

# KIERKEGAARD'S SOCRATES: A VENTURE IN EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

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MARY-JANE RUBENSTEIN

## *Introduction*

In Part II of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus writes "Something about Lessing", an almost obstinately vague and self-contradictory tribute to a thinker whom he greatly admires. In a subsection entitled, "An Expression of Gratitude", Climacus finds numerous ways not to express his gratitude. Then, in a subsection entitled, "Possible/Actual Theses by Lessing",<sup>1</sup> Climacus maintains that philosophical reflection entails an irreducible subjectivity, thus rendering impossible the kind of straightforward elaboration that "theses" usually require. Of Kierkegaard's numerous pseudonymous creations, Climacus is perhaps most concerned with the problems of communication, acutely aware that "the highest principles for all thinking can be demonstrated only indirectly".<sup>2</sup> He admires Lessing for understanding that a student cannot learn the truth by committing his teacher's words to memory; Lessing's greatest pedagogical accomplishment was (and remains) his self-effacement. Climacus realises, therefore, that it would be pointless to express his gratitude directly: "If I were to present a few thoughts and then by rote ascribe them directly to him, if I were to clasp him affably in admiration's embrace as the one to whom I owed everything, he perhaps would withdraw with a smile and leave me in the lurch, an object of laughter."<sup>3</sup> As readers of this chapter of the *Postscript*, we know that Climacus will summarise and thank Lessing indirectly, because he has told us as much. Directly. What does it mean, however, to say (directly) "I am going to speak indirectly"? How, in fact, does one manage the hermeneutical task of reading an *objective* declaration like "truth is subjectivity"?

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Mary-Jane Rubenstein  
Emmanuel College, Cambridge, UK

In his master's dissertation, *The Concept of Irony; With Continual Reference to Socrates*, Kierkegaard describes an engraving that depicts Napoleon's grave: "Two tall trees shade the grave. There is nothing else to see in the work, and the unsophisticated observer sees nothing else. Between the two trees there is an empty space; as the eye follows the outline, suddenly Napoleon himself emerges from this nothing, and now it is impossible to have him disappear again."<sup>4</sup> Four years later in the *Postscript*, Climacus tells us he is expressing his gratitude to Lessing indirectly. Yet the reader who gives anything more than a cursory glance to "Something about Lessing" will see that another figure emerges in this section, omitted from the title yet impossible to excise once he appears. In a chapter ostensibly devoted to Lessing, Climacus refers to another shadowy pedagogue even more frequently than he mentions Lessing. And just as the trees above Napoleon's grave become incidental to the electrified space between them, Lessing is not nearly as important to the *Postscript*—or, indeed, to Kierkegaard himself—as is Socrates, whose emergence Lessing both masks and conditions.

Socrates haunts not only "Something about Lessing", but the entirety of Kierkegaard's authorship: and because of this, numerous scholars have at least made reference to Kierkegaard's relationship to Socrates. Such discussions usually take one of three forms. The first falls within a linguistic context and relies primarily on *The Concept of Irony*. According to this text, Socrates's very existence is ironic because Socratic discourse is completely negative. Socratic irony does not assert anything; it begins by claiming ignorance, moves on to destroy everything positive in its path, and stops there. Following Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that Socrates did not yet have access to the Idea, but that his dialectical negativity *serviced* world history by correcting the excesses of Sophism. Sylviane Agacinski, the most notable elaborator of this standpoint, focuses on *Irony* because, as she will argue, "Kierkegaard's entire authorship can be read as an intricate network of just such allegorical narratives of irony or allegories of Kierkegaard's theory of language as indirect communication";<sup>5</sup> and *Irony* is the most outwardly linguistic of his texts. Indeed, toward the end of his dissertation, Kierkegaard writes that one cannot merely revive Socratic irony in the self-conscious nineteenth century, but that "for a new mode of irony to be able to appear now, it must result from the assertion of subjectivity in a still higher for ... raised to the second power".<sup>6</sup> His implication is that his own authorship might be a post-Hegelian Socratic endeavor—an ironic self-consciousness, aware of its own place in (and necessity to) the world-historical process.

The second conception of Kierkegaard's Socrates usually appears within the context of the question of recollection versus repetition.<sup>7</sup> Here, the relationship between the two thinkers is primarily adversarial; Kierkegaard is understood as substituting the teleological category of repetition for static, retrospective, self-confident Socratic recollection. Such arguments usually draw heavily on *Philosophical Fragments*, a text whose author is entirely

frustrated with the ravages of Hegelianism and, as such, differs considerably from the author of *Irony*, whom Climacus refers to as Magister Kierkegaard. Climacus frames his first pamphlet as an alternative to the Socratic method, implicitly connecting the excessive confidence of recollection with that of speculation and (again, implicitly) blaming Socrates for setting Western metaphysics on a collision course to Hegel.

Still other formulations of the Kierkegaard-Socrates relationship dwell on Kierkegaard's *admiration* of the ancient philosopher as the only person whose existence, particularity, and indirection could possibly save us now from the abstract universality of the day-lit Idea. This viewpoint relies mainly on the *Postscript*, and concentrates on Kierkegaard's professed desire to be a "Socratic thinker inside Christianity".<sup>8</sup> Thus Harold Sarf says that Kierkegaard's "meditations on Socrates are really attempts to make [him] a living presence";<sup>9</sup> and Mark Taylor calls the pseudonymous corpus "a Socratic dialogue in which the reader is invited to participate".<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly enough, the radical incommensurability of these three Kierkegaardian Socrateses has yet to be glossed. In *Irony*, Socrates knows nothing and therefore falls *short* of the speculative. In *Fragments*, Socrates knows everything from eternity and therefore marks the *inception* of the speculative. In the *Postscript*, Socratic uncertainty, falling between the categories of knowing and not-knowing, might be sufficiently elusive to *resist* the speculative. How might one go about bringing such mutually-exclusive conceptions together?

In the face of Kierkegaard's endless linguistic duplicity, it quickly becomes almost impossible to predicate anything of his works without qualification or suspicion. Climacus himself circumvents these obstacles by riddling his own works (*Fragments* and the *Postscript*) with "suppose" statements: "I say only 'suppose', and in this form I have permission to present what is most certain and most unreasonable, for even the most certain is not posited as the most certain but is posited as what is assumed for the purpose of shedding light on the matter, and even the most unreasonable is not posited essentially but only provisionally, for the purpose of illustrating the relation of ground and consequent."<sup>11</sup> In fact, the works themselves can be read as extended "suppose" statements. In the *Fragments* and the *Postscript*, Climacus constructs a reading of Christianity that will rehabilitate particularity, decision, temporality, and mystery in the wake of Hegel, emphasizing all the while that his creation is just that, a *creation*, and not a dogmatic assertion of the Truth Itself.

I would like to consider this essay a "suppose" statement as well; not by any means a distillation of The Way Things Are for Kierkegaard—for what would be a greater violence to him than to presume one knew?—but rather an exercise in experimenting theology.<sup>12</sup> Suppose one were to think together all three of these conceptions of Kierkegaard's Socrates. Suppose these conceptions are, in fact, developments, rather than mere discrete moments in Kierkegaard's authorship. In what ways are they so radically different from

one another? What might account for that difference? Where does Climacus leave us vis-à-vis Socrates at the end of the *Postscript*, and why? My purpose in conducting this experiment is not, by any means, to chastise existing scholarship for one-sidedness, but to track a fascinating progression on the levels of Kierkegaardian authorship *and* scholarship. I hope, in good Socrato-Kierkegaardian fashion, to make my subject matter “more difficult”, looking thereby to illuminate partially the infinitely complicated notions of communication, faith, and subjectivity that seem to be inextricably bound up with the evolution of Kierkegaard’s relationship to Socrates.

### The Concept of Irony: *Socrates as Pure Abstract Negativity*

How seriously is one to take a philosopher who says (directly) that he knows nothing? How does one go about asking such a thing of such a figure, when his avowed suspicion of writing<sup>13</sup> prevents his readers from having direct access to the “what” of his philosophy? Hegel, distilling a conception of Socrates from the works of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes, maintained that Socrates failed to reach the Idea. Socrates’s instructive technique, a combination of abstract negativity (or irony) and proto-speculative positivity, is, in the age of the Idea, outmoded because it has been absorbed and surpassed by world-history: “It may actually be said that Socrates knew nothing, for he did not reach the scientific construction of a systematic philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> In a partial departure from Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that Socrates was pure abstract negativity. Kierkegaard, while retaining Hegel’s definition of irony as abstract negativity, wants to establish Socrates as *ontologically ironic*: Socrates began by claiming complete ignorance, proceeded to convince his students of their own ignorance, and terminated his inquiries inconclusively, utterly incapable of (or merely uninterested in) positing anything. Kierkegaard thus dismisses Xenophon’s accounts because they ascribe positivity and usefulness to the Socratic method. He also draws a rigid distinction between the speculative and negative moments in the Platonic dialogues, ascribing the former to Plato and the latter to Socrates: “Plato tried to fill up the cryptic nothing that actually constitutes the point in Socrates’s life by giving him the idea; Xenophon tried to do it with the prolixities of the useful.”<sup>15</sup>

Kierkegaard’s adoption of the Hegelian definition of irony as infinite and absolute negativity leads him to declare that Socrates’s irony was entirely non-existent. Socrates is just as abstract as any nineteenth century speculative thinker, but nothingness for Socrates stands in the space that the Hegelian Idea later comes to occupy: “Socrates drove all his contemporaries out of substantiality as if naked from a shipwreck, undermined actuality, envisaged ideality in the distance, touched it but did not acquire it.”<sup>16</sup> Socrates’s pure negativity tore through and disaffirmed every shred of actuality, replacing it with a void of abstract nothingness, and Socrates himself was “incapable of contracting any real relation to the existent”.<sup>17</sup> One sign of

Socrates's thoroughgoing destruction of actuality was his staunch apoliticism. Kierkegaard maintains that Socrates's relentlessly abstract irony manifested itself as a refusal to be involved with the State, and meant that he could not be an ethicist. Similarly, Socrates's irony precluded any kind of real religiousness on his part. The absolute nothingness in the form of his *daimon* is almost diametrically opposed to the Christian emphasis upon "victory" and "the positive"; in fact, Kierkegaard posits that "Similitudo Christum inter et Socratem in dissimilitudine praecipue est posita [the similarity between Christ and Socrates consists essentially in their dissimilarity]".<sup>18</sup> Socratic irony here prevents the philosopher from becoming an existential thinker, an ethical thinker, or a religious thinker—although, as Winfield Nagley demonstrates, this viewpoint will shift dramatically between *Irony* and the *Postscript*.<sup>19</sup>

Although Kierkegaard rarely challenges Hegel in *Irony*, he does shift focus away from the obsolescence of the Socratic method and toward its usefulness within the world-historical process. Unlike Hegel's, Kierkegaard's characterisation of Socrates is not so much a criticism of him as it is a contextualisation. According to the young Kierkegaard, Socrates was a moment of radical negativity that, although it fell short of the Idea, enabled the Idea's emergence: "Truth demanded silence before lifting up its voice, and it was Socrates who had to impose this silence. Thus he was *exclusively negative*."<sup>20</sup> Socratic irony, unlike its contemporary "romantic" counterpart, receives Kierkegaard's approval because the positivity of the Sophists called for something as radically-destabilising as Socratic ignorance. Socratic ignorance was not conscious of the part it played in world-history and, as such, was genuine, whereas the irony of Schlegel, Tieck, and Solger is merely self-indulgence in light of the contemporaneous emergence of the Idea. In a seemingly straightforward and Hegelian manner, Kierkegaard argues that irony is justified only when it acts as a precursor to (and refiner of) the Idea.

