would appear presumptuous, unless of course Mr. Post-Climacus intends his name in a merely temporal way, which would seem reasonable, but of course as a third party I cannot be sure.

And were someone to ask whether *I* can apply the text to *myself* in any way, and as to whether this present sentence makes sense, this

⁸⁰Including, of course, this footnote and the withdrawal itself.

⁸¹cf. *CUP*, 531n.

would not be a question that, at least according to Kierkegaard, could be answered objectively to third parties.⁸² – *Editor*

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⁸²Indeed if Kierkegaard is right I must withdraw this concluding sentence of mine as soon as the reader has understood it. – *Editor*