In a moment that anticipates his later, indirect authorship, however, Kierkegaard does not resolve his dissertation neatly. As Agacinski demonstrates, "irony" is a strange "concept"—and an even stranger thesis—because it both designates a negatively subjective moment in the world-historical process *and* functions grammatically to destabilise subjectivity itself. So the status of irony, like Aristophanes' Socrates at the end of the *Clouds*,<sup>21</sup> is up in the air at the end of *Irony*. On the one hand, Kierkegaard indicates that the importance of Socrates-as-irony is his place as "a phase in the development of the world spirit".<sup>22</sup> Socratic irony conditioned the emergence of the Idea that would subsume it. On the other hand, a brief chapter at the end of *Irony* called "For Orientation" might prevent any such resolution. Since Socrates is irony, his philosophy is more of a point of view than an instruction—more of a "how" than a "what". Irony might be an inassimilable otherness. Socrates might have been an irreducible singularity. Socratic irony might resist "Systematic" incorporation by refusing to enter into relationships of opposition. Irony, therefore, is the moment that *either* enables *or* disables the

System. It seems that Johannes Climacus picks up this *aut/aut*, playing with the first possibility in the *Fragments* and with the second possibility in the *Postscript*.

### Philosophical Fragments: *Socrates as Proto-Hegelian Idealist*

Climacus begins the *Philosophical Fragments* with a reminder of the central question of the *Meno*; that is, "Can the truth be learned?"<sup>23</sup> The Socratic "pugnacious proposition" regarding the origins of knowledge is, briefly, that it is impossible for the learner to know what he does not know, yet he must know what it is he does not know if he is to know it. By leading an uneducated slave boy through a proof of the Pythagorean Theorem,<sup>24</sup> Socrates resolves his own *aporia*. The truth is neither immediately accessible nor extra to the self; rather, the soul knows the truth from eternity and forgets it at birth. Learning is therefore a process of recollection; that is, of bringing back to the embodied spirit the knowledge it has had from eternity. Eternal recollection is, for the Climacus of the *Fragments*, the extent of the Socratic method: "The philosophers have many ideas—all valid up to a point. Socrates has but one, which is absolute".<sup>25</sup>

The most obvious of Climacus's contentions with Socratic recollection is that it renders unimportant any sort of particularity. The learner already knows that which he will eventually learn through eternal recollection, which means that time (in the form of the moment of recollection), the individual teacher, and the learner himself all become absorbed back into the abstract universality of the Eternal. With the Socratic method,

the ultimate idea in all questioning is that the person asked must himself possess the truth and acquire it by himself. 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*.

By extension, if the learner has always known the truth, his teacher can be anyone; in fact, the Socratic teacher is not even a teacher, but a midwife.<sup>26</sup> Since he does not bring about an ontological overhaul in the learner, this sort of teacher is merely an occasion; he is to be neither followed nor thanked. Likewise, the particularity of the individual becomes unimportant when viewed Socratically, since existence in time does not alter him essentially. In this Socratic economy of eternal recollection, potentiality trumps actuality, and nonexistence is truer than existence itself. Life in time makes no difference; there is no decision, no existence, and no future in recollection.

In order to rehabilitate particularity, Climacus constructs an alternative to the Socratic method, investigating the question, "Can an eternal happiness

be built on historical knowledge?" He begins with time, arguing that if the moment of coming-into-knowledge is to be significant (that is, decisive), then we must abandon recollection. The Socratic learner, always in possession of the Truth, *is* himself Truth. But if the learner's learning is to be significant, then we must assume he begins in a state of ontological Untruth (Climacus will later call it "sin"). Not only does the learner lack the truth, but he must also lack the condition for receiving that truth, otherwise, he would be able to take himself back into the eternal. Moreover, in order to be fully-depraved, he must be directly responsible for having lost the condition, which he must have possessed at one time. Yet, like the boy who foolishly chose to use his few rix-dollars to purchase a toy, and now cannot exchange the toy for a book because the money is gone, the learner, having chosen untruth, cannot reverse his choice. Decisions are weighty in Climacus's world. According to his scheme, the learner must receive *both* the condition and the truth from *outside* himself; that is, from the teacher. Climacus will call this moment, insofar as it is eternally-decisive, "the fullness of time".<sup>27</sup> The learner's passage from untruth into truth is thus an ontological revolution, and the moment that marks it is absolutely crucial to his eternal happiness. Viewed this way, the teacher must be a very particular teacher indeed; unlike a mere midwife, this teacher has created a new life in his student, and the student owes *everything* to the teacher.

Through this investigation, Climacus thus creates a way of bringing the eternal and the historical into relation with one another, without the annihilation of the latter that comes as a nasty Socratic side-effect. Yet how does one go about *thinking* the absolute relation of the historical to the eternal? The historical, by nature, is that which is *not* eternal, and vice versa. How, then, can the historical possibly be a point of departure for the eternal? This is the question that ineluctably arises; this is "the paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think".<sup>28</sup> At the height of understanding, understanding fails, and "the unknown against which the understanding collides is the god".<sup>29</sup> This is not the god of Paganism, whom Socrates knew through recollection. In fact, when Socrates *did* collide with the unknown, he was so incapable of supporting the confusion that he lost himself completely, unable to tell whether he was monstrous or divine.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the fully-knowable god of paganism who remains forever eternal, Climacus's god is the eternal god who, impossibly, came into time, inaugurating a paradoxical relation of history to eternity, and of particularity to universality. This god is the Teacher. This Teacher, as the Paradox, is the object of faith and, as such, an offense to the understanding.

This Teacher is not Socrates.

Climacus, then, is not arguing against Socrates's having resolved the *aporia* with *recollection*, but against his having resolved it *at all*. Socrates does not contend with the Absolute Paradox; he only contends with—and resolves—relative paradoxes. There is an infinite qualitative distinction between God

and mankind, and an absolute unthinkability when the two exist in a relationship with one another. The doctrine of recollection denies this distinction; Socrates, in other words, cannot see the difference. Socratic recollection not only swallows existence, particularity, and time into the gaping retrogressive hole of eternity, but it asserts and engenders a totalising self-confidence that Climacus finds appalling: "In the Socratic view, every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge."<sup>31</sup>

One begins to wonder whether Socrates might be standing in for a more recent, perhaps more treacherous speculative thinker.

*Interlude: Something about Climacus's Hatred of Mediation*

Unlike the author of *The Concept of Irony*, Johannes Climacus is virulently anti-Hegelian. Although he elaborates the numerous evils of the System much more thoroughly in the *Postscript*, *Fragments* expresses the same sentiments, however indirectly. Supposing for a moment that Hegel, and not Socrates, is Climacus's real target in *Fragments*, the figure of Socrates serves two functions, both of which will change dramatically in the *Postscript*. First, Socrates becomes the much-sought Origin: Climacus suggests that Socrates's resolution of the paradox set Western history on a course that denied Absolute Difference so thoroughly that it found its culmination in the numbing and static identity of the System. Secondly (perhaps politically, but more likely out of respect for his own notion of indirect communication), Climacus diverts his readers' attention, outwardly criticizing Socrates, but focusing solely on those elements of Socrates's thought that are most proto-Hegelian. This way, he can criticise Hegel without *opposing* Hegel; Climacus is too smart for that. This reading seems plausible in light of a journal entry in which Kierkegaard states that *Fragments* "was written specifically to battle against mediation";<sup>32</sup> in this text, Climacus challenges the Idea without entering into a direct relationship with it. Instead, he attacks Socrates, who, as we saw in the conclusion of *Irony*, may or may not have enabled the emergence of the Idea. In *Fragments*, Climacus suggests that if Socrates did, in fact, service the realisation of Absolute Spirit, he did so through the notion of eternal recollection. This explains Climacus's seemingly excessive rant against the Socratic method in *Fragments*; recollection itself is not nearly so dangerous as its fully-systemised, speculative descendent. However, as Climacus explains at the end of the *Postscript*, he needed to excise those Socratic ideas that may have anticipated Hegel before he could begin reconstructive work, for "if a single concession is made to speculative thought with regard to beginning with the pure being, all is lost".<sup>33</sup>

Just as Climacus refrains from mentioning Hegel by name in *Fragments*,<sup>34</sup> he does not refer to the alternative he constructs as "Christianity" until the *Postscript*. This is because, as Climacus laments, "the whole Christian



terminology has been confiscated by speculative thought",<sup>35</sup> so he initially needed to use a different vocabulary just to attempt to dissociate Christianity from philosophy. The problem with speculative thought, as far as Climacus is concerned, is that it believes it has *comprehended* (that is, both "understood" and "encompassed") Christianity. By reducing Christianity to a set of objective doctrines, or a series of historical data, speculation has reconciled every paradox, asserting itself over any Christian claim to mystery or ineffability. Speculative thought declares itself to be above and beyond Christianity, so that "when Christianity declares itself to be the paradox, the speculative explanation is not an explanation but a correction, a polite and indirect correction, such as befits a superior intellect in relation to the more limited".<sup>36</sup> By highlighting the pagan-speculative heritage, Climacus hopes to demonstrate that philosophy has not *surpassed* Christianity at all, but has regressed into the nonexistential, atemporal objectivity of paganism. This is why Climacus speaks of paganism all through *Fragments*; "if modern Christian speculative thought has categories essentially in common with paganism, then modern speculative thought cannot be Christianity".<sup>37</sup> If, as we saw earlier, Climacus disdains recollection because it resolves the *aporia* of understanding, he despises mediation because it "overcomes" subjectivity and inwardness, leaving no room for faith.

Faith, Climacus explains at the end of *Fragments*, is belief in the historical existence of the eternal; faith is belief in the absurd because of (not in spite of) its absurdity. The absurd, he will reiterate in the *Postscript*, "is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, has been born, has grown up, etc.". <sup>38</sup> Speculative thought, by claiming to overcome all uncertainty, has reconciled every difference, denied existence, conflated inwardness and outwardness, absorbed subjectivity into objectivity, destroyed decision with necessity, and replaced becoming with Being. It thereby eliminates the possibility of faith *qua* inward appropriation of the absolute paradox, and collapses Christianity into paganism. What is most offensive to Climacus is that the philosopher, having mastered the Truth objectively, then declares himself to be more Christian than Christianity. At this point, Climacus offers one of his infamous "suppose" statements and goes on to explore the possibility that speculative thought has not consummated but has rather misunderstood Christianity: "Suppose that the speculator is not the prodigal son ... but the naughty child who refuses to stay where existing human beings belong ... continually screaming that, from the point of view of the eternal, the divine, the theocentric, there is no paradox."<sup>39</sup> By filling in every gap and reconciling every contradiction, the speculator has exalted himself over the Truth he cannot appropriate.

The self-confidence accompanying speculative thought is thus doubly-deceptive. First, it leads the subject to believe he knows everything objectively, when, at least according to Climacus, truth is irreducibly subjective.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, while speculation claims to exalt the all-knowing subject, "pure

thought" unites the subject and object, effectively obliterating the thinker himself: "... the concept, like a juggler in this carnival time, has to keep doing those continual flip-flopping tricks—until the man himself flips over".<sup>41</sup> Climacus compares speculative thought with a doctor in Holberg who killed his patient in order to cure a fever; abstract thinking may give the subject immortality, but does so only by absorbing him into abstraction; that is, by destroying his particularity. Pure thought, inasmuch as it proclaims itself to be *sub specie aeterni*, would have the subject believe that his existence is something to be overcome, something standing in the way of pure abstraction. The aim of speculation, therefore, is to turn the thinker into speculation as well: "the way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something".<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Climacus argues, knowing the truth objectively is simple; what is difficult is the inward existential *appropriation* of that truth. And faith, as the inward existential appropriation of an objective absurdity, is the most difficult of all. But Hegelian philosophy, the culmination of which asserts the identity of the inner and the outer, has "overcome" inwardness. It has thus prevented the relation of the particular subject to the truth, flattening both subjectivity and truth itself.

It is Climacus's devotion to particularity that most obviously prevents him from adopting Kierkegaard's standpoint in *Irony* vis-à-vis the world-historical process. As we saw earlier, Kierkegaard (partially) resolves the problem of uncovering the historical Socrates by stressing his life as an idea, a purely negative moment in the progressive self-consciousness of Spirit. As far as Climacus is concerned, however, the problem with viewing history from a Hegelian perspective is that, like the thinker in relation to universality, the moment collapses into the totality of *Geist's* continual self-realisation. The moment loses validity *qua* moment, making sense only insofar as it follows from and leads to something else: "Each generation, each stage of this process, is legitimated and yet is only an element in the truth."<sup>43</sup> Yet it is precisely the moment, here reduced to the status of "stage", that is decisive for Christianity. As we saw earlier, in Climacus's Christianity, the historical moment becomes the point of departure for the eternal, yet this is impossible within the System—just as impossible as decisiveness itself. In the end, every motion within the speculative process is subordinate to the necessity of speculation; the motion of "mediation" is in fact not motion at all.

Insofar as philosophy claims to be a System, it contains its *telos* within itself; in its beginning is its end. Motion within the System is therefore chimerical; it merely unfolds what has always existed potentially, destroying all possibility of becoming as it continually actualises eternal Being. Whereas existence involves a constant process of becoming, the System is fixed, bound. Mediation, by reconciling every opposition, merely plays out a necessary series of events, turning motion into stasis. Any dialectic that services the System in this manner is not truly dialectical: "whether it is a word, a sentence, a book, a

man, a society, whatever it is, as soon as it is supposed to be a boundary, so that the boundary itself is not dialectical, it is superstition and narrow-mindedness".<sup>44</sup> One *cannot* reconcile Christianity with speculative philosophy because, insofar as the latter claims to be mediation itself, one would be attempting to mediate Christianity with mediation. Mediation, by proclaiming itself to be the rules, judge, and bounds of the game, proceeds by absorbing every difference into itself. Climacus suggests that the true dialectic would shuttle back and forth between discrete terms, making something *new* rather than merely realising what has always been. Likewise, a true mediation would keep its terms apart and engender existential becoming, but Climacus can never hope to use the word "mediation" to refer to Christianity because the term has been completely usurped by speculation. He may hope to reconstitute Christianity by re-creating it out of the undifferentiated mass of appropriated elements in the System, but "mediation" will always remain infected by speculation. In other words, Climacus hates mediation because it is not mediation at all, but identity. By obliterating difference, denying existence, and stagnating the process of becoming, the System is eternally itself, solipsistically reconciling itself with itself, world without end.

#### Concluding Unscientific Postscript: *Socrates as Subjective Existing Thinker*

At the height of the overly-confident nineteenth century, Johannes Climacus is looking to recover difference in order to resuscitate truth. He is looking for the absolute paradox—the one that, unlike its relative correlates, *cannot* be resolved. He is looking for inwardness that will not turn into outwardness, existence that will not retreat into a past eternity, decision that will not collapse into necessity, and becoming that will resist the stasis of Being. At a time when the all-powerful, mechanised System threatens to appropriate every object that opposes it, Climacus is looking for a subject that will refuse objectivity. Where, however, in the Era of the Idea, is one to find irreducibly subjective subjectivity? Even if one were to find such a subject, how might one go about communicating it? How does one express inwardness outwardly and objectively without falling prey to Hegel? Climacus is acutely aware that "it is not possible (except for thoughtlessness, for which all things are indeed possible) for this contradiction to become manifest in a direct form ... Just because [he who exists in a God-relationship] is continually in the process of becoming in an inward direction, that is, inwardness, he can never communicate himself directly, since the movement here is the very opposite".<sup>45</sup> Direct communication, by bringing every secret into the light of objectivity, is "a fraud toward God".<sup>46</sup> The challenge facing Climacus as he attempts to rehabilitate truth as subjectivity is thus twofold: he needs to locate irreducible subjectivity and to communicate it without destroying it as such.<sup>47</sup> Obviously, one cannot prevent this ungodly fraud merely by speaking negatively. As Hegel has repeatedly shown, negativity flips over

by necessity into positivity and remains there, reinforcing the very assertion it sought to unsettle. Climacus will thus focus on *indirection* rather than simple negativity. Only the inassimilable otherness of indirection expresses the double-reflection of inwardly appropriated truth: the relationship of the thought to the word and the thought-word to the communicator himself.

In order to work out the possibility of a non-objective subjectivity and of its indirect communication, Climacus appeals to the most existential thinker ever to walk the earth: Socrates. According to the *Postscript*, the “subtle little Socratic secret” is the irreducibility of subjectivity in philosophical reflection. What Socrates knew was that “the relation of the subject is precisely the knotty difficulty ... the movement is inward; the truth is the subject’s transformation within himself”.<sup>48</sup> Truth cannot be thought “purely”; that is, apart from the existing thinker’s relation to it. Socratic ignorance, the a/methodology that allows Socrates gradually to convince his interlocutors of their own ignorance, keeps existence and uncertainty at the heart of philosophical reflection. It thus becomes Climacus’s model for indirect communication, allowing Climacus to sidestep speculation and to assert subjectivity as truth.

At first, this may seem highly confusing to the reader who has encountered either *The Concept of Irony* or *Philosophical Fragments*. Kierkegaard’s central assertion regarding Socrates in *Irony* was his purely abstract negativity—so purely abstract that it prevented his becoming an existential thinker. Moreover, this negativity fell short of, but *helped to realise*, the Idea. Socrates was significant insofar as his life was a stage in world history: a passing moment of negativity between Sophism and the Idea, obliterating the former to make room for the latter. Yet in the *Postscript*, Climacus suggests that Socrates was not, in fact, an abstract thinker; on the contrary, he was stubbornly existential. Moreover, he was not an entirely negative thinker whose life could therefore be declared “obsolete” and absorbed into the Idea; rather, his liminality vis-à-vis positivity and negativity (that is, his indirection) resisted (and continues to resist) the logic of the Idea itself. Readers of *Fragments* might also be surprised to see Socrates’s *ignorance* highlighted in the *Postscript*, when *Fragments* had accused him of inaugurating Hegelianism with the proto-Idea of eternal recollection. Climacus justifies this shift by refining the Plato/Socrates distinction that Magister Kierkegaard had set in *Irony*. Kierkegaard had said that Plato was responsible for the positive moments in the dialogues, whereas the negative moments were Socrates’s. In the *Postscript*, recollection becomes the distinguishing element, and Climacus ascribes it solely to Plato. Socrates, he maintains, was entirely uncomfortable with recollection: he knew he was unable to take himself back into eternity because he sensed that existence had changed him essentially (I shall return to this point later). In any case, Climacus reconciles his seemingly contradictory texts by ascribing the faults highlighted in *Fragments* to Plato, rather than Socrates.

Another Postscriptural surprise is that Climacus, who blamed Socrates for leading philosophy to Hegel in his earlier work, now pits him *against* Hegel

(N.B., *not* by opposing them; Climacus's concentration on ignorance rather than negativity allows him to articulate a different kind of difference). It might be helpful at this point to revisit "For Orientation", *Irony's* inconclusive conclusion, and explore the possibility that Agacinski detects there; that is, the possibility that irony might, by refusing to enter into relationships of opposition, be inassimilable. If *Fragments* played out the world-historical *Either*, placing Socrates on a continuum with Hegel, then the *Postscript*, by complicating the concept of irony, explores the System-thwarting *Or*, characterising Socrates as thoroughly existential and therefore unplaceable. Moreover, Climacus's revision of Kierkegaardian irony effects the shift that Nagley notes between the Socrates of *Irony* and the Socrates of the *Postscript*. If the irony of *Irony* had prevented Socrates from becoming anything more than abstract negativity, the *existential* irony of the *Postscript* allows Socrates "to appear to be the following: firstly [*sic.*], an existential thinker; secondly—to use Kierkegaard's word—an ethicist; and thirdly, an authentic religious thinker".<sup>49</sup>

In a journal entry written after the last of the pseudonymous works had been published, Kierkegaard reflects on his "error" in portraying Socrates as falling short of the Idea. He explains,

influenced as I was by Hegel and whatever was modern, without the maturity really to comprehend greatness, I could not resist pointing out somewhere in my dissertation that it was a defect on the part of Socrates to disregard the whole and only consider numerically the individuals. What a Hegelian fool I was! It is precisely this that demonstrates what a great ethicist Socrates was.<sup>50</sup>

According to Climacus's (and, apparently, Kierkegaard's, but who can say?) later conception of Socrates, the ancient philosopher was not only the greatest example of a subjective existing thinker, but he knew how to communicate that subjectivity. Indeed, his greatest pedagogical accomplishment was to "consider numerically the individuals": "The thesis that subjectivity, inwardness is truth contains the Socratic wisdom, the undying merit of which is to have paid attention to the essential meaning of existing, of the knower's being an existing person."<sup>51</sup> While he was not The Teacher whose existence is the absolute paradox and the source of faith, Socrates was unquestionably *a* teacher, perhaps the greatest (lowercase) teacher in history. Climacus actually does hint at this in a footnote to *Fragments*, when he says that, although the god-relationship is infinitely higher, "between one human being and another the Socratic relationship is indeed the highest, the truest".<sup>52</sup> He can, however, only address Socrates's pedagogical virtue at length in the *Postscript* after he has reconstituted Christ, faith, and the god-relationship in *Fragments*. After constructing *Fragments* as an alternative to all things "Socratic", Climacus not only exalts, but imitates the Socratic method in the *Postscript*. Although the categories are hardly discrete, I have divided Climacus's

appropriation of Socratic pedagogy into three sections that seem helpful to the illumination of Climacus's project: madness, starvation, and authorlessness.

*Madness and the Socratic Method*

Socrates, who reportedly interrupted individuals walking about the marketplace in order to engage with them philosophically, never tried to form a coherent whole out of his intellectual meanderings. Because Socrates understood that existence always disrupts pure thought, because the "how" of communication and becoming is far more important than the "what" of knowledge and Being, his "method" could never be systematised. Socrates instructed through uncertainty, never formulating rules or principles because a systemised uncertainty would destroy uncertainty as such. From an objective perspective, then, Socratic communication seems like insanity. In the *Gorgias*, for example,<sup>53</sup> Socrates refers to the bravery and accomplishment of a certain sailor who has delivered a number of passengers safely to shore. Socrates then adds that his adulation may, in fact, be unmerited; the sailor may actually have done the passengers a *disservice* by not allowing them to drown at sea. Speaking this way, he sounds very much

like a madman. Perhaps some of those present actually considered him a lunatic (for, according to Plato and Alcibiades, there was a broad consensus that he was at least a bit odd); perhaps someone else thought that it was a droll way of talking, perhaps. At the same time, however ... Socrates perhaps kept a little tryst with his idea, with ignorance. If he did grasp the infinite in the form of ignorance, he had to have this with him everywhere.<sup>54</sup>

The "mad" ignorance that Socrates carried with him at all times was the mark of a subjectivity that did not fall into objectivity: an incomprehensible otherness.

Such "madness", of course, is precisely what Climacus is striving for as an author, since a direct, coherent expression of his subject matter will turn it quickly into an object matter. If Climacus, or indeed Kierkegaard, were to state his point (if he *had* a point to state) straightforwardly, then there would be no difficulty, no uncertainty, no existential appropriation on the part of his reader—only intellectual assent. But who in his right mind would give a madman his intellectual assent? Climacus thus reflects, "to be regarded as a lunatic—there's something to that—it is encouraging. It protects the quiet inwardness of an absolute relationship. But to be assumed to be holy in earnest—that is bound to worry one to death."<sup>55</sup> Climacus exploits "madness" because it expresses irresolvable uncertainty: because it hovers between knowing and not-knowing, and might therefore preserve the "elusive", the absolute paradox, from speculative contamination. Having provided a

shadowy sketch of the absolute paradox in *Fragments*, Climacus thus dons Socratic madness in order to express the inexpressible, and to prevent his readers from nodding blindly in assent. Paralleling the tale of the sailor and his questionably fortunate passengers, Climacus tells the story of a young man who, when asked to attend a dinner, responds that he will definitely be there. On his way home, however, a ceiling tile falls on his head and kills him. The man would have spoken subjectively, Climacus interjects, if he had responded to the invitation by saying that he would absolutely be there, unless a tile were to fall and kill him, in which case he would not be able to attend. As in the case of Socrates, this would-be guest would be speaking like a madman. However, Climacus continues, when he seems most insane, "the speaker may privately have a tryst with the god, who is present just as soon as the uncertainty of everything is thought infinitely".<sup>56</sup>

Subjective existential truth, religious communication, and madness thus all have *something* to do with one another. In fact, Climacus admits that "in a solely subjective definition of truth, lunacy and truth are ultimately indistinguishable because they may both have inwardness".<sup>57</sup> In a footnote, however, he qualifies this conflation, lest he be taken at his word and lest Christianity be accused of insanity. Madness is, in fact, inwardness, but it is only a finite, fixed inwardness that, as such, becomes objective. Christianity, on the other hand, moves *infinitely* inward, thereby remaining subjective. Although he does not say it directly (and how suspicious one would be if he were to do so), Christianity as inwardness is in fact *beyond* madness. This distinction is lost on the objective thinker, who cannot sustain the absolute paradox and thus ridicules the subjective existing thinker, as Socrates himself was so mocked. To be sure, if Socrates were to appear now, the "assistant professors" of nineteenth century Europe would not only tease him; they would attempt to coax the existence out of him. If a teacher such as Socrates were to emerge today, "he would be turned out of doors as one who is incapable of being objective, until at long last a good-natured objective chap, a systematic devil of a fellow, would most likely have mercy upon him and help him halfway into the paragraphs".<sup>58</sup> Yet, Climacus points out in a subsequent footnote, even when Socrates, unable to find his clothes, covered himself hastily with an animal hide and proceeded to philosophize in the stunned marketplace, "nevertheless he remained a human being and even in his hide was not nearly as ludicrous as he later became in the system, where he shows up fantastically wrapped in the rich systematic drapery of a paragraph".<sup>59</sup> Climacus here suggests a way of interpreting his anti-Socratic rant in *Fragments*; perhaps he was not reacting against the Socratic method itself, but against what has *become* of it now that the "what" has triumphed over the "how" and the Idea reigns supreme. There is nothing quite as misguided, and nothing more treacherous for subjectivity, as a philosophy that tries to suppress actuality by clothing and systematising that which looks like madness.

*Starvation and the Socratic Method*

Climacus's indirect communication might therefore be an attempt to un-dress Socrates: to revive the Socratic "how" as an antidote to the Systematic "what"; indirect communication might be an attempt to rehabilitate the *real* dialectic (that is, the creative, mobile, nonappropriative dialectic) in order to unsettle the necessity and ultimate stasis of the Hegelian dialectic. The problem with nineteenth century Denmark, as Climacus sees it, is not that people do not know enough but that they know too much; it is hard to convince such widely-learned people of their ignorance. The obstacle facing Climacus, who wants to emphasize the absolute importance and excruciating difficulty of *becoming* a Christian, is that most of his contemporaries already believe they *are* Christians. In a Christian country, he explains, "it is not information that is lacking; something else is lacking, and one human being cannot directly communicate this something else to another".<sup>60</sup> Socrates, we will remember, found himself in a similar situation vis-à-vis the endlessly self-assured Sophists. Part of his approach, which Climacus adopts, was to communicate by un-communicating; to take knowledge *away* from his interlocutors so that his "idea", existential uncertainty, would become clearer.

In *Irony*, Kierkegaard had emphasized Socrates's divine mission: to convince people of their ignorance, to "wrest from them what they had"<sup>61</sup> in order to collapse their overinflated self-assurance and restore their relationships with the gods. Socrates took the knowledge his interlocutors believed they possessed and re-revealed it to them in a strange and unfamiliar form, thereby demonstrating that underlying their sophistic pomp was nothing, and that ultimately their contingent existences depended upon the gods who knew what they could not. Human understanding, because it relates the finite, historical human to the infinite, eternal divine, is always paradoxical for Socrates, and his method enforces a respect for this irreducible difficulty. Climacus *qua* humorist understands the God-relationship to be analogous to Socrates's, although on a different plane now that the paradox has become the paradox-squared. For Socrates, the relation of the truth to the thinker created a paradoxical situation; for Climacus, whose god has, impossibly, come into time, the truth *itself* is paradoxical. That the subject might be able to relate himself to such an internally-contradictory truth is thus *doubly*-paradoxical, yet none of Climacus's contemporaries seems even to notice this difficulty. In fact, Climacus's contemporaries do not notice any difficulty at all; his frustration with nineteenth century speculative thought is that it is just as mindlessly self-assured as pre-Socratic sophism. The problem with Hegelianism is that it denies the paradoxicality of time's relation to eternity. The contemporary world does not need someone to give it *more* knowledge; it needs someone (like Socrates) to give it *less*.

This sort of negative pedagogy—this epistemological taking-away—is thus another explanation for the bizarre anecdotes and episodes of the



pseudonymous works, and of the *Postscript* in particular. Climacus is constantly looking to make things more difficult; to make people realize how far they really are from the truth of Christianity. The *Postscript*, Climacus explains in a footnote, was written not for average, working churchgoers, but for those infinitely confident speculators, "whose trouble is that they know too much". In an age when "pure thought" claims to grasp easily the truth of Christianity in such a way that practically everyone is *de facto* Christian, the only thing to do is to complicate infinitely that which seems simple. "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?"<sup>62</sup> As we have seen, instruction by taking-away is a thoroughly Socratic endeavor. Kierkegaard will echo his pseudonym's admiration of knowledge-removal as indirect communication, commenting in a journal that it had been his intention "Socratically [to] starve the life out of all the illusions in which Christianity has run aground".<sup>63</sup> In fact, the late-in-life Kierkegaard seems to agree with the *Postscript's* Climacus about most issues regarding indirect communication.<sup>64</sup>

Insofar as teaching-by-starvation brings to light the absolute uncertainty of existence, it preserves existence itself. Climacus thus finds in this negative pedagogical tool a way of reasserting existence over and against the Idea that threatens to turn subjectivity into speculation. Hence his reluctance in *Fragments* to appeal directly to Christianity (or, for that matter, to Hegel or Socrates). If Climacus had begun by pitting Christianity, or any of its recognisable tenets, against Hegelianism, the dutiful speculator would rush to his own defense, thinking, "Christianity. I know what that means", and taking immediate refuge in his mediated, conceptual comprehension of Christianity. Believing that he already understood the matter at hand, the Hegelian would fail to realise that he himself had become Untruth—that he was no closer to the truth than the drudge down the street who had never even *heard* of Hegel. It was only by first razing his readers' understanding—by ignoring Christianity as we know it and reconstructing the paradoxically religious against paganism—that Climacus could hope to bring his readers to understand what Socrates knew all along. We may be able to manipulate concepts and objectify subjects and pen paragraphs and reconcile differences, but confronted as we ultimately are with the absolute paradox, none of us knows anything.

#### *Authorlessness and the Socratic Method*

So far, we have seen that Climacus employs "mad" discourse and knowledge-removal, two mutually-implied Socratic strategies, in order to communicate

that which he cannot risk objectifying. A third linguistic/pedagogical affect he attempts to effect, entirely bound up with the other two, is self-effacement. In *Fragments*, one of Climacus's numerous critiques of the Socratic method is that the teacher himself, Socrates, becomes a mere occasion for the learner's self-understanding, and vice-versa. Climacus denigrates this mode of learning primarily to make room for Christ who, because he creates a new person, is not merely occasional for the learner, nor does the learner ever help Christ as the interlocutors occasionally aided Socrates. Yet Socratic and reciprocal midwifery, so maligned in *Fragments*, actually becomes a virtue in the *Post-script*. Once Climacus has secured Christ's place as infinitely higher than any (again, lowercase) teacher, he is able to reconstruct (albeit in a footnote) the Socratic as the height of human communication. He places Socratic communication *between* the aesthetic interpretation (in which one person is the teacher and the other is the learner) and the paradoxical-religious interpretation (in which the Teacher is the god [Güden] who breaks into time, creating his pupil anew). Climacus calls this interstitial interpretation "religious"; that is, corresponding to Religiousness A, rather than Religiousness B. According to this stage of communication, "there is no pupil and no teacher ('the teacher is only the occasion', see *Fragments*); every individual is essentially structured equally eternally and essentially related to the eternal; the human teacher is a vanishing tradition".<sup>65</sup> As one seeks to distill the Real Kierkegaard from the maze of pseudonyms, false editors, revocations, footnotes, parables, and journals he has generated, it becomes clear that what he wanted above all was to become a latter-day Socrates: a vanishing tradition.

Authorial self-erasure (un-)manifests itself as both a narrative withholding and an autobiographical withholding. By refusing to speak directly and by claiming personal ignorance of the matter at hand, the communicator, whether he be Socrates, Climacus, or Kierkegaard, keeps himself out of the truth to which he circuitously points. He thus preserves the radical subjectivity of truth *and* the integrity of the interiority with which he stands in relation to it. Moreover, this "occasional" teacher keeps himself apart from his students. The teacher as vanishing tradition prevents his students from entering into a direct relationship with *him*; ensuring that they do not commit his words to memory and nod in vigorous assent simply because he is the Master. Unlike the aesthetic interpretation, that which is to be understood religiously cannot be passed down from one person to another. *Vis-à-vis* the god-relationship, every person begins in the same place and must, in inwardness, move closer to the truth. If the teacher were to tout his singular understanding of religiousness and articulate it systematically to his student, the student would not do any work himself. He would outwardly express his agreement, fail to appropriate the truth existentially, go home comfortably after church each Sunday, and lose himself completely. Climacus offers the following example of an improper pedagogical situation: "Suppose that Jacobi himself has made the leap; suppose that with the aid of eloquence he

manages to persuade a learner to want to do it. Then the learner has a direct relation to Jacobi and consequently does not himself come to make the leap."<sup>66</sup>

Socrates realised that two people attempting to communicate truth-as-inwardness would have to remain apart, lest the communication objectify the truth (and the subjective thinkers themselves). Climacus conjectures that it was this understanding that made Socrates so pleased with his "advantageous appearance". This advantageous appearance was not beauty, but abject ugliness: "he was very ugly, had clumsy feet, and more than that, a number of bumps on his forehead and in other places". According to Climacus, it was Socrates's ugliness that kept him at an appropriate distance from his interlocutors:

... he perceived that it might help to place the learner at a distance so that he would not be caught in a direct relation to the teacher, perhaps would admire him, perhaps would have his clothes made in the same way, but *might understand through the repulsion of opposition*, which in turn was his irony in a higher sphere, that the learner essentially has himself to deal with, and that the inwardness of truth is not the chummy inwardness with which two bosom friends walk arm in arm with each other but is the separation in which each person for himself is existing in what is true.<sup>67</sup>

Socrates's self-professed ignorance prevented his students from merely agreeing with The One Who Knew, forcing them to relate themselves to the truth in inwardness. Similarly, his unseemly physical appearance kept them from believing they had found and comprehended Truth when they found Socrates; there was far too much separating them to allow such complacency. Ignorance and ugliness set up a constant dynamic of repulsion, keeping both Socrates and his students in a constant state of becoming. In fact, when it seemed as if his students were drawing too near, Socrates would force them away: hence his refusal of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*.<sup>68</sup> By shunning the beautiful young boy, Socrates was playing neither the coy lover nor the Stoic pietist; rather, he was maintaining a pedagogical distance necessary for the preservation of inwardness. More importantly, as Wilhelm Anz argues, by preserving indirection and distance, Socrates made room for the god-relationship, ultimately "pointing to a fundamental relationship which is superior to knowledge and shuns it".<sup>69</sup>

Inasmuch as the *Fragments* can be read as Climacus's attempt to make room for the god-relationship, his authorial effacement mimics Socratic ignorance and ugliness, taking the form of a series of narrative removals. Climacus understands that all will be lost if his readers attempt to make a religious move merely because they believe he has "actually done it": "Never in all eternity is it true that someone has been assisted in doing the good by someone else's actually having done it."<sup>70</sup> Climacus thus continually asserts the extent to which he falls short of knowledge, pure inwardness, and faith.

He emphasizes that his texts are not instructive but merely *constructive*—humorous experiments expressed informally in pamphlets. A didactic text could only be written by an author who had mastered his subject, and Climacus certainly has not done that; he does not even have an opinion, much less a firm mastery of religiousness. All he can presume to declare is that it must be terribly difficult to be a Christian. Aside from that, he can say nothing definitively. Climacus thus refers to himself as “neither a religious speaker nor a religious person, but just a humorous, imaginatively constructing psychologist”.<sup>71</sup> This sounds very much like the self-appraisal of Constantin Constantius, the author of *Repetition* who called his work neither an explication nor a definition but an imaginary construction, a “Venture in Experimenting Psychology”. In fact, at one point in the *Postscript*, Climacus notes a number of similarities between himself and the authors of Kierkegaard’s other pseudonymous texts. He summarises the works briefly, somewhat reductively concentrating only on the extent to which they demonstrate an understanding of the inwardness and subjectivity of truth. During this bafflingly meta-authorial moment, Climacus praises these pseudonyms’ self-effacement, proclaiming that “the absence of the author is a means of distancing”.<sup>72</sup>

Of course, Climacus’s and Constantius’s authorial absence and ignorance performs Kierkegaard’s own relationship to the works, occupying a position which is in fact once more removed than that of the characters themselves. The pseudonymous works are most explicitly connected to one another through a common theme of disavowal; Climacus maintains that he is not a religious thinker, Constantius writes that he is “unable to make a religious movement”,<sup>73</sup> and Johannes de Silentio, exalting the Abrahamic knight of faith, punctuates his text with qualifications like, “by no means do I have faith”.<sup>74</sup> Even at the end of his last pseudonymous work, when Kierkegaard admits in a signed essay that the pseudonyms are his creations, he maintains a strict remoteness from them. Like Socrates, Kierkegaard has served as no more than a midwife for these authors; echoing the pseudonyms’ own disavowals, he writes that “in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication”.<sup>75</sup> Through his pseudonymous characters, who then mimic their creator’s absence in order to push him farther away from the doubly-reflected matter at hand, Kierkegaard is affecting a sort of Socratic ugliness, keeping his reader from simplifying that which is irreducibly difficult.

Also, at the level of *written* authorial removal, although Kierkegaard never admits this, the Plato/Socrates distinction breaks down. The Climacus of the *Postscript* and the Kierkegaard of *Irony*, although their emphases differ, both place all the straightforward, speculative dialogic material upon Plato in order to highlight Socrates as the indirect, noncommittal figure who effaced

himself pedagogically. Neither Climacus nor Kierkegaard ever acknowledges, however, the extent to which the pseudonymous works reiterate the Platonic dialogues in terms of narrative structure; Plato himself is just as removed from his dialogues as is Kierkegaard from his pseudonymous texts. *Either/Or*, for example, was edited by one Victor Emerita, who found the two manuscripts when he decided to take a hacksaw to a secondhand desk he had bought years before. The manuscripts he found were written by two people: an aesthete whom Emerita calls "A", and an ethicist referred to as Judge William. While the Judge's pennings are (presumably) his own, "A" only wrote part of his manuscript. The "Seducer's Diary" was the work of a friend of his—a work which "A" volunteered to edit. Anticipating his reader's own reactions to this ludic narrative set-up, Emerita comments dryly, "one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle".<sup>76</sup> This recalls a work like the *Symposium*, narrated not by Plato himself but by Apollodorus, who tells the story to an unidentified "friend", having just recounted it to Glaucon. Apollodorus, although he had not been in attendance at Agathon's dinner, had heard the tale from Aristodemus of Cydanthanaeum, "a little fellow who used to go about barefoot",<sup>77</sup> who could not remember the events very well because he had been drinking heavily that evening. To make matters worse, Apollodorus cannot even remember all that Aristodemus had related to him. We can infer from Plato's suspicion of writing<sup>78</sup> that his own reluctant writing style was an attempt to prevent forgetting: to maintain the mobility and subjective challenge of orality. Kierkegaard's adoption of this narrative strategy indicates that he also feared the tendency of the written word to engender hermeneutical stasis—precisely the kind of undialectical dialectic with which Hegel had rendered all contingencies necessary, all particularity general, and all difficulty simple.

Also, by placing an unbridgeable gap between reader and author, Kierkegaard maintains the kind of apartness necessary to resist the totalising tide of Hegelian mediation. The kind of dialectic that Kierkegaard wants to revive is one that holds terms apart rather than reconciling them—one that respects and preserves difference rather than "overcoming" it with a relentless identity. It is important not to forget, however, why Kierkegaard, through Climacus, fought so vehemently against Hegelianism in the first place. Commenting on his role as author, Climacus frequently states his project as one of making things more difficult, but not more difficult than they *are*. In other words, this is no mere academic complicating; Climacus is trying to bring back mystery and contingency in the form of the absolute paradox. This absolute paradox, the one that cannot be "overcome" speculatively, is the expression of the impossible relationship between history and eternity when eternity itself is paradoxical. Without the absolute paradox there can be no god-relationship, because without the absolute paradox there is only relative difference, and "between God and a human being (let speculative thought just keep *humankind* to perform tricks with) there is an absolute

difference, therefore a person's absolute relationship with God must specifically express the absolute difference".<sup>79</sup> Something as seemingly trivial as Socrates's oversized feet thus become of the utmost importance; he who endeavors to communicate religiously must do all that he can to preserve the distance religiousness requires.

*Socrates on the Verge: The Outer Reaches of Existential Thought*

We shall recall that, in *The Concept of Irony*, Socrates's pure negativity prevented him from becoming an existential thinker, an ethicist, or a religious thinker, whereas in the *Postscript*, Socrates becomes all three. This, I have argued, is a result of Climacus's shifting focus away from negativity and toward *ignorance*, which allows Socrates to be irreducibly existential. His unmitigated existentialism puts him at the height of immanent goodness; indeed, by the end of the *Postscript*, Socrates is portrayed more definitely as an ethical thinker, and even occasionally as a religious thinker as well. The height of Climacus's estimation of the ugly philosopher could be his tentative statement that

Socratic ignorance is an *analogue* to the category of the absurd, except that there is even less objective certainty in the repulsion exerted by the absurd, since there is only the certainty that it is absurd, and for that very reason there is infinitely greater resilience in the inwardness. The Socratic inwardness in existing is an analogue to faith, except that the inwardness of faith ... is infinitely deeper.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, having taken such pains in *Fragments* to demonstrate the absolute uniqueness of the Christian paradox, Climacus cannot now make such a connection in an unqualified way. Also, having modeled his indirect writing strategies on Socratic ignorance, and wishing to maintain his *own* ignorance, he cannot in good faith now equate Socratic communication with Christian communication. Socrates's feet are not *quite* as powerfully repulsive as the absurd. In fact, they are infinitely less so. Sensitive as he is to the absolute nature of absolute difference, Climacus cannot rest with asserting a difference of *degree* between Socrates (or himself) and Christ. He thus takes a more radical approach. Toward the end of the *Postscript*, Climacus refers back to the analogy he has drawn between Socratic existential thought and Christian faith, saying that "there is no analogy to the sphere of the paradoxically religious, and thus the application, when it is understood, is a revocation".<sup>81</sup> This revocation is not nearly as frustrating, however, as the one with which he ends the *Postscript* itself: "Everything [in this book] is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only an end but a revocation to boot."<sup>82</sup> Climacus is careful to emphasise at this point, however, that "to write a book and revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it".<sup>83</sup> Saying, therefore, that Socratic ignorance is analogous to the absurd and

then unsaying it does not erase the utterance completely. Like an attorney who tells a jury something he knows will be stricken from the court records, Climacus realises that the connection he has made cannot be unmade. He cannot leave the connection neatly in place, however, because such a statement risks both blasphemy and conceptual domestication. He must therefore revoke the predication, pointing his readers in the right direction but preventing the complacency (not to mention idolatry) of facile objectification: "All other faith is only an analogy that is no [analogy], an analogy that can serve to make aware, but no more, the understanding of which is therefore a revocation".<sup>84</sup>

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates stakes his life upon the "if" of immortality. Kierkegaard emphasises that the importance of Socrates's last instruction lies not in the arguments he constructed, but in the perfectly calm way he went to his death, all the while unsure of the possibility of an afterlife. Christianity, however, is infinitely more difficult. While the pagan (or, at least, the very highest of the pagans) can stake his life upon an "if" statement, the Christian is required to believe that which is utterly contrary to reason. Socratic ignorance serves as religious communication insofar as it reflects the paradox inherent in the subject's relationship to eternal truth. It is not, however, the communication of Religiousness B because, in the Socratic view, the truth itself is not paradoxical. Religiousness B, the religion of the absolute paradox, is doubly-reflected and, as such, infinitely different from Religiousness A. The absurd, Climacus says, would be too much even for Socrates to accept: Socrates would probably consider it to be "general lunacy to venture everything when suffering becomes the certainty".<sup>85</sup> Christianity, the belief in the absurd because it is absurd, would be too ludicrous for the madman; Christianity is indeed *beyond* madness.

Climacus does suggest, however, that Socrates glimpsed, even if he never quite formulated, the absolute paradox. Toward the end of the *Postscript*, he says that the greatest respect a human can have for the absolute difference between himself and God is to immerse himself completely in existence. The sign of one who has existed as completely as humanly possible is "the essential consciousness of guilt".<sup>86</sup> Climacus admires Socrates because, as we have seen, he was entirely existential; he refused the comfort of abstraction at every turn. And the most telling sign of this insistent existentialism was that Socrates found within himself a "disposition to all evil";<sup>87</sup> which Climacus reads as an eternal recollection of guilt. He speaks of an eternal recollection of guilt as the highest expression of existence. It may seem odd that Climacus brings back recollection at the end of the *Postscript*, considering the lengths to which he had gone in *Fragments* to obliterate the retrogressive abstraction of eternal recollection. Climacus speaks of an eternal recollection of *guilt*, however, which *prevents* the eternal recollection of *truth*. What this means is that if Socrates had the eternal consciousness of guilt, then he was aware of the impossibility of strict recollection—that is, of taking himself back into

eternity in the midst of existence.<sup>88</sup> Toward the end of the *Postscript*, Socrates becomes not only an existential thinker, but a thinker at the *height* of the existential, and of the (lowercase) religious. Climacus suspects that Socrates (who, although Climacus never mentions this, states repeatedly in the *Phaedo* that it is existence in time that allows the soul to be freed from the soul of *metempsychosis*) knew he had been altered fundamentally by existence, and that he was therefore incapable of “taking himself speculatively out of existence back into eternity ...”. What Socrates knew, but what he could not express, was that “he must go forward; to go backward is impossible”.<sup>89</sup> Socrates could not quite grasp what he saw in the distance because he had no concept of sin—because the god had not come into time and because the eternal truth itself was still masquerading as unparadoxical. Climacus indicates that Socrates *sensed* something beyond the outer reaches of existence, but had no way of reaching it. Only Religiousness B accounts for the uneasiness Socrates felt with the non-teleological category of recollection: “... the consequence of the appearance of the god [*Güden*] in time prevents the individual from relating himself backward to the eternal, since he now moves forward in order to become eternal in time through the relation to the god in time”.<sup>90</sup> There is a non-identical, teleological movement that relates the subjective existing thinker to the eternal without rendering existence itself unimportant, but it requires a violent break with immanence at the very height of immanence. This forward-movement, although Socrates did not know it by name and Climacus does not appeal to it directly, is repetition.<sup>91</sup>

### *Repetition and the Ecstatic Constitution of Subjectivity*

In *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio writes that “humanly speaking, [the knight of faith] is mad and cannot make himself understandable to anyone”.<sup>92</sup> The linguistic is the universal—the ethical sphere in which people can relate directly to one another. Abraham, exalted *qua* individual above the universal by virtue of the absurd, could not make himself understood, so he remained silent. Socrates too, Climacus frequently reminds his readers, employed silence as “a God-pleasing self-defense against the persecutions of mediocrity”.<sup>93</sup> Unspeakability is therefore the mode of communication corresponding to that which utterly surpasses the universal; it protects both the (non-) speaker and the truth itself from objective contamination. Kierkegaard, we may notice, makes continual reference throughout the pseudonymous and upbuilding texts to the moment of decision, but never gives his audience a clear idea of what that moment of decision might *entail*, or how one might go about readying oneself for it. Likewise Climacus, the humorist who has never been able to break with the immanent and leap into the absolutely paradoxical, leaves repetition unspoken.

Where, then, does one go to work through repetition? This is a particularly complicated issue, considering that the very text that promises to elucidate



repetition never quite does so; Constantin Constantius may demonstrate what does *not* constitute a true religious repetition, but he never delineates what *does* constitute a true religious repetition. Constantius leads us to understand that his farcical trip to the Königstädter Theatre could not possibly be a true repetition, and even that the restoration of Job's health and goods was not a true repetition (although it was closer). *Repetition* may revolve *around* repetition, but it never addresses it directly. What Constantius *does* say is that repetition "is a crucial expression for what 'recollection' was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition".<sup>94</sup> This last sentence charts two shifts that are extremely important to Climacus as well; Constantius moves from backward-glancing recollection to forward-moving repetition, and from metaphysics to existence—from "knowledge" to "life". Repetition, he will explain, does not try to escape time, but to persevere in the midst of it. As we saw at the end of the *Postscript*, insofar as Socrates is aware of teleology, he is aware of the significance of existence, and vice versa. Socrates did, therefore, anticipate repetition. In fact, it looks as if repetition might be precisely the kind of forward-looking, non-identical dialectic for which Climacus has been searching: "repetition proper is what has mistakenly been called mediation. It is incredible how much flurry has been made in Hegelian philosophy over mediation and how much foolish talk has enjoyed honor under this rubric. One should rather seek to think through mediation and then give a little credit to the Greeks."<sup>95</sup> At their best, the Greeks sensed what Hegel willfully ignores: eternity cannot be fully recaptured within time because time itself *matters*.<sup>96</sup>

Might repetition in fact be the true dialectic that Climacus has been trying to recuperate in the face of Hegelianism? Naturally, Climacus cannot possibly tell us outright. If Climacus needed to protect subjectivity, inwardness, and his devotion to Socrates with indirection, he protects repetition with silence. Repetition, occurring *after* immanence and *beyond* madness, cannot fit any linguistic scheme. Repetition cannot properly be represented because it is, as Gilles Deleuze remarks, utterly transgressive:

If repetition is possible, it is due to miracle rather than to law ... If repetition exists, it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation and an eternity opposed to permanence. In every respect, repetition is a transgression.<sup>97</sup>

Of course, this sort of "opposing" must surpass Hegelian opposition. Repetition, which for Kierkegaard is always non-identical and creative, violates the laws of exchange and generality, and as such entails an absolutely irreducible difference. By virtue of the gift of repetition, the individual is exalted *over* the universal, subjectivity maintained in the midst of objectivity. By virtue of

the absurd, the gift of repetition breaks in at the outer limits of human capability, after the subject has exhausted and forsaken every one of his faculties.

Yet there is no subject that goes before repetition; repetition produces that which it repeats, which means that subjectivity “can never be taken at its origin but only repeated”.<sup>98</sup> The radical anteriority of repetition means that there is no thing that precedes repetition. Constantin Constantius, who cannot seem to reproduce his blissful weekend in Berlin at the Königstädter Theatre, concludes that there is no possibility of repetition, telling himself, “what you are hunting for does not exist, and the same goes for you yourself!”<sup>99</sup> Constantius’s hyperbolic nihilism spells out that which Climacus suspects—there is, indeed, no subjectivity without repetition—past the pages of the *Postscript* lies that upon which truth-as-subjectivity relies. Climacus takes his readers to the limits of the Socratic: the limits of existence, guilt, and Religiousness A. There he leaves them, gazing with Socrates at something in the distance that might be forward-reaching rather than eternally retrogressive—something that might constitute the subject over and against the object after the possibilities of existence have been exhausted. Yet Socrates could not seem to make the move of infinite resignation, and neither can Climacus. At the end of the *Postscript*, an infinite leap away from Religiousness B, Climacus leaves us, like Constantius before his disillusionment, “waiting for a thunderstorm—and for repetition”.<sup>100</sup>

### *Self-Abandonment at the Limits of Existence*

Throughout the anti-Hegelian *Postscript*, Climacus appeals to Socrates because he is an irreducibly existential thinker, precisely what his era of disembodied abstraction needs. As existential, Socrates operates at the highest mode of immanent communication. Toward the end of this text, however, Climacus begins to speak of a complete *break* with immanence, accomplished as the subject makes the impossible leap between Religiousness A and Religiousness B. Suddenly, it looks as if there might be something beyond even existence. Yet we know from both *Fragments* and the *Postscript* that it is a vain and self-deceiving speculator indeed who seeks to escape actuality. What, then, is this beyond-existence, and how can the subjective thinker possibly attain it if his greatest attribute is his existentialism? Again, Not-Quite-Christian Climacus does not give any clear answers, but he does say in a footnote that “In [Religiousness] B, existing, although even lower by being paradoxically accentuated, is nevertheless so much higher that I first become eternal in existence, and as a result existing gives rise by itself to a qualification that is infinitely higher than existing”.<sup>101</sup> This qualification is the constant non-totalising presence of eternity within time: the God-relationship. By virtue of the transgressive gift of repetition, existence surpasses itself at the height of existence, and “by repetition the individual becomes himself”.<sup>102</sup>

Emmanuel Levinas claims that the Kierkegaardian subject, as radically inward, is egocentric: "Kierkegaard very powerfully rehabilitated the topics of subjectivity, uniqueness, and individuality. He objected to the absorption of subjectivity into Hegelian universality, but he replaced it with subjectivity that was shamelessly exhibitionistic." In order to demonstrate this self-important selfhood, Levinas refers to the Abraham of *Fear and Trembling*, the most offensive instance of "a subjectivity raising itself above the ethical to the level of the religious".<sup>103</sup> Yet Levinas makes such subjectivity far too easy. The self thus constituted by repetition does not precede repetition itself, but emerges through it, and is thoroughly infused with the God-relationship. This subjectivity, then, is *relational* rather than identical and, insofar as the religious subject is constantly in a state of becoming, thanks to what Gillian Rose calls "the eminence of futurity at the intersection of eternity and time",<sup>104</sup> dynamic rather than static. Repetition, as Deleuze reminds us, is always a gift and, as such, a scandal; the subject cannot merely summon repetition and constitute himself *qua* subject. Kierkegaardian subjectivity, I would argue *contra* Levinas, does not raise itself above the ethical; rather, it is *raised* above the ethical. Between the two there is an absolute difference. And the subject that emerges through the madness of repetition is *not* a self-identical individual, alone in inwardness; it is rather a subject related at every turn to the eternal. The highest form of this selfhood is only selfhood insofar as it exists in the God-relationship—inwardness, in other words, gives rise to something infinitely higher than inwardness.

Subjectivity, like the transgressive move of repetition that gives rise to it, is thus utterly improper. The subject is related at all times to an otherness which, as Chrétien demonstrates, both exceeds and conditions his existence *qua* human: "l'altérité de Dieu s'inscrit inoubliablement au coeur de notre intimité." He who recognises that the past can never be fully recuperated likewise detects the "présence inoubliable et inépuisable de l'altérité" at the core of his being; the "excès qui [se] fonde".<sup>105</sup> The individual who becomes himself becomes one who is not properly himself; he is only what he is insofar as he is related at all moments (by virtue of the Moment) to God. Subjectivity thus arises past the limits of human capacity, after the thinker existing in inwardness follows the contingency of existence to its outer limits, finally giving it all up to the objective impossibility of faith. "In this mad religious economy", Caputo writes of repetition, "if one gives up everything, everything is repeated, returned, even a hundredfold, by virtue of the absurd".<sup>106</sup> It is not, however, merely the process-at-large that is mad; the subject himself is also, objectively speaking, mad. The very locus of the subject's self is *beyond him*. In other words, this subjectivity, which cannot be considered by itself but only repeated, is profoundly ecstatic.

That which looks like madness, as we know from the *Postscript*, could in fact be the height of religiousness. Socrates's ludicrous comment about the questionably-fortunate survivors of the sea voyage was either abject insanity

or “a Socratic rendezvous with the divinity ... on the boundless ocean of uncertainty”.<sup>107</sup> To live in continual uncertainty, and to cling passionately to that uncertainty, is to exist ecstatically—like Socrates with his *daimon*, to exist exclusively in and through the God-relationship. “Much madness is divinest sense.”<sup>108</sup>

### *A Final Cry for Socrates*

Johannes Climacus “concludes” the *Postscript* with another disavowal of his own authority by crying out, in awareness of his own ignorance, for his teacher:

If only the teacher were to be found among us! I am not speaking of the teacher of classical learning ... I am not speaking of the teacher of the difficult art of religious address ... I am not speaking of the teacher of the beautiful art of poetry ... No, the teacher of whom I speak and in a different way, ambiguously and doubtfully, is the teacher of the ambiguous art of thinking about existence and existing. So if he could be found, I dare to guarantee that something would jolly well come of it if he in print would attend my instruction and to that end proceed slowly and piece by piece, allowing me to ask questions, as good instruction should, and to delay going on from anything before I have completely understood it.<sup>109</sup>

Climacus, as diligently as he tries to model his authorship on Socratic madness, negativity, ignorance, indirection, and silence, is profoundly aware of the gap between himself and the ancient philosopher. Again demonstrating considerable sympathy with this particular pseudonymous author, Kierkegaard writes in a journal entry that he has fallen miserably short of his prototype:

There was a young man as favorably endowed as an Alcibiades. He lost his way in the world. In his need he looked about for a Socrates but found none among his contemporaries. Then he requested the gods to change him into one. But now—he who had been so proud of being an Alcibiades was so humiliated and humbled by the gods’ favor that, just when he received what he could be proud of, he felt inferior to all.<sup>110</sup>

This is not the first time Kierkegaard has highlighted the figure of Alcibiades. In *The Concept of Irony*, the young author referred to Socrates as a seducer, all of whose interlocutors were, like Alcibiades, “‘deceived in such a way that instead of the lover he became the beloved’”.<sup>111</sup>

Pierre Hadot refers to this sort of Socratic reversal of identity as “erotic irony”, which structurally reiterates dialectic irony. The latter, dialectic irony, describes the process whereby Socrates feigned ignorance, identifying with his student, and pretending his student might have something to teach

him. "In the last analysis", however, "it is the interlocutor who unconsciously enters into Socrates's discourse and identifies with *him*. Let us not forget: to identify oneself with Socrates is to identify oneself with *aporia* and doubt, for Socrates doesn't know anything; all he knows is that he knows nothing. Therefore, at the end of the discussion, the interlocutor has not learned anything; in fact, he no longer even knows anything".<sup>112</sup> Likewise, Socrates would pretend to be in love, seeking to receive from the young boy the beauty he lacked himself. When Socrates eventually refused to act upon his affections, as Alcibiades relates in the *Symposium*, the student would realise that his beauty was insufficient for Socrates; that is, that he did not really possess beauty at all. He would then fall in love with Socrates—the lover would become the beloved. As Hadot emphasises, however, "It was not beauty with which the beloved fell in love—Socrates did not have any—rather, he fell in love with the love which, according to Socrates's definition in the *Symposium*, is desire for the beauty which all of us lack".<sup>113</sup> The same holds with knowledge. He whose understanding has been shaken by Socratic irony realises that he has no knowledge to bring to the pedagogical stage, and he clings to Socrates not because *Socrates* knows anything, but because the learner comes to desire the truth that *neither* of them has.

Magister Kierkegaard began, as we saw in *Irony*, by thinking that he had something to teach the ancient ironist. Kierkegaard, after all, had the Idea. The more he danced with the Socratic, however, the more he came to realise that it was much closer to the truth than the Idea ever could be. Lacking a teacher who would guide him away from speculation into existence, Kierkegaard donned the Socratic mask, identifying with the teacher whom he, a latter-day Alcibiades, had underestimated in his inflated self-confidence. He hid Socratically behind pseudonyms and fables, disavowals and revocations, only to punctuate them all with a cry for Socrates at the end of the *Postscript*. This inconclusive conclusion, this lament over the teacher's absence, is not a longing for what Socrates *had*, but an expression of desire for what they both (indeed, *all*—Kierkegaard, Socrates, and Climacus) lack: the inscrutable truth of the absolute paradox. The final cry for Socrates, now the beloved, is a cry for selfhood<sup>114</sup>: for the possibility of existing in continual relation to that which exceeds us. The *Postscript's* final conception of Socrates, marked by its refusal to name its subject, indicates that in the shadowy figure of Socrates might rest the very possibility of subjectivity's communication—ecstatically-constituted subjectivity (contingent upon the unspeakably absurd gift of repetition) is preserved in Socratic lunacy.

#### NOTES

- 1 (theses with which he hopes, but cannot be certain, that Lessing would have agreed).
- 2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, Volumes I and II*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

- Press, 1992) (henceforth *CUP*), p. 220. All references to Kierkegaard's texts by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, unless otherwise specified.
- 3 *CUP*, p. 71.
  - 4 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony; With Continual Reference to Socrates*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) (henceforth *CI*), p. 19.
  - 5 Kevin Newmark, "Taking Kierkegaard Apart", introduction to his translation of Sylviane Agacinski's *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1988), p. 11.
  - 6 *CI*, p. 242.
  - 7 For an example of this sort of discussion, see A. F. Ashbaugh, "Platonism: An Essay on Repetition and Recollection" in *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup, eds., (Copenhagen: Reitzels Byhandle A/S, 1981), pp. 9–26.
  - 8 From *Journals and Papers*, as quoted in Wilhelm Anz, "Kierkegaard on Death and Dying" in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain, eds, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 39–52; p. 40.
  - 9 Harold Sarf, "Reflections on Kierkegaard's Socrates", *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1983), pp. 255–276; p. 256.
  - 10 Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. vii.
  - 11 *CUP*, p. 77, footnote.
  - 12 Cf. Constantin Constantius's *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology*. "Experiment" in this title becomes a transitive verb: to experiment a psychology is to construct a set of psychological circumstances that produced a particular, hopefully helpful, reading. This essay might be read as an analogous endeavour.
  - 13 See *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates, through an Egyptian fable, tells Phaedrus that if people rely on writing, "it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written". He goes on to say that "anyone who leaves behind him a written manual, and likewise anyone who takes it over from him, on the supposition that such writing will provide something reliable and permanent, must be exceedingly simple-minded". For Socrates, writing can do no more than "remind one who knows that which the writing is concerned with". (*Phaedrus*, 274b–278b; all translations of Plato by Hamilton and Cairns.)
  - 14 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, E. S. Haldane and Francis H. Simson, trans., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 1:399/18:458.
  - 15 *CI*, p. 153.
  - 16 *CI*, Capel translation, (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 349.
  - 17 *CI*, Capel translation, p. 203.
  - 18 One of the fifteen theses preceding Kierkegaard's dissertation, *CI* (Hong), p. xviii.
  - 19 See Winfield Nagley, "Kierkegaard's Early and Later Views of Socratic Irony" *Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea*, Vol. LV (1980), pp. 271–282.
  - 20 *CI*, Capel translation, p. 203.
  - 21 Kierkegaard judges that Aristophanes represented Socratic irony best when he placed him in a basket that could not quite hold him, hovering above the earth.
  - 22 *CI*, p. 198.
  - 23 Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985) (henceforth, *PF*), p. 9.
  - 24 Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 82b–85c.
  - 25 *PF*, p. 10.
  - 26 Kierkegaard takes this image primarily from *Theaetetus*, in which Socrates explains, "... I am so far like the midwife that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom, and the common reproach is true, that, though I question others, I can myself bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in me. The reason is this. Heaven constrains me to serve as a midwife, but has debarred me from giving birth. So of myself I have no sort of wisdom, nor has any discovery ever been born to me as the child of my soul ..." (*Theaetetus*, 150b–d).
  - 27 *PF*, p. 18.
  - 28 *PF*, p. 37.
  - 29 *PF*, p. 39.

- 30 "The connoisseur of human nature became almost bewildered about himself when he came up against the different; he no longer knew whether he was a more curious monster than Typhon or whether there was something divine in him. What did he lack, then? The consciousness of sin ..." (PF, p. 47).
- 31 PF, p. 11.
- 32 Paper VII A 158, as quoted in Hong's introduction to PF, p. xx.
- 33 CUP, p. 603.
- 34 With the exception of a few footnotes.
- 35 CUP, p. 363.
- 36 CUP, p. 220.
- 37 CUP, p. 386.
- 38 CUP, p. 210.
- 39 PF, p. 214.
- 40 One should not, however, make the mistake of calling Kierkegaard a relativist; the subjectivity of truth means not that truth is constantly in flux but simply that a person's understanding of truth is always inflected with his *own* subjectivity.
- 41 PF, p. 6.
- 42 PF, p. 193.
- 43 PF, p. 33.
- 44 PF, p. 35, footnote.
- 45 CUP, pp. 73–74.
- 46 CUP, p. 75.
- 47 The traditional approach to Kierkegaard has asserted that truth requires indirect communication to remain subjective. Recent thinkers, most notably Blanchot, have reversed this view, arguing that indirect communication in fact produces the subjectivity it conveys. It does seem important, however, to hold these two arguments in tension, noting the co-implication of truth as subjectivity (which can only be communicated indirectly) and indirect communication (without which subjectivity as-such cannot emerge linguistically).
- 48 CUP, pp. 37–38.
- 49 Nagley, p. 276.
- 50 From *Journals and Papers*, as quoted in Hong's preface to *Irony*, p. xiv.
- 51 CUP, p. 204.
- 52 PF, p. 55.
- 53 The passage that Kierkegaard reformulates can be found in *Gorgias*, 511d–512b.
- 54 CUP, pp. 83–84.
- 55 CUP, p. 416.
- 56 CUP, p. 87.
- 57 CUP, p. 194.
- 58 CUP, p. 79.
- 59 CUP, p. 147, footnote.
- 60 CUP, p. 614.
- 61 *Irony*, p. 175.
- 62 CUP, p. 275, footnote.
- 63 from *Journals and Papers*, as quoted in Anz, p. 40.
- 64 I say this merely to make a connection—not to claim knowledge of Kierkegaard's "real intentions", or to attempt to conflate him with one of his characters. Indeed, the Kierkegaard of the journals and papers should probably be read as another creation—another experimented character. An accordance between the journals' "Kierkegaard" and Climacus thus bears no more significance than an accordance between Climacus and anti-Climacus, or Climacus and Constantius. Nor does it bear less.
- 65 CUP, p. 573, footnote.
- 66 CUP, p. 101.
- 67 CUP, pp. 248–249.
- 68 *Symposium*, (219a–e).
- 69 Anz, p. 42.
- 70 CUP, p. 359.
- 71 CUP, p. 483.
- 72 CUP, p. 220.

- 73 Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Philosophy*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 187.
- 74 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 32.
- 75 CUP, p. 626.
- 76 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Volumes I and II*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 9.
- 77 *Symposium*, 178b.
- 78 See note 12, above.
- 79 CUP, p. 412.
- 80 CUP, p. 205, emphasis mine.
- 81 CUP, p. 567.
- 82 CUP, p. 619.
- 83 CUP, p. 621.
- 84 CUP, p. 569.
- 85 CUP, p. 458.
- 86 CUP, p. 531.
- 87 CUP, p. 162.
- 88 Jean-Louis Chrétien argues that not only Socrates, but Plato himself, was aware of the always-incomplete nature of recollection. It was Plotinus, he maintains, who thought that recollection could take the subject back into eternity. Plato, on the other hand, was aware of a forgetting that is *anterior* to knowledge; an “oubli radical” that cannot be excised. We can never recollect fully, because the forgetting defines us *qua* human. Recollection is thus *future-oriented*; in fact, the “passé absolu” is what *gives* us the future, because it makes recollection an exercise of anticipation and hope. According to Chrétien, “la reminiscence platonicienne” is itself reminiscent of what Heidegger calls repetition, a notion which relies heavily on Kierkegaard’s. Platonic recollection, unlike the Kantian *a priori* with which it is all too often conflated, *is* temporal; in other words, the futurity of recollection means that time matters for Plato, and that recollection and repetition are not opposed: “Fondée par l’avenir, cette répétition ne reproduit en rien un passé, ne l’imite pas et ne s’y conforme pas, elle renouvelle l’existence ... elle ne fait revenir aucun souvenir” (Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L’inouïable et l’inespéré*, (Paris: Desclède Brouwer, 1991), p. 48).
- 89 CUP, p. 209.
- 90 CUP, pp. 583–584.
- 91 Gillian Rose describes recollection and repetition as, according to Kierkegaard’s scheme, separated and held together by the interstitial category of anxiety which deconstructs the recollection/repetition binary. As the end of the *Postscript* seems to indicate—and as Chrétien maintains (see footnote 84, above)—Rose argues that “without repetition backwards, without recollection, there can be no repetition forwards”. See Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. 101–103 and 246).
- 92 *Fear and Trembling*, p. 76.
- 93 CUP, p. 548.
- 94 *Repetition*, p. 131.
- 95 *Repetition*, p. 148.
- 96 See footnote 84, above.
- 97 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 2–3.
- 98 Louis Mackey, “Once More with Feeling: Kierkegaard’s Repetition”, in *Kierkegaard and Literature: Irony, Repetition, and Criticism*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), pp. 80–118; p. 115.
- 99 *Repetition*, p. 175.
- 100 *Repetition*, p. 214.
- 101 CUP, p. 573, footnote.
- 102 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 12.
- 103 Emmanuel Levinas, “Existence and Ethics” in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain, eds., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 26–38; p. 34.
- 104 Rose, p. 99.



- 105 Chrétien, pp. 126, 127, and 27, respectively.
- 106 Caputo, p. 31.
- 107 CUP, David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie trans., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 82.
- 108 Emily Dickinson, *The Collected Poems*, Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson, eds, (New York, NY: Gramercy Books, 1982), p. 8.
- 109 CUP, p. 623; see also Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980): "Socrates, Socrates, Socrates! Yes, we may well call your name three times; it would not be too much to call it ten times, if it would be of any help. Popular opinion maintains that the world needs a republic, needs a new social order and a new religion—but no one considers that what the world, confused simply by too much knowledge, needs is a Socrates" (*Sickness*, p. 92).
- 110 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, as quoted in Hong's introduction to *Either/Or*, p. xviii.
- 111 *Symposium*, as quoted in *CI*, p. 47.
- 112 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 154.
- 113 Hadot, p. 160.
- 114 One might also call it faith